Norman L.
GEISLER

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

IN ONE VOLUME

BIBLE • GOD • CREATION

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DR. NORMAN

GEISLER

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

VOLUME TWO

GOD

CREATION

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

DR. NORMAN GEISLER

VOLUME ONE

INTRODUCTION

BIBLE

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VOLUME ONE

PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

PART TWO: BIBLE

Three persons deserve special recognition for the final state of this volume.

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PART ONE

INTRODUCTION (PROLEGOMENA)

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

THEOLOGICAL DEFINITIONS

P*rolegomena* (lit.: ***pro***, "before," and ***lego***, "speak") is the introduction to theology. It deals with the necessary preconditions for doing systematic theology.

Theology (lit.: ***theos***, "God," and ***logos***, "reason" or "discourse") is a rational discourse about God.
Evangelical theology is defined here as a discourse about God that maintains that there are certain essential Christian beliefs.[1] These include, but are not necessarily limited to,[2] the infallibility and inerrancy of the Bible alone,[3] the tri-unity of God, the virgin birth of Christ, the deity of Christ, the all-sufficiency of Christ's atoning sacrifice for sin, the physical and miraculous resurrection of Christ, the necessity of salvation by faith alone through God's grace alone based on the work of Christ alone, the physical bodily return of Christ to earth, the eternal conscious bliss of the saved, and the eternal conscious punishment of the unsaved.[4]
Theology is divided into several categories:

(1) ***Biblical Theology*** is a study of the biblical basis for theology.
(2) ***Historical Theology*** is a discussion of the theology of the great theologians

of the Christian church.

(3) ***Systematic Theology*** is an attempt to construct a comprehensive and consistent whole out of ***all*** revelation from God, whether special (biblical) or general (natural) revelation (see chapter 4).

Apologetics (Gk: ***apologia***, "defense") deals with the protection of Christian theology from external attacks. ***Polemics*** defends orthodox Christianity from internal doctrinal threats such as heresy and aberrant teachings.

THE BASIC DIVISIONS OF SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Systematic theology is generally divided into the following categories: (1) Prolegomena (Introduction); (2) Bibliology (Gk: ***biblios***, "Bible"); (3) Theology Proper, the study of God; (4) Anthropology (Gk: pl. ***anthropoi***, "human beings"); (5) Harmartiology (Gk: ***harmartia***, "sin"); (6) Soteriology (Gk: ***soterios***, "salvation"); (7) Ecclesiology (Gk: ***ecclesia***, "[the] church"); (8) Eschatology (Gk: ***eschatos***, "the last things").

In addition, the study of the Holy Spirit (a subdivision of Theology Proper) is titled Pneumatology (Gk: ***pneuma***, "spirit"), and discourses about Christ are called Christology. Theological discussions about demons are designated Demonology, those about Satan are titled Satanology, and the study of angels is labeled Angelology.[5]

THE PRECONDITIONS OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

Evangelical theologians believe the Bible is an infallible, absolutely true communication in human language that came from an infinite, personal, and morally perfect God. This belief presupposes that many things are true—most of which are challenged by our current culture. Evangelicalism presupposes that there is a theistic God (the metaphysical precondition—chapter 2) who created

the world and can miraculously intervene in it (the supernatural precondition—chapter 3); a God who has revealed Himself in both general and special revelation (the revelational precondition—chapter 4); which revelation is subject to the laws of logic (the rational precondition—chapter 5) and which contains objectively meaningful statements (the semantical precondition—chapter 6) that are true objectively (the epistemological precondition—chapter 7) and true exclusively (the oppositional precondition—chapter 8); which statements can be properly understood in analogous language (the linguistic precondition—chapter 9), the meaning and truth of which can be understood objectively (the hermeneutical precondition—chapter 10), including those elements relating to historical events (the historical precondition—chapter 11); and which revelation can be systematized by a complete and comprehensive theological method (the methodological precondition—chapter 12).

Foreboding as this project may seem, these are the preconditions necessary to make evangelical theology a possibility. Each one will be treated successively in the following chapters.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PRECONDITIONS

A precondition makes possible what is based on it. For example, the preconditions for two human beings communicating with each other minimally include:

(1) There is a mind capable of sending a message (***encoder***).
(2) There is a mind capable of receiving a message (***decoder***).
(3) There is a common mode of communication (like a language) shared by both persons (***code***).

Without these necessary preconditions communication could not take place. Likewise, without the above stated preconditions, evangelical systematic theology is not possible. One of the most important preconditions is the metaphysical one, theism, which is discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

GOD: THE METAPHYSICAL PRECONDITION

THE NATURE AND IMPORTANCE OF METAPHYSICS

The existence of a theistic God is the foundation of Christian theology. If the God of traditional Christian theism does not exist, then logically evangelical theology crumbles. Attempting to construct a systematic evangelical theology without the superstructure of traditional theism is like trying to put together a house without a frame.

The Significance of Metaphysics

Theism is the metaphysical precondition for evangelical theology. It is fundamental to all else, being the framework within which everything else has meaning. It makes no sense to speak about the Bible being the Word of God

unless there is a God. Likewise, it is meaningless to talk about Christ as the Son of God unless there is a God who can have a Son. And miracles as special acts of God are not possible unless there is a God who can perform these special acts. In fact everything in evangelical theology is based on this metaphysical foundation of theism.

The Definition of Metaphysics

Metaphysics (lit.: ***meta***, "beyond"; ***physics***, "the physical") is the study of being or reality. It is the study of being as being, as opposed to studying being as physical (physics) or being as mathematical (mathematics). "Metaphysics" is often used interchangeably with "ontology" (lit.: ***ontos***, "being"; ***logos***, "study of").

Evangelical Theology Entails Metaphysical Theism

Evangelical theology implies a certain understanding of reality, and there are many views about the world that are incompatible with the claims of evangelical thought. For example, evangelicalism believes that God exists beyond this world ("world" in this case meaning "the whole created universe") and that He brought this world into existence. It also embraces the belief that this God is one eternal, infinite, absolutely perfect, personal Being. The name given for this view that God created everything else that exists is theism (God created all), as opposed to atheism (there is no God at all) and pantheism (God is all). All other worldviews (including panentheism, deism, finite godism, and polytheism) are incompatible with theism. If theism is true, all non-theisms are false, since the opposite of true is false (see chapter 8).

THEISM AND THE OPPOSING WORLDVIEWS

There are seven major worldviews, and each one is incompatible with the others. With one exception (pantheism/polytheism), no one can consistently believe in more than one worldview because the central premises of each are opposed by those of the others. Logically, only one worldview can be true; the others must be false. The seven major worldviews are as follows: theism, atheism, pantheism, panentheism, deism, finite godism, and polytheism.[1]

Theism: An Infinite Personal God Exists Both Beyond and in the Universe

Theism is the worldview that says the physical universe is not all there is. There is an infinite, personal God beyond the universe who created it, sustains it, and can act within it in a supernatural way. He is both "out there" and "in here"; transcendent and immanent.[2] This is the view represented by traditional Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Atheism: No God Exists Beyond or in the Universe

Atheism claims that only the physical universe exists; there is no God ***anywhere***. The universe (or cosmos) is all there is or ever will be, and it is self-sustaining. Some of the more famous atheists were Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Jean-Paul Sartre.

Pantheism: God Is the Universe (the All)

For the pantheist there is no Creator beyond the universe; rather, Creator and creation are two different ways of viewing one reality. God ***is*** the universe (or the All) and the universe is God; there is, ultimately, only one reality. Pantheism is represented by certain forms of Hinduism, Zen Buddhism, Christian Science,

and most New Age religions.
Before describing the other worldviews, it will be profitable to contrast the three already mentioned: Pantheism affirms God is All, atheism claims there is no God at all, and theism declares that God created all. In pantheism, all is mind. According to atheism, all is matter. But theism asserts that both mind and matter exist. Indeed, while the atheist believes that matter produced mind, the theist believes that Mind (God) made matter.

Pan-en-theism: God Is in the Universe

Panentheism says God is in the universe as a mind is in a body; the universe is God's "body." But there is another "pole" to God other than the actual physical universe. (For this reason, panentheism is also called ***bipolar theism***.) This other pole is God's eternal and infinite potential beyond the actual physical universe. And since panentheism holds that God is in the constant process of changing, it is also known as ***process theology***. This view is represented by Alfred North Whitehead, Charles Hartshorne, Schubert Ogden, John Cobb, and Lewis Ford.

Deism: God Is Beyond the Universe, But Not in It

Deism is like theism minus miracles. It says God is transcendent over the universe but not immanent in the world, certainly not supernaturally. In common with atheism, it holds a naturalistic view of the operation of the world, yet in common with theism, it believes the origin of the world is a Creator. In brief, God made the world, but He does not involve Himself with it. The Creator wound up creation like a clock, and ever since it has run on its own. In contrast to pantheism, which negates God's transcendence in favor of His immanence, deism negates God's immanence in favor of His transcendence. Deism is represented by such thinkers as Francois Voltaire, Thomas Jefferson, and Thomas Paine.

Finite Godism: A Finite God Exists Beyond and in the Universe

Finite godism is like theism, only the god beyond the universe and active in it is not infinite but is limited in his nature and power. Like the deist, the finite godist generally accepts the creation of the universe but denies any miraculous intervention in it. Often, God's apparent inability to overcome evil is given as a reason for believing He is limited in power. John Stuart Mill, William James, Peter Bertocci, and Rabbi Kushner are examples of adherents to this worldview.

Polytheism: There Are Many Gods Beyond the World and in It

Polytheism is the belief that there are many finite gods. The polytheist denies any infinite God beyond the physical world, such as in theism; however, the gods are active in the world, in contrast to deism. And in contrast to finite godism, the polytheist believes in a plurality of finite gods, often each having its own domain. The belief that one finite god is chief over all the others (such as Jupiter for the Romans) is a subview of polytheism called ***henotheism***. Chief representatives of polytheism are the ancient Greeks, the Mormons, and the neo-pagans (such as Wiccans).

Clearly, if theism is true, then all six forms of non-theism are false. God cannot be, for instance, both infinite and finite, or personal and impersonal, or beyond the universe and not beyond the universe, or able to perform miracles and not able to perform miracles, or unchanging and changing.

PLURALISM VS. MONISM

Pluralism,[3] as opposed to monism, holds that more than one being exists (e.g., God and creatures). While monism asserts that all reality is one—that there is only one being—pluralism, by contrast, believes that there are many beings in existence: God is an infinite Being, and He created many finite beings that are not identical to Him, though they are dependent on Him.

Thus, to be successful, evangelical theology must defend philosophical (or ontological) pluralism against monism. Since theism affirms there is at least one finite being that exists along with only one infinite Being, it follows that if theism is true then so is pluralism. However, it does not follow that theism is true simply because pluralism is true, since there are other forms of pluralism (e.g., deism, finite godism, and polytheism).

The Argument for Monism

If one is to defend pluralism, to say nothing of theism, there is a fundamental argument for monism that must be answered. This argument was stated by the early Greek philosopher Parmenides (b. 515 B.C.), who presented as follows (Parmenides, ***P***): There cannot be more than one thing (absolute monism), for if there were two things, they would have to differ. For things to differ, they must differ either by being or by nonbeing. But since being is that which makes them identical, they cannot differ by being. Nor, on the other hand, can they differ by nonbeing, for nonbeing is nothing, and to differ by nothing is not to differ at all. Hence, there cannot be a plurality of beings but only one single indivisible being —a rigid monism.

The Alternatives to Monism

The alternatives to Parmenides are few and far between for pluralists who wish to escape the clutches of monism. Basically, there are four other options. The first two forms of pluralism, which we will call atomism and platonism, affirm that the many beings differ ***by nonbeing.*** The last two views, called aristotelianism and thomism, hold that the many beings differ ***in their being.***

Atomism: Things Differ by Absolute Nonbeing

The ancient atomists, such as Leucippus (fl. c. fifth century B.C.) and Democritus (c. 460–370 B.C.), contended that the principle separating one being

(one atom) from another is absolutely nothing (i.e., nonbeing). They called this the Void. For them, being is full and nonbeing is empty. The atoms, which do not differ at all in their essence, are separated by the different space they occupy in the Void (empty space). This difference, then, is merely extrinsic; there is no intrinsic difference in the atoms (beings).[4]

In short, the atomists' response to Parmenides was that there are many beings (atoms) that differ by nonbeing. Each being occupies a different space in the Void that, in itself, is absolutely nothing (empty space).

Of course, this is scarcely an adequate answer to Parmenides, since he would simply point out that to differ by absolutely nothing is to have absolutely no difference at all. And to have absolutely no difference is to be absolutely the same. Monism appears to win the day over atomism.

Platonism: Things Differ by Relative Nonbeing

Plato (c. 427–347 B.C.), with the help of Parmenides, struggled with how "the Forms" could differ if they were absolutely simple.[5] Plato believed that all things had an ideal archetype behind them. This Idea (or Form) was the real world. All things in this world of our experience are only "shadows" of the real world by virtue of their participation in this true Form. For example, each individual human being in this world participates in a universal form of humanness in the world of ideas. Plato later adopted the view that the Forms (or Ideas) are not indivisibly and unrelatedly separated by ***absolute*** nonbeing but are related by the principle of ***relative*** nonbeing.

By this principle of relative nonbeing, also called the "other," Plato believed he could have many different forms (beings) and thus avoid monism. Each form differed from other forms in that it was ***not*** that other form. All determination, in this case, is by negation.

For one example, the sculptor determines what the statue is in relation to the stone by chipping away (negating) what he does not want. Likewise, each form is differentiated from every other form by negation—what it is, is determined by what it is not. For another example, the chair is distinguished from everything else in the room in that it is ***not*** the table, it is ***not*** the floor, it is ***not*** the wall, etc. This does not mean that the chair is absolutely nothing. It is something in itself, but it is nothing in relation to other things. That is, it is not those other things.

Even so, Parmenides would not have been impressed by Plato's attempt to evade monism. He would simply have asked whether there were any differences in the beings themselves. If there were not, then he would have insisted that all these beings (forms) must be identical. For the monist there are not many beings but only one.

Aristotelianism: Things Differ as Simple Beings

Both Plato and the atomist took one horn (the same horn) of the parmenidean dilemma: They tried to differentiate things by nonbeing. But, as we have seen, to differ by nothing is not to differ at all. Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) and Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) took the other horn of the dilemma: They sought to find a difference in the beings themselves. Both contend that there are many beings that are essentially different. Aristotle held that these beings are metaphysically simple, and Aquinas (see next page) viewed them as metaphysically composite, having an act/potency distinction on the level of pure forms or beings.
Aristotle argued that there is a plurality of forty-seven or fifty-five beings, or unmoved movers, that are separated from one another in their very being (Aristotle, ***M***, XII). These beings (movers) caused all the motion in the world, each operating in its own separate cosmic domain. Each was a pure form (being) with no matter (which Aristotle used to differentiate things in this world). This plurality of totally separated substantial forms has no commonness or community of being whatsoever. They cannot be related to one another (Eslick, ***RD***, 152–53), and they are completely diverse from one another.
Of course, Parmenides would ask Aristotle just how simple beings can differ in their very being. Things composed of form and matter can differ in that ***this*** particular matter is different from ***that*** matter, even though they have the same form. But how do pure forms (beings) differ from each other? They have no principle of differentiation. If there is no difference in their being, then their being is identical. Thus, neither does Aristotle's solution avoid monism.

Thomism: Things Differ As Complex Beings

The fourth pluralistic alternative to parmenidean monism is represented by Thomas Aquinas, who, in common with Aristotle, sought difference within the beings themselves. But unlike Aristotle, who had only simple beings, Aquinas

believed that all finite beings are composed ***in their very beings***. Only God is an absolutely simple Being, and there can be only one such Being (God). However, there can be other kinds of beings, namely, composed beings. Beings can differ in their very being because there can be ***different*** kinds of beings (Aquinas, ***ST***, la.4.1, 3).

God, for example, is an infinite kind of Being; all creatures are finite kinds of beings. God is Pure Actuality (Act); all creatures are composed of actuality (act) and potentiality (potency). Hence, finite things differ from God in that they have a limiting potentiality; He does not. Finite things can differ from each other in whether their potentiality is completely actualized (as in angels) or whether it is being progressively actualized (as in humans).

In all creatures their essence (what-ness) is really distinct from their existence (is-ness). In God, on the other hand, His essence and existence are identical. Aquinas was not the first to make this distinction, but he was the first to make such extensive use of it.

Aquinas argues in his book ***On Being and Essence*** that existence is something other than essence, except in God, whose essence is His existence. Such a being must be one and unique, since ***multiplication of anything is only possible where there is a difference***. But in such a being as God there is no difference. From this it follows necessarily that in everything else, except in this one unique existence, its existence must be one thing and its essence another.

In this way Aquinas provided an answer to the age-old predicament posed by monism. Things do differ in their being because there are different kinds of beings. Parmenides was wrong because he assumed that “being” is always understood univocally (the same way). Aquinas, on the other hand, saw that being is analogous (see chapter 9), being understood in similar but different ways. All beings are the same in that they are all actual; however, finite beings differ from an infinite Being in that they have differing potentialities that have been actualized.

THE SUPERIORITY OF THOMISTIC THEISM[6]

The value of Aquinas’s view is made manifest by both its own rationality and the implausibility of its alternatives. Parmenides’ position, by contrast, does violence to our experience of a differentiated yet interrelated multiplicity of beings. But

again, if a rigid monism is unacceptable, it seems there are only four basic pluralistic alternatives.

The atomist attempts to explain multiplicity by affirming that ***absolute nonbeing*** —the Void—is that which separates one being from another. But surely this answer is insufficient, for as Parmenides painstakingly pointed out, to differ by that which is absolutely nonexistent is not to differ at all. And if there is no real distinction, then there is no distinction in reality at all. All is one.

The platonists tried to use ***relative nonbeing*** as the principle of differentiation. That is, while admitting that things differ by nonbeing, he argued that nonbeing in some way exists, even though it is "other" than being. That is, differentiation is by negation: One being is distinct from another not by what it is but by what it is not—different not by being but by non-being. In other words, the differentiating factor is not within being but is outside of being—it is not real or actual. But nothing that is external to being can be the principle of differentiation within being. And if there is no actual difference within the nature of things, then there is actually no difference between them at all—the old parmenidean dilemma in a different form.

The aristotelian multiplicity of simple, separated substances has no principle of individuation at all.[7] Aristotle calls on neither absolute nonbeing nor relative nonbeing to explain how there can be many ***simple***, separate beings. Not only is this view without a principle of differentiation, but as Plotinus noted (***E***, VI.5.9), it is also without any principle of unification. That is, there is nothing to coordinate the separate operations of the many prime movers.

Finally, the thomistic (i.e., following Thomas Aquinas) position on plurality is that multiplicity is possible because there are different kinds of being. This is possible because beings have within them a real distinction in their being between their existence and their essence. That is to say, being is not a homogenous, undifferentiated whole. Rather, created being is a dynamic, ***complex*** composition of essence and existence. It has the correlative principles of potency and act. The question is not "to be" or "not to be," but "what ***kind*** of being?"

For Thomas Aquinas things differ from one another by the kind of being or actuality they are. Being is not predicated of things univocally,[8] for then all would be one. Nor is it predicated of things equivocally,[9] for then all would be

totally different and isolated. Rather, being is predicated of things analogically—each essence has being in its own distinct way and is related to others only by analogy. Each thing has its one mode of being. In other words, "essence," the principle of differentiation, is real. It is part of the very being of things; a co-constitutive principle.[10]

In brief, the real distinction within being (Lat. *ens*) between essence (*essentia*) and existence (*esse*) seems to be the only satisfactory answer to, the parmenidean problem of unity and plurality. Without an analogy of being (see chapter 9) there is no way to account for multiplicity. In univocity of being, things are either unrelated or identical. As we have seen, if being is taken univocally (instead of analogically), then there can only be one being, for if wherever being is found it means entirely the same thing, then all being is identical (entire sameness leaves no room for any difference in being).

What is more, if being is taken equivocally (as entirely different), then there can be no more than one being, for if ***this*** is being and everything ***else*** is totally different from it, then everything else is nonbeing. (This is true because what is totally different from being would be nonbeing.) Seemingly, the only way to avoid the monistic conclusion that follows from either an equivocal or a univocal view of being is to take an analogical view. And the only way being can be analogical is if there is within being both the principle of unification and the principle of differentiation. Aquinas called these, respectively, esse and essentia: Existence (unification) is to essence (differentiation) what actuality is to potentiality. Since finite beings have different potentialities (essences), these finite beings can be differentiated in reality when these potentialities are actualized (or brought into existence) in different kinds of beings.

What is being? ***Being is that which is.*** How many beings are there? Being can be either simple (Pure Actuality—God) or complex (both actuality and potentiality). There cannot be two absolutely simple beings, since there is nothing in a pure Being by which it could differ from another pure Being.

Of course, a simple Being can (indeed, must) differ from complex beings, since it has no potentiality, as they do. Therefore, there can be only one Being purely and simply, but there are many beings with a mixture of act and potency. Only one ***is*** Being; everything else ***has*** being.

In this way Aquinas seemed to provide the only rational answer to monism. Plotinus did attempt to answer the problem by positing an absolute "One" that goes beyond reason and beyond being, but it is self-defeating to reason about

what is beyond reason.

THE RATIONAL BASIS FOR THEISM: THE ALTERNATIVE TO MONISM

Thomas Aquinas's answer for pluralism makes theism ***possible***, but only sound arguments for God's existence make theism ***viable.*** Many such arguments have been offered, while four of them have dominated discussion over the centuries: the cosmological argument, the teleological argument, the ontological argument, and the moral argument.

The Cosmological Argument for God's Existence

The cosmological argument comes in two basic forms: horizontal and vertical. The horizontal argument, known as the kalam (Arabic for "eternal") argument, argues for a Beginner of the universe. The vertical argument reasons to a Sustainer of the universe. One posits an ***original*** Cause and the other a ***current*** Cause. The horizontal argument was embraced by Bonaventure (c. 1217–1274), who followed certain Arab philosophers. The vertical argument was championed by Thomas Aquinas.

The Horizontal Form of the Cosmological Argument

The essence of this argument is as follows:

(1) Everything that had a beginning had a cause.
(2) The universe had a beginning.
(3) Therefore, the universe had a Cause.

The first premise ("Everything that had a beginning had a cause") is often taken

as self-evident, since to admit otherwise would amount to the ridiculous claim that nothing produces something. Even the infamous skeptic David Hume (1711–1776) confessed, "I never asserted so absurd a proposition as that anything might arise without a cause" (***LDH***, 1:187).

The second premise ("The universe had a beginning") is defended both philosophically and scientifically. Philosophically, it is argued that

(1) An infinite number of moments cannot be traversed.

(2) If there were an infinite number of moments before today, then today would never have come, since an infinite number of moments cannot be traversed.

(3) But today ***has*** come.

(4) Hence, there were only a finite number of moments before today (i.e., a beginning of time). And everything with a beginning had a Beginner. Therefore, the temporal world had a Beginner (Cause).

The scientific evidence for the world having a beginning comes from the so-called Big Bang view held by most contemporary astronomers. There are several converging lines of evidence that the space-time universe had a beginning. ***First***, the universe is running out of usable energy (Second Law of Thermodynamics), and what is running down cannot be eternal (otherwise it would have run down by now). An entity cannot run out of an infinite amount of energy.

Second, the universe is said to be expanding. Thus, when the motion picture of the universe is put into reverse, logically and mathematically it reaches a point where it is nothing (i.e., no space, no time, and no matter). So the universe literally came into being out of nothing. But ***nothing cannot produce something.***

Third, the radiation echo given off by the universe, discovered by two Nobel Prize-winning scientists, Arno Allan Penzias and Robert Woodrow Wilson (see Jastrow, ***GA***, 14–15), has the identical wavelength of that which would be given off by a gigantic explosion.

Fourth, the large mass of energy resulting from such an explosion and predicted by Big Bang proponents was actually discovered by the Hubble Space Telescope in 1992.

Fifth, Einstein's own theory of general relativity demanded a beginning of time, a view he resisted for years and even defended by a fudge factor he introduced into his argument to avoid it and for which he was later embarrassed (see Heeren

and Smoot, ***SMG***, 109).

The cumulative philosophical and scientific evidence for an origin of the material universe provides a strong reason to conclude that there must have been a nonphysical originating Cause of the physical universe. Agnostic astronomer Robert Jastrow admits that this is a clearly theistic conclusion ("SCBTF" in ***CT***, 17). After reviewing the evidence that the cosmos had a beginning, the British physicist Edmund Whittaker concurred: "It is simpler to postulate creation ex nihilo—divine will constituting nature from nothingness" (cited by Jastrow, ***GA***, 111). Jastrow concludes, "That there are what I or anyone would call supernatural forces at work is now, I think, ***a scientifically proven fact***" (Jastrow, "SCBTF" in ***CT***, 15, 18, emphasis added).

The Vertical Form of the Cosmological Argument

The horizontal form of the cosmological argument argues from the ***past*** origin of the cosmos to an Original (First) Cause of it. By contrast, the vertical form of the cosmological argument begins with the ***present*** contingent existence of the cosmos and insists there must be a current Necessary Being causing it. Both are causal arguments and both begin with an existing cosmos. However, the horizontal argument starts with a universe that had a ***beginning*** (long ago), and the second with a universe that has ***being*** (right now). The former stresses originating causality, and the latter focuses on conserving causality. The first argues to a ***First Cause*** (back then), and the second argues to a ***Necessary Cause*** (at present).

The vertical cosmological argument was stated in several ways by Thomas Aquinas (***ST***, 1.2.3). Two forms of it will illustrate the point: the argument from contingency and the argument from change.

The argument from contingency begins with the fact that at least one ***contingent*** being exists; that is, a being that exists but ***can*** not exist. A ***Necessary*** Being is one that exists but ***cannot*** not exist. The argument goes like this:

(1) Whatever exists but can/could not exist needs a cause for its existence, since the mere possibility of existence does not explain why something exists. The mere possibility for something is nothing (i.e., no-thing).

(2) But ***nothing*** cannot produce ***something.***

(3) Therefore, something necessarily exists as the ground for everything that

does exist but ***can*** not exist. In short, it is a violation of the principle of causality to say that a contingent being can account for its own existence.

Another way to put this form of the vertical argument is to note that if something contingent exists, then a Necessary Being must exist:

(1) If everything were contingent, then it would be possible that nothing existed.
(2) But something does exist (e.g., I do), and its existence is undeniable, for I have to exist in order to be able to affirm that I do not exist.
(3) Thus, if some contingent being now exists, a Necessary Being must now exist, otherwise there would be no ground for the existence of this contingent being.

The argument from change, another form of the vertical cosmological argument, begins with the fact that there are changing beings:

(1) Whatever changes passes from a state of potentiality (potency) for that change to a state of being actualized (act). That is, all changing beings have act(uality) and potency in their very being. If not, then all change would involve annihilation and re-creation, which is impossible without a Cause, since nothing cannot produce something.
(2) But no potentiality can actualize itself, any more than the potential for steel to become a skyscraper can actualize itself into a skyscraper.
(3) If no potency can actualize itself, and yet at least one being is actualized (e.g., me), then ultimately there must be something that is Pure Actuality (with no potentiality), otherwise there would be no ground for why something now exists that has the potential not to exist.

This form of the vertical cosmological argument addresses the impossibility of an infinite regress of beings that are composed of act and potency. It points out that the very first Being beneath a changing being (with act and potency) ***cannot*** be another being with act and potency, for what does not account for its own existence certainly cannot account for another's existence. To say it could is like arguing that one paratrooper whose chute did not open can hold up another

whose chute did not open. And adding more paratroopers whose chutes do not open does not help the problem; it compounds it.

Another way to put the impossibility of an infinite regress of causes of the present existence of a changing being (with act and potency) is to point out that in an infinite regress of such causes at least one cause must ***be causing***, since it is admitted that causing is occurring. Yet in an infinite series every cause ***is being caused***, for if one were not being caused, then we have arrived at an ***Uncaused Cause*** (which scientists desire to avoid). One cause must be uncaused, for if every cause in an infinite series is being caused and at least one cause is causing, then that cause is ***self-caused.*** However, a self-caused being is impossible, since a cause is ontologically (see page 34), if not chronologically, prior to its effect, and something cannot be prior to itself.

Another form of the vertical cosmological argument begins with the ***present dependence of every part of the universe.*** Briefly stated:

(1) Every part of the universe is right now dependent for its existence.
(2) If every part is right now dependent for its existence, then the whole universe must also be right now dependent for its existence.
(3) Therefore, the whole universe is dependent right now for its existence on some Independent Being beyond itself.

In response, critics argue that the second premise commits the fallacy of composition. That every piece of a mosaic is square does not mean the whole mosaic is square. Also, putting two triangles together does not necessarily make another triangle; it may make a square. The whole may (and sometimes does) have a characteristic not possessed by the parts.

Defenders of the vertical form of the cosmological argument are quick to note that sometimes there is a necessary connection between the parts and the whole. For example, if every piece of a floor is oak, then the whole floor is oak. If every tile in the kitchen is yellow, then the whole floor is yellow. This is true because it is of ***the very nature of*** patches of yellow tile that when you put more like patches of yellow tile together, you still have a patch of yellow. And while putting two triangles together does not necessarily make another triangle, nevertheless, putting two triangles together will necessarily make another geometric figure. Why? Because it is of the very nature of geometric figures that when they are combined they still form a geometric figure.

Likewise, ***it is of the very nature of dependent beings that when you put more of them together, you still have dependent beings.*** If one thing is dependent for its being, then another dependent being can no more hold it up than adding more links to a chain will hold it up if there is no peg holding up the whole chain. In response, some critics argue that the whole is greater than the parts. Therefore, while the parts are dependent, the whole universe is not. However, either the sum of the parts is ***equal to*** the whole or it is ***more than*** the whole. If the whole universe is equal to its parts, then the whole must be dependent just like the parts are.[11] If, on the other hand, the whole universe is more than the parts and would not vanish were the parts all destroyed, then the whole universe is the equivalent of God, for it is an uncaused, independent, eternal, and necessary Being on which everything in the entire universe depends for its existence.

The Teleological Argument for God's Existence

There are many forms of the teleological argument, the most famous of which derives from William Paley (1743–1805), who used the watchmaker analogy. Since every watch has a maker, and since the universe is exceedingly more complex in its operation than a watch, it follows that there must be a Universe Maker. In brief, the teleological argument reasons from design to an Intelligent Designer:

(1) All designs imply a designer.
(2) There is great design in the universe.
(3) Therefore, there must have been a Great Designer of the universe.

The first premise we know from experience; on any occasion that we see a complex design, we know by previous experience that it came from the mind of a designer. Watches imply watchmakers; buildings imply architects; paintings imply artists; and coded messages imply an intelligent sender. We know this to be true because we observe it happening over and over.

Also, the greater the design, the greater the designer.[12] A thousand monkeys sitting at typewriters for millions of years would never produce ***Hamlet.*** But Shakespeare did it on the first try. The more complex the design, the greater the intelligence required to produce it.

It is important to note here that by "complex design" is meant specified complexity. A crystal, for example, has specificity but not complexity; like a snowflake, it has the same basic patterns repeated over and over. Random polymers,[13] on the other hand, have complexity but not specificity.[14] A living cell, however, has both specificity and complexity.

The kind of complexity found in a living cell is the same kind of complexity that is found in a human language; that is to say, the letter sequence in the four-letter genetic alphabet is identical to that in a written language. And the amount of specified complex information in a simple one-celled animal is greater than that found in ***Webster's Unabridged Dictionary.*** As a result, believing that life occurred without an intelligent cause is like believing that ***Webster's Unabridged*** resulted from an explosion in a print shop.

Michael Behe's excellent book ***Darwin's Black Box*** provides from the nature of a living cell strong evidence that it could not have originated by anything but intelligent design. The cell represents irreducible complexity, and it cannot be accounted for via the incremental changes called for by evolution (Behe, ***DBB***, all). Even Charles Darwin (1809–1882) admitted, "If it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed which could not possibly have been formed by numerous, successive, slight modifications, my theory would absolutely break down" (Darwin, ***OOS***, 6th ed., 154). Even evolutionist Richard Dawkins agrees:

> Evolution is very possibly not, in actual fact, always gradual. But it must be gradual when it is being used to explain the coming into existence of complicated, apparently designed objects, like eyes. For if it is not gradual in these cases, it ceases to have any explanatory power at all. Without gradualness in these cases, we are back to miracle, which is a synonym for the total absence of [naturalistic] explanation. (Dawkins, *BW*, 83.)

But Behe provides numerous examples of irreducible complexity that cannot evolve in small steps. He concludes,

> No one at Harvard University, no one at the National Institutes of Health, no member of the National Academy of Sciences, no Nobel prize winner—no one at all can give a detailed account of how the cilium, or vision, or blood clotting, or any complex biochemical process might have developed in a Darwinian fashion. But we are here. All these things got here somehow; if not in a Darwinian fashion, then how? (Behe, *DBB*, 187.)
>
> Other examples of irreducible complexity abound, including aspects of DNA reduplication, electron transport, telomere synthesis, photosynthesis, transcription regulation, and more … [Hence,] life on earth at its most fundamental level, in its most critical components, is the product of intelligent activity (ibid., 160, 193).

Behe adds,

> The conclusion of intelligent design flows naturally from the data itself—not from sacred books or sectarian beliefs. Inferring that biochemical systems were designed by an intelligent agent is a humdrum process that requires no new principles of logic or science.… [Thus,] the result of these cumulative efforts to investigate the cell—to investigate life at the molecular level—is a loud, clear, piercing cry of "design!" The result is so unambiguous and so significant that it must be ranked as one of the greatest achievements in the history of science. The discovery rivals those of Newton and Einstein (ibid., 232–33).

The late agnostic astronomer Carl Sagan (1934–1996) unwittingly provided a powerful example of incredible design. He notes that the genetic information in the human brain expressed in bits is probably comparable to the total number of connections among neurons—about a hundred trillion, 10^{14} bits.

> If written out in English, say, that information would fill some twenty million volumes, as many as in the world's largest libraries. The equivalent of twenty million books is inside the head of every one of us. The brain is a very big place in a very small space.

Sagan went on to note that "the neurochemistry of the brain is astonishingly busy, the circuitry of a machine more wonderful than any devised by humans" (Sagan, ***C***, 278). But if this is so, then why does the human brain not need an intelligent Creator, such as those wonderful machines (like computers) devised by humans?

Another support for the teleological argument comes from the ***anthropic principle***, which states that from its very inception the universe was fine-tuned

for the emergence of human life (see Barrow, ***ACP***). That is, the universe intricately preadapted for the arrival of human life. If the delicate balance had been off in the least, then life would not have been possible.

For example, oxygen comprises 21 percent of the atmosphere. If it were 25 percent, fires would erupt, and if only 15 percent, humans would suffocate. If the gravitational force were altered by merely one part in ten to the fortieth power (ten followed by forty zeroes), the sun would not exist and the moon would crash into the earth or veer off into space (Heeren, ***SMG***, 196). If the centrifugal force of planetary movement did not precisely balance the gravitational forces, nothing could be held in orbit around the sun. If the universe were expanding at a rate one-millionth more slowly than it is, the temperature on earth would be 10,000 degrees Celsius. If Jupiter were not in its current order, the earth would be bombarded with space material. If the earth's crust were thicker, too much oxygen would be transmitted to it to support life. If it were thinner, volcanic and tectonic activity would make life untenable. And if the rotation of the earth took longer than twenty-four hours, temperature differences between night and day would be too great (see Ross, ***FG***).

Again, Robert Jastrow sums up the implications: "The anthropic principle … seems to say that science itself has proven as a hard fact, that this universe was made, was designed, for man to live in. ***It's a very theistic result***" (Jastrow, ***SCBTF***, 17, emphasis added). Former atheistic astronomer Alan Sandage came to the same result:

> The world is too complicated in all of its parts to be due to chance alone. I am convinced that the existence of life on earth with all its order in each of its organisms is simply too well put together.... The more one learns of biochemistry, the more unbelievable it becomes unless there is some kind of organizing principle—an architect for believers.... (Sandage, "SRRB" in *T*, 54.)

The great Albert Einstein (1879–1955) likewise declared that "***the harmony of natural law … reveals an intelligence of such superiority that, compared with it, all systematic thinking and acting of human beings is an utterly insignificant reflection***" (Einstein, ***IO—WISI***, 40, emphasis added).

The Ontological Argument for God's Existence

"Ontological" comes from the Greek word
ontos
("being"). This is the argument from the ***idea*** of a Perfect or Necessary Being to the ***actual existence*** of such a Being. The first philosopher known to develop the ontological argument (though Immanuel Kant [1724–1804] was the first to call it this) was Anselm (1033–1109).
There are two forms of the argument. One derives from the idea of a Perfect Being and the other from the idea of a Necessary Being. These are sometimes called Anselm A and Anselm B, respectively.

The First Form of the Ontological Argument

According to this statement of the argument, the mere concept of God as an absolutely perfect Being demands that He exist. Briefly put:

(1) God is by definition an absolutely perfect Being.
(2) Existence is a perfection.
(3) Therefore, God must exist. If God did not exist, then he would be lacking one perfection, namely, existence. But if God lacked any perfection, then He would not be absolutely perfect. And God is ***by definition*** an absolutely perfect Being. Therefore, an absolutely perfect Being (God) must exist.

Since the time of Immanuel Kant it has been widely accepted that this form of the ontological argument is invalid because ***existence is not a perfection.*** It is argued that existence adds nothing to the concept of a thing; it merely gives a concrete instance of it. The dollar in my mind can have exactly the same properties or characteristics as the one in my wallet. The only difference is that I have a concrete example of the latter.
Kant's critique of the first form of the ontological argument is penetrating and widely embraced. There is, however, a second form that is not subject to this criticism.

The Second Form of the Ontological Argument

In his response to the monk Gaunilo (fl. c. eleventh century), who opposed the argument, Anselm insisted that the very concept of a Necessary Being demands His existence. It can be stated this way:

(1) If God exists, we must conceive of Him as a Necessary Being;
(2) but by definition, a Necessary Being cannot not exist;
(3) therefore, if a Necessary Being can exist, then it must exist.

Since there appears to be no contradiction to the idea of a Necessary Being, it would seem to follow that one must exist, for the very idea of a Necessary Being demands that it must exist—if it did not exist, then it would not be a necessary ***existence.***

Critics point to a different problem with this form of the ontological syllogism.[15] It's like saying, "***If*** there are triangles, then they must have three sides." Of course, there may not be any triangles. So the argument never really gets past that initial "if"; it never proves the big question that it claims to answer. It ***assumes***, but does not ***prove***, the existence of a Necessary Being, merely asserting that if a Necessary Being exists—and that is the open question—then it must exist necessarily, for this is the only way a Necessary Being can exist.

Some have further refined the argument by adding that a state of total nothingness is not logically possible, since our own existence is undeniable. And if something exists, then something else must exist (i.e., the Necessary Being). However, in this form it is no longer an ontological argument, since it begins with something that exists and reasons to something that must exist.

Most theists do not believe the ontological argument as such is sufficient in and of itself to prove the existence of God. This is not to say it cannot be useful. While the ontological argument cannot prove God's ***existence***, it can prove certain things about His ***nature***, if God does exist. For example, it shows that if God exists at all, then He must exist necessarily. He cannot cease to exist, and He cannot exist contingently.

The Moral Argument for God's Existence

The roots of the moral argument for God are found in Romans 2:12–15, where the apostle Paul speaks of humankind being without excuse because there is "a law written on their hearts." In the last 250 years this argument has been stated in various ways; the most popular form emanates from C. S. Lewis (1898–1963) in the first part of his popular book ***Mere Christianity.*** The heart of the argument follows this basic structure:

(1) Moral law implies a Moral Lawgiver.
(2) There is an objective moral law.
(3) Therefore, there is an objective Moral Lawgiver.

The first premise is self-evident. A moral law is a prescription, and ***prescriptions come only from prescribers.*** Unlike the laws of nature (which are only ***descriptive***), moral laws are ***prescriptive:*** Moral laws don't describe what ***is;*** they prescribe what ***ought to be.*** They are not simply a description of the way people ***do*** behave but are imperatives as to how they ***should*** behave.

The weight of the moral argument for God's existence rests on the second premise—that there is an objective moral law. That is, there is a moral law not just prescribed ***by*** humans but also prescribed ***for*** humans. The question is whether there is evidence that there is a universal, objective prescription that is binding on ***all*** humans.

The evidence for an objective moral law is strong; it is implied in moral judgments that we make, such as, "The world is getting better (or worse)." How can we know this unless there is some standard beyond the world by which we can measure it? Likewise, statements like "Hitler was wrong" lose their intended significance if they are merely a matter of opinion or are culturally relative. But if Hitler was really (objectively) wrong, then there is a moral law beyond all of us by which we are all bound. And if there is such an objective moral law beyond all of us, then there is a Moral Lawgiver (God).

C. S. Lewis effectively answers typical objections to this moral argument as paraphrased in the following text (see Lewis, ***MC***, part 1).

This Moral Law Is Not Herd Instinct

What we call the moral law cannot be the result of herd instinct[16] or else the stronger impulse in us would always win. It does not. Furthermore, we would always act ***from*** our instinct rather than ***for*** it in order to bolster it (e.g., to help someone in trouble) as we only sometimes do. Finally, if the moral law were only herd instinct, then instincts would always be right, but they are not. Even love and patriotism are sometimes wrong.

This Moral Law Cannot Be Social Convention

Not everything learned ***through*** society is ***based*** on social convention (e.g., math or logic), so neither is the moral law merely a societal norm. Evidence of this is that the same basic moral laws can be found in virtually every society, past and present. Furthermore, judgments about social progress would not be possible if society were the basis of the judgments.

This Moral Law Is Different From the Laws of Nature

The moral law is not to be identified with the laws of nature because the latter are descriptive (are), not prescriptive (ought) as moral laws are. Indeed, factually convenient situations (the way it ***is***) can be morally wrong and vice versa. For example, someone who tries to trip me and fails is in the wrong, while someone who accidentally trips me is not.

The Moral Law Is Not Human Fancy

Neither can the moral law be mere human fancy, because we cannot get rid of it even when we would sometimes like to do so. We did not create it; it is clearly impressed upon us from without. And if it were fancy, then all value judgments would be meaningless, including “Murder is wrong” and “Racism is wrong.” But if the moral law is neither a description nor a merely human prescription, then it must be a moral prescription from a Moral Prescriber who is beyond us. As Lewis notes, this Moral Lawgiver is more like mind than nature. He can no more be part of nature than an architect is part of the building he designs.

Injustice Does Not Disprove a Moral Lawgiver

The main objection to an absolutely perfect Moral Lawgiver is the argument from evil in the world. No serious person can fail to recognize that all the murders, rapes, hatred, and cruelty make the world far short of being absolutely perfect. But if the world is imperfect, how can there be an absolutely perfect God? Lewis's answer is simple and to the point: The only way the world could possibly be known to be imperfect is if there is an absolutely perfect standard by which it can be judged to be imperfect. Injustice makes sense only if there is a standard of justice by which something is known to be not just. And absolute injustice is possible only if there is an absolute standard of justice. In his own words Lewis clarifies:

> My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of *just* and *unjust?* A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line.... Thus in the very act of trying to prove that God did not exist—in other words, that the whole of reality was senseless—I found I was forced to assume that one part of reality—namely my idea of justice—was full of sense. Consequently atheism turns out to be too simple. (Lewis, *MC*, 45–46.)

Rather than disproving a morally perfect Being, then, the evil in the world presupposes an absolutely perfect standard. One could raise the question as to whether this Ultimate Lawgiver is all-powerful, but not as to whether He is perfect.

CONCLUSION ABOUT THE THEISTIC ARGUMENTS

Most theists do not rest their whole case for God on any one argument. Indeed, each argument seems to demonstrate a different attribute of God along with His existence. For example, the cosmological argument shows that an infinitely powerful Being exists; the teleological argument reveals that this Being is also super-intelligent; the moral argument establishes that He is morally perfect. And, granted that Something exists, the ontological argument demonstrates that He is a Necessary Being.

Some theists offer other arguments for the existence of God, such as the argument from religious need (see Geisler, "G, EF" in ***BECA***) or the argument

from religious experience (see Trueblood, ***PR***). But the ones detailed above are the standard or classical arguments.
The objection is made that the cosmological argument does not prove a theistic God, such as evangelical Christianity holds. There ***are*** many other concepts of God besides theism, but these concepts cannot be identified with a theistic God.

Theism vs. Finite Godism

God must be infinite (in contrast with finite godism), since per the cosmological argument ***every*** finite thing needs a cause. Hence, the Cause of all finite things must not be finite.
Further, the finite universe is made of parts, yet there cannot be an infinite number of parts, since no matter how many parts there are, one more could always be added. And the First Uncaused Cause of the universe cannot be a part or have parts, otherwise He would be caused. Hence, He must be infinite, since only finite things have parts. Since nothing can be added to an infinite, but since all parts can be added to other parts, the Creator of the universe is infinite (and without parts).

Theism vs. Polytheism

The Uncaused Cause of theism is distinct from the many polytheistic gods, for there cannot be more than one unlimited existence as such. ***More than the Most is not possible.*** Such a Cause is Pure Actuality, and Actuality is unlimited and unique. Only act as conjoined with potency is limited, such as is found in contingent beings (which exist but have the possibility not to exist).
Further, in order to differ, one being would have to lack some characteristic that the other one had. But any being that lacked some characteristic of existence would not be an unlimited perfect existence. In other words, two infinite Beings cannot differ in their potentiality, since they have no potentiality; they are Pure Actuality. And they cannot differ in their actuality, since Actuality as such does not differ from Actuality as such. Hence, they must be identical. So, there is only

one Unlimited Cause of all limited existence.

Theism vs. Pantheism

Further, the Uncaused Cause of Theism is not the God of ***pantheism.*** Pantheism affirms that an unlimited and necessary being exists but denies the reality of limited and finite beings. Theism begins with real, finite, contingent changing being(s), and from this it reasons to a real, infinite, necessary, unchanging being. So the theistic God is not the same as the god of pantheism.

The denial that a human being is finite and changing is self-defeating. A pantheist did not always believe this way; he ***came to believe*** this way by some process of "enlightenment." But if he went through some changing process, then he is not an unchanging being after all.

Theism vs. Atheism

Nor can the Uncaused Cause of theism be identical with the ***material universe***, as many ***atheists*** believe. As ordinarily conceived, the cosmos or material universe is a limited and spatio-temporal system. It is, for example, subject to the Second Law of Thermodynamics and thus is running down. But an Uncaused Cause is unlimited and not running down.

Space and time imply limitations to a here-and-now kind of existence. But an Uncaused Cause is not limited, and so it cannot be identical to the space-time world. The theistic God is ***in*** the temporal world as its ground of continuing existence, but He is not ***of*** the world in that it is limited and He is not.

If, in response, one claimed that the whole of the material universe is not temporal and limited as are the parts, he would only demonstrate what theism claims, for his conclusion is that there exists beyond the contingent world of limited spatio-temporality a whole reality that is eternal, unlimited, and necessary. In other words, it agrees with theism that there is a God beyond the limited, changing world of experience. It is a substitute for God that admits that there is a whole reality that is more than the experienced part of reality and that

has all the essential metaphysical attributes of the theistic God.

Theism vs. Panentheism

Neither can the Uncaused Cause of theism be identical with the God of ***panentheism***, also known as bipolar theism or process theology. Again, panentheism affirms that God has two poles: an actual pole (which is identified with the changing temporal world) and a potential pole (which is eternal and unchanging). Such a conception of God must be rejected for the following reasons:

For one thing, the conclusion of the cosmological argument demonstrates the need for a God of pure actuality with no potentiality (pole) at all. Further, God cannot be subject to limitations, composition, or spatiotemporality, since He is unlimited in His being. Moreover, the theistic God cannot have poles or aspects, since He is absolutely simple (i.e., uncomposed) and has no duality at all. As Pure Actuality, He is a simple and unlimited existence as such, with no limited pole. A partly limited unlimited existence is a contradiction.

In addition, God cannot be subject to change, for anything that changes must be composed of actuality and potentiality for change. Change is a passing from potentiality to actuality, from what it can be to what it actually becomes. But since existence has no potentiality, it follows that it cannot change. If something changes, it proves thereby that it was not Pure Actuality but possessed some potentiality for the change it underwent. A pure and unlimited actuality cannot change.

Theism vs. Deism

Finally, the conclusion of the cosmological argument, at least the vertical form of it, cannot be a ***deistic God***, for a deistic God is not the here-and-now Cause of the universe, as is the theistic God. Since the universe is dependent in its being, it needs something independent on which to depend—at all times. The universe never ceases to be dependent or contingent. Once contingent, always contingent;

a contingent being cannot become a Necessary Being, for a Necessary Being cannot come to be or cease to be as a contingent being can. Hence, the God of theism is different from the deistic conception of God. This is to say nothing of the fact that the God of theism can and does perform miracles, and the God of deism does not (see chapter 3).

Further, deism denies that miracles can or do occur. But a God who has created the universe from nothing has already performed the greatest miracle. Hence, such a God cannot be the God of deism.

CONCLUSION

The God of theism can be established by sound reasoning. Further, He is distinct from all other views of God, since there can only be one indivisible, infinite, necessary, absolutely perfect Uncaused Cause of everything else that exists. And since metaphysical theism is a precondition of evangelical theology, the viability of this precondition of evangelicalism is well supported by numerous lines of evidence. To be sure, objections can and have been raised, but none have been successful (see appendix 1).

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CHAPTER THREE

MIRACLES: THE SUPERNATURAL PRECONDITION

INTRODUCTION TO MIRACLES

Evangelical theology is built on the supernatural. Christ's virgin birth, His miracle-filled ministry, His physical resurrection from the dead, and His bodily ascension into heaven are only some of the numerous miracles essential to biblical Christianity. So much is the supernatural a precondition of orthodox theology that without it historical Christianity would collapse. To quote the apostle Paul, "If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God.… And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost" (1 Cor. 15:14–18).

Before a miracle can be identified, to say nothing of verified, it must be defined; there is no way to find a miracle unless we know what we're looking for. Theologians have defined miracles in two different ways.

TWO DEFINITIONS OF MIRACLES

Historically, miracles have been defined in either a weak sense or a strong sense. Following Augustine (354–430), some describe a miracle as "a portent [that] is not contrary to nature, but contrary to our knowledge of nature" (***CG***, 21.8). The problem with this weak view of miracles is that the event might not be supernatural at all; it could simply be a natural event for which the observer, as yet, has no natural explanation. This would mean that all natural anomalies, including meteors, earthquakes, volcanoes, and eclipses, were at one time miracles to everyone—and still are to many people. Certainly, these kinds of so-called miracles would have no apologetic value such as those in the Bible claim to have (Matt. 12:39–40; Mark 2:10–11; John 3:2; Acts 2:22; Heb. 2:3–4; 2 Cor. 12:12).

Others, following Thomas Aquinas, define a miracle in the strong sense of an event that is beyond nature's power to produce and that only a supernatural power (God) can do (***SCG***, Book 3). Again, only in this strong view can miracles be identifiable as acts of God, since in the weak sense they are indistinguishable from unusual natural events. Further, only in the strong sense do miracles have apologetic value, since they occur with direct supernatural intervention. In this sense, ***a miracle is a divine intervention into the natural world.*** As atheist Antony Flew put it, "A miracle is something which would never have happened had nature, as it were, been left to its own devices" (Flew, "M," in Edwards, ed., ***EP***, 346). Natural law describes naturally caused ***regularities;*** a miracle is a supernaturally caused ***singularity.***

DISTINGUISHING MIRACLES FROM NATURAL LAW

In order to explain what is meant by a supernatural act, we need an initial understanding of what is meant by natural law. Natural law is understood as the usual, orderly, and general way that the world operates. By contrast, a miracle is minimally an unusual, irregular, and specific way in which God acts within the world.

Miracles are supernatural but not anti-natural. As the famous physicist Sir George Stokes said, "It may be that the event which we call a miracle was brought about not by the suspension of the laws in ordinary operation, but by the

super-addition of something not ordinarily in operation" (***ISBE***, 2063). In other words, if a miracle occurs, it is not a violation or contradiction of the ordinary laws of cause and effect, but rather a ***new effect*** produced by the introduction of a supernatural cause.

At this point, what we need is a biblical description of miracles. The Bible uses three basic words to describe them: ***sign, wonder***, and ***power.*** A study of the usage of each will help in understanding what is meant by "miracle."

OLD TESTAMENT USAGE OF THE WORDS *SIGN*, *WONDER*, AND *POWER*

Each of the words for "miracle" carries with it a connotation of its own. When the meanings of all three are combined, we gain a complete picture of biblical miracles.

Old Testament Usage of the Word *Sign*

Although the Hebrew word for "sign" (***oth***) is sometimes used to refer to natural things, such as stars (Gen. 1:14) or the Sabbath (Ex. 31:13), it usually carries a supernatural significance, namely, as something appointed by God with special assigned meaning.

The first usage of the word ***sign*** is in the divine prediction given to Moses that Israel would be delivered from Egypt and serve God at Horeb. God promised, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you" (Ex. 3:12). When Moses asked God, "What if they do not believe me or listen to me?" (Ex. 4:1) the Lord gave Moses two "signs": His rod turned into a serpent (Ex. 4:3), and his hand became leprous (Ex. 4:6–7). These were given "that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers … has appeared to you" (Ex. 4:5).

God said, "If they do not believe you or pay attention to the first miraculous sign, they may believe the second" (Ex. 4:8). Moses "performed the signs before the people, and they believed. And … they bowed down and worshiped" (Ex. 4:30–31). In fact, God assured Moses, "I will harden [strengthen] Pharaoh's

heart, and … multiply my miraculous signs and wonders in Egypt.… And the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring the Israelites out of it" (Ex. 7:3, 5; cf. 11:9).

Again and again it is repeated that the purpose of these signs is twofold: "By this you will know that I am the LORD" (Ex. 7:17; cf. 9:29–30; 10:1–2) and that these are "my people" (Ex. 3:10; cf. 5:1; 6:7; 11:7). The more the Lord multiplied the signs, the harder Pharaoh's heart became (Ex. 7:3, 9:35; cf. 11:9). But even through this stubborn unbelief God received "glory" (Num. 14:22).

Throughout the rest of the Old Testament there are repeated references to the miraculous "signs" God performed in delivering His people from Egypt. He complained to Moses in the wilderness, saying, "How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the miraculous signs I have performed among them?" (Num. 14:11; cf. v. 22). Moses challenged Israel, "Has any god ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another nation, by testings, by miraculous signs and wonders?" (Deut. 4:34). Later Moses reminded the people, "Before our eyes the LORD sent miraculous signs and wonders—great and terrible—upon Egypt and Pharaoh and his whole household" (Deut. 6:22). "So the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders" (Deut. 26:8; cf. Deut. 29:2–3; Josh. 24:17; Neh. 9:10; Ps. 105:27; Jer. 32:20–21).

Many times in the biblical record "signs" are given to prophets as confirmation of their divine call. Moses' miraculous credentials have already been mentioned (Ex. 3 and 4). Gideon asked of God, "Give me a sign that it is really you talking to me" (Judg. 6:17). God responded with miraculous fire that consumed Gideon's offering (v. 5:21). God confirmed Himself to Eli by miraculous predictions about his sons' deaths (1 Sam. 2:34). Likewise, predictive "signs" were made to confirm God's appointment of King Saul (1 Sam. 10:7, 9). Isaiah offered predictions as "signs" of his divine message (Isa. 7:14; 38:7–8). Although the word ***sign*** is not used in these cases, God's miraculous confirmations of Moses over Korah (Num. 16) and Elijah over the false prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18) illustrate the same point. In short, miracles were used as signs to accredit the true prophet. Likewise, the lack of predictive powers (false prophecy) was an indication that the prophet was not of God (Deut. 18:22).

Other events in the Old Testament are called "signs" or "miracles" as well. These include the plagues on Egypt (Ex. 7:3), the provisions in the wilderness (spoken of in John 6:30–31), fire from a rock (Judg. 6:17–21), victory over enemies (1 Sam. 14:10), confirmation of healing (Isa. 38:7, 22), and judgments

from the Lord (Jer. 44:29).

Old Testament Usage of the Word *Wonder*

Often the words ***sign*** and ***wonder*** are used of the same event(s) in the same verse (Ex. 7:3; cf. Deut. 4:34; 7:19; 13:1–2; 26:8; 28:46; 29:3; 34:11; Neh. 9:10; Ps. 135:9; Jer. 32:20–21). At other times the Bible describes as "wonders" (Heb: ***mopheth***) the same events that are elsewhere called "signs" (Ex. 4:21; 11:9–10; Ps. 78:43; 105:27; Joel 2:30). Of course, sometimes the word ***sign*** is used of a natural "wonder," as of a prophet (Ezek. 24:24) or a unique thing a prophet did to get his message across (Isa. 20:3). But even here the word ***wonder*** has a special, supernatural (divine) significance.

Old Testament Usage of the Word *Power*

One Hebrew word for "power" (***koak***) is sometimes used of human power in the Old Testament (Gen. 31:6; Deut. 8:17; Nah. 2:1). However, very often it is used of divine power, sometimes of God's power to create: "God made the earth by his power; he founded the world by his wisdom and stretched out the heavens by his understanding" (Jer. 10:12; cf. Jer. 27:5; 32:17; 51:15). In other places the "power" of God overthrows His enemies (Ex. 15:6–7), delivers His people from Egypt (Num. 14:17; cf. v. 14:13), rules the universe (1 Chron. 29:12), gives the people of Israel their land (Ps. 111:6), and inspires His prophets to speak His Word (Mic. 3:8). "Power" is often in direct connection with events called "signs" or "wonders" or both (see Ex. 9:16; 32:11; Deut. 4:37; 2 Kings 17:36; Neh. 1:10). Sometimes other Hebrew words for "power" are used in the same verse with "signs and wonders"; Moses speaks of the deliverance of Israel "by miraculous signs and wonders … [and] by a mighty [***chazaq***] hand" (Deut. 4:34; cf. Deut. 7:19; 26:8; 34:12).

NEW TESTAMENT USAGE OF THE WORDS

SIGN, WONDER, AND *POWER*

The New Testament usage of the three basic words for miracles is directly parallel to that of the Old Testament.

New Testament Usage of the Word *Sign*

In the New Testament, "sign" (Gk: ***semeion***) is used seventy-seven times (forty-eight times in the Gospels). It is occasionally used of ordinary events, such as circumcision (Rom. 4:11) or a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes (Luke 2:12). Here again these signs have special divine significance, but most often the word is reserved for what we would call a miracle. Many times it is used of Jesus' miracles, such as healing (John 6:2; 9:16), turning the water to wine (John 2:11), and raising the dead (John 11:43–44). Likewise, the apostles performed miracles of healing (Acts 4:16, 30), "great signs and miracles" (Acts 8:13), and "miraculous signs and wonders" (Acts 14:3; 15:12); "many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles" (Acts 2:43). Even the Jewish authorities said, "What are we going to do with these men? … Everybody living in Jerusalem knows they have done an outstanding miracle, and we cannot deny it" (Acts 4:16).

The word ***sign*** is also used of the most significant miracle in the New Testament, the raising of Jesus Christ from the grave. Not only was the Resurrection a miracle, but it was also a miracle that Jesus predicted (John 2:19; Matt. 12:40; 16:21; 20:19). Jesus said to His unbelieving generation, "But none [no sign] will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.… [T]he Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12:39–40). Jesus was also asked for a sign in Matthew 16, at which time He repeated this assurance of His resurrection.

New Testament Usage of the Word *Wonder*

The word ***wonder*** (Gk: ***teras***) is used sixteen times in the New Testament and almost always refers to a miracle. In fact, in every occurrence it is used in combination with the word ***sign.*** It is used of the supernatural events before the second coming of Christ (Matt. 24:24; Mark 13:22; Acts 2:19), of Jesus' miracles (John 4:48; Acts 2:22), of the apostles' miracles (Acts 2:43; cf. Acts 4:30; 5:12; Heb. 2:3–4), of Stephen's miracles (Acts 6:8), of Moses' miracles in Egypt (Acts 7:36), and of Paul's miracles (Acts 14:3; 15:12; Rom. 15:19). ***Teras*** means "a miraculous sign, prodigy, portent, omen, wonder" (Brown, ***DNTH***, 2:633). It carries with it the idea of that which is amazing or astonishing (ibid., 623–25).

New Testament Usage of the Word *Power*

The word ***power*** (Gk: ***dunamis***) is used on numerous occasions in the New Testament. It is occasionally used of human power (2 Cor. 1:8) or abilities (Matt. 25:15), and sometimes it is used of spiritual (satanic) powers (Luke 10:19; Rom. 8:38). Like its Old Testament parallel, the New Testament term for "power" is often translated "miracles." ***Dunamis*** is used in combination with "signs and wonders" (Heb. 2:4), of Christ's miracles (Matt. 13:58), of the power to raise the dead (Phil. 3:10), of the virgin birth of Christ (Luke 1:35), of the special gift of miracles (1 Cor. 12:10), of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 1:8), and of the "power" of the gospel to save sinful people (Rom. 1:16). The emphasis of the word is on the ***divine energizing*** aspect of a miraculous event.

THE THEOLOGICAL NATURE OF A MIRACLE

Each of the three words for supernatural events (sign, wonder, power) delineates an aspect of a miracle. A miracle is an unusual event (wonder) that conveys and confirms an unusual message (sign) by means of unusual ability (power). From the divine vantage point a miracle is an act of God (power) that attracts the attention of the people of God (wonder) to the Word of God (by a sign). Respectively, these words designate the "source" (God's power), the "nature" (wonderful, unusual), and the "purpose" (to signify something beyond itself) of a

miracle. They are often used as a sign to confirm a sermon; a wonder to verify the prophet's words; a miracle to help establish his message (John 3:2; Acts 2:22; Heb. 2:3–4).

A miracle, then, is a divine intervention into, or an interruption of, the regular course of the world that produces a purposeful but unusual event that would not (or could not) have occurred otherwise. By this definition, natural laws are understood to be the normal, regular, and general way the world operates. But a miracle occurs as an unusual, irregular, and specific act of a God who is beyond the universe.

This does not mean that miracles are against natural laws; it simply means they find their source beyond nature. In other words, miracles don't violate natural laws of cause and effect, they simply have a cause that transcends nature.

THE PURPOSE OF MIRACLES

The Bible states at least three purposes of a miracle:

(1) to glorify the nature of God (John 2:11; 11:40);
(2) to accredit certain persons as the spokespeople for God (Acts 2:22; Heb. 2:3–4); and
(3) to provide evidence for belief in God (John 6:2, 14; 20:30–31).

Of course, not all people believe that the event is an act of God, even when they witness a miracle. But in this event, says the New Testament, the miracle is a witness against them. John grieved, "Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him" (John 12:37). Jesus Himself said of some, "They will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead" (Luke 16:31). So in this sense the result (not the purpose) of disbelieving in miracles is condemnation of the unbeliever (cf. John 12:31, 37).

THE VARIOUS DIMENSIONS OF MIRACLES

Miracles Have an Unusual Character

First, miracles have an ***unusual character.*** A miracle is an out-of-the-ordinary event in contrast to the regular pattern of events in the natural world. It is a "wonder" that attracts attention by its uniqueness. Fire from heaven, walking on water, and a burning bush that is not consumed are not normal occurrences. Hence, they will by their unusual character draw the interest of observers.

Miracles Have a Theological Context

Second, supernatural events have a ***theological context.*** A miracle is an act of God (Gk:
theos
); therefore, a miracle presupposes that there is a God who can act. The view that there is a God beyond the universe who created it, controls it, and can interfere in it is called theism. Miracles, then, imply a theistic view of the universe.

Miracles Have a Moral Dimension

Third, miracles have a ***moral dimension.*** They bring glory to God; that is, they manifest His moral character. Miracles are visible acts that reflect the invisible nature of God. Technically, there are no evil miracles, then, because God is good. All miracles by nature aim to produce and/or promote good.

Miracles Have Doctrinal Content

Fourth, miracles have ***doctrinal content.*** Miracles in the Bible are connected directly or indirectly with "truth claims," meaning that there is a message in the miracle. They are ways to tell a true prophet from a false prophet (Deut. 18:22); they confirm the truth of God through the servant of God (Heb. 2:3–4). A miracle is the sign that confirms the sermon; new revelation and divine

confirmation go hand-in-hand (cf. John 3:2).

Miracles Have a Teleological Aspect

Finally, biblical miracles have a ***teleological aspect.*** Unlike magic, they are never performed to entertain (see Luke 23:8). Miracles have a distinctive purpose: To glorify the Creator and to provide evidence for people to believe by accrediting the message of God through the prophet of God. These five facets of a miracle form a theistic context for identifying a miracle.
There are two basic ways to know whether miracles are possible:

(1) to show that a supernatural God exists (which has already been done in chapter 2);
(2) to answer objections raised against the possibility and/or plausibility of miracles.

THEISM MAKES MIRACLES POSSIBLE

C. S. Lewis aptly put it,

> If we admit God, must we admit Miracles? Indeed, indeed, you have no security against it. That is the bargain.... Theology says to you in effect, "Admit God and with Him the risk of a few miracles, and I in return will ratify your faith in uniformity as regards the overwhelming majority of events" (Lewis, *M*, 109).

Miracles, in the strictest sense of the word, are possible only in a theistic world, for no other worldview admits there is an infinite, supernatural, personal Power beyond the natural world except deism, which denies that God can (or does) perform miracles. So not only does theism make miracles possible, but ***only*** theism does this.
Furthermore, theism demonstrates that the miraculous is actual, since theism affirms the Creation of the universe (see chapter 2), which is the greatest

supernatural event of all. Some deists may admit that miracles are possible but not actual. Yet this is inconsistent, since they already admit that the biggest miracle—Creation—has actually happened.

If theism is true, not only are miracles possible, but the most astounding one has already occurred. The only question that remains is whether more have happened and how we can identify them. In short, philosophy can show that miracles are possible (by providing evidence that there was a Creator of the universe), but only history can demonstrate that subsequent miracles have actually taken place. But if miracles ***do*** happen, then they ***can*** happen; the actual proves the possible (not the reverse).

ANSWERING OBJECTIONS AGAINST MIRACLES

Few philosophers have attempted to demonstrate that miracles are impossible. The pantheist Benedict Spinoza, the agnostic David Hume, and the atheist Antony Flew are notable exceptions.

Spinoza's Argument That Miracles Are Impossible

Benedict Spinoza (1632–1677) argued from a now-outdated closed view of the universe. He insisted on the universal, exceptionless essence of natural law, and from this he concluded that miracles are not possible.

A Statement of Spinoza's Argument

Spinoza declared that "nothing … comes to pass in nature in contravention to her universal laws, nay, everything agrees with them and follows from them, for … she keeps a fixed and immutable order." He insisted that "a miracle, whether in contravention to, or beyond, nature, is a mere absurdity." He was nothing short of dogmatic about the impossibility of miracles, unabashedly proclaiming, "We may, then, be absolutely certain that every event which is truly described in

Scripture necessarily happened, like everything else, according to natural laws" (Spinoza, ***T-PT***, 83, 87, 92).

When one reduces Spinoza's argument against miracles to its basic premises it goes something like this:

(1) Miracles are violations of natural laws.
(2) Natural laws are immutable.
(3) It is impossible to violate immutable laws.
(4) Therefore, miracles are impossible.

The second premise is the key to Spinoza's argument: Nature "keeps a fixed and ***immutable*** order." Everything "***necessarily*** happened … according to natural laws." If it were true that nothing comes to pass in nature in contravention to nature's universal laws, then Spinoza would be right; to believe otherwise ***would be*** "a mere absurdity."

In order to appreciate what Spinoza meant, one must be aware that he was a rationalist who tried to construct his philosophy on the model of Euclid's geometry (Spinoza, ***E***, Part One); that is, he believed that one should accept as true only what is self-evident or what is deducible from the self-evident. Like his French contemporary René Descartes, Spinoza argued in a geometric way from axioms to the conclusions contained in these axioms.[1] Spinoza lived in an age increasingly impressed with the orderliness of a physical universe, an era in which it was believed Newton's recently discovered law of gravitation was without exception. Because of this it seemed axiomatic to Spinoza that natural laws are immutable.

A Response to Spinoza's Argument

There are several serious problems with Spinoza's antisupernaturalism, all springing from his Euclidian (deductive) rationalism.

First of all, Spinoza's philosophy suffers from an acute case of *petitio principii* (Lat: "begging the question"),[2] for, as David Hume later noted, anything validly deducible from premises must have been present in those premises from the

beginning. But if the antisupernatural is already presupposed in Spinoza's rationalistic premises, then it is no surprise to discover him denying all miracles, including those in the Bible. In other words, once one defines natural laws as "fixed," "immutable," and "unchangeable," then of course it is irrational to say a miracle occurred. How can anything break the unbreakable?

Further, Spinoza's concept of natural law views nature as a "closed system" and, hence, law describes the way things ***must*** behave. For most contemporary scientists, however, the universe is an "open system" in which natural laws are merely statistical averages or probabilities of the way things ***do*** behave. If so, then there is always, from the scientific perspective, the ***possibility*** that there may be exceptions to these "normal" patterns. In this way a miraculous event would only be viewed as an anomaly, not a violation of natural law. Consequently, in contemporary scientific discussion, miracles are not dismissed, like they were by Spinoza, as impossible ***by definition.***

What is more, Spinoza's view of God is pantheistic—he believed that God and the universe were one and the same. Spinoza maintained that God is coterminous with nature; hence, a miracle as an act of a God beyond nature cannot occur, since nature is the whole show. (As we already noted, miracles as supernatural interventions are only possible in a theistic universe. Therefore, scientists will want good reason to believe that a theistic God exists before they are likely to believe there is any evidence for miracles. In Spinoza's monistically airtight concept of nature [as absolutely one], then, there is simply no room for the supernatural.)

Finally, the evidence has mounted for a unique beginning of the space-time universe (see chapter 2). If this is so, then the beginning of the universe would be a prime example of a miracle, for what else should we call something coming into existence from nothing? Additionally, concluding that the universe had a beginning provides a devastating blow to Spinoza's concept of God, calling into question the naturalistic view that no God exists beyond the world. So rather than arguing against miracles, science may be coming back (however reluctantly) to the supernatural. In any event, Spinoza's argument by no means demonstrated the impossibility of miraculous events; rather, it demonstrated the circularity of his mental processes.

Hume's Argument That Miracles Are Incredible

In Part X of his famous ***Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding***, David Hume (1711–1776) introduces his argument with these words: "I flatter myself that I have discovered an argument … which, if just, will, with the wise and learned, be an everlasting check to all kinds of superstitious delusion, and consequently will be useful as long as the world endures" (Hume, ***ECHU***, 10.1.18).

A Statement of Hume's Argument

Just what is this alleged argument of finality against miracles? In Hume's own words, the reasoning goes like this:

(1) "A wise man … proportions his belief to the evidence.

(2) "If such conclusions are founded on an infallible experience, he expects the event with the last [i.e., highest] degree of assurance and regards his past experience as a full ***proof*** of the future existence of that event.

(3) "As the evidence derived from witnesses and human testimony is founded on past experience, so it varies with the experience and is regarded either as a ***proof*** or a ***probability***, according as the conjunction between any particular kind of report and any kind of object has been found to be constant or variable (ibid., 10.1.18–20).

(4) "There are a number of circumstances to be taken into consideration in all judgments of this kind; and the ultimate standard by which we determine all disputes that may arise concerning them is always derived from experience and observation.

(5) "Where this experience is not entirely uniform on any side, it is attended with an unavoidable contrariety in our judgments and with the same opposition and mutual destruction of argument as in every other kind of evidence.

(6) "We entertain a suspicion concerning any matter of fact when the witnesses contradict each other, when they are but few or of a doubtful character, when they have an interest in what they affirm, when they deliver their testimony with hesitation or … with too violent asseverations.

(7) "But when the fact attested is such a one as has seldom fallen under

our observation, here is a contest of two opposite experiences; of which the one destroys the other as far as its force goes, and the superior can only operate on the mind by the force which remains.

(8) "A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and … firm and unalterable experience has established these laws.…

(9) "[Therefore,] the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined.

(10) "[Since] a uniform experience amounts to a proof, there is here a direct and full ***proof***, from the nature of the fact, against the existence of any miracle" (ibid., 10.1.121–123).

Again using his own words, Hume's argument can be abbreviated in the following way:

(1) "A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; firm and unalterable experience has established these laws.
(2) "A wise man proportions his belief to the evidence.
(3) "[Therefore,] the proof against a miracle … is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined."

Hume concludes, "There must, therefore, be a uniform experience against every miraculous event. Otherwise the event would not merit that appellation. [Consequently,] nothing is esteemed a miracle if it ever happened in the common course of nature" (ibid.).

The Two Interpretations of Hume's Argument

Hume's argument against miracles can be understood in two ways: hard and soft. According to the ***hard interpretation***, Hume would be claiming that

(1) Miracles by definition are a violation of natural law.
(2) Natural laws are unalterably uniform.
(3) Therefore, miracles cannot occur.

Now, despite the fact that Hume's argument sometimes sounds like this, it isn't necessarily what he had in mind. If this is his argument, then it clearly begs the question by simply defining miracles as impossible, for if miracles are a violation of what cannot be altered, then miracles are *ipso facto* impossible—impossible by the facts themselves, as a result of their very nature. But a supernaturalist could easily avoid this dilemma by refusing to define a miracle as a "violation" of fixed law and simply call it an "exception" to a general rule. That is, he could define natural law as the regular (normal) pattern of events but not as a universal or unalterable pattern.

Actually, Hume's position contains an argument that is much more difficult to answer, one that utilizes a ***soft interpretation*** of natural law. It is not an argument for the ***impossibility*** of miracles, but for the ***incredibility*** of miracles. It can be stated this way:

(1) A miracle is by definition a rare occurrence.
(2) Natural law is by definition a description of regular occurrence.
(3) The evidence for the regular is always greater than that for the rare.
(4) A wise man always bases his belief on the greater evidence.
(5) Therefore, a wise man should never believe in miracles.

Notice that on this soft form of Hume's argument miracles are not ruled out entirely; they are simply held to be always incredible by the very nature of the evidence. The wise person does not claim that miracles cannot occur; he simply never believes they happen, because he never has enough evidence for that belief. One indication that Hume is stressing credibility (or believability) rather than viability (or possibility) is found in his use of such terms as "belief," "is esteemed," etc.

However, even in this soft interpretation of the argument, miracles are still eliminated, since by the ***very nature of the case*** no thoughtful person should ever hold that a miracle has indeed occurred. If this is so, Hume has seemingly avoided logical fallacy and yet has successfully eliminated the possibility of reasonable belief in miracles.

An Evaluation of Hume's Argument

Since the hard form of Hume's argument is easily answered by redefining the terms, we will concentrate primarily on the soft form.

First, a word of evaluation about Hume's claim for "uniform experience." On the one hand, it is begging the question if Hume presumes to know the experience is uniform ***in advance*** of looking at the evidence, for how can he know that all ***possible*** experience will confirm his naturalism unless he has access to all possible experiences, including those in the future? On the other hand, it is special pleading if by "uniform experience" Hume simply means the select experiences of ***some*** persons, namely, those who claim not to have encountered miracles, for there are other persons who ***do*** claim to have experienced miracles. As Stanley Jaki recognizes, "Insofar as [Hume] was a sensationist or empiricist philosopher he had to grant equal credibility to the recognition of any fact, usual or unusual" (Jaki, ***MP***, 23).

In the final analysis, then, the debate over miracles cannot be settled by supposed "uniform experience," for this either begs the question in advance or else opens the door for a factual analysis of whether indeed there is sufficient evidence to believe that a miracle has occurred. As C. S. Lewis observed,

> Now, of course we must agree with Hume that if there absolutely is "uniform experience" against miracles, if in other words they have never happened, why then, they never have. Unfortunately we know the experience against them to be uniform only if we know that all the reports of them are false. And we can know all the reports to be false only if we know already that miracles have never occurred. In fact, we are arguing in a circle. (Lewis, *M*, 105.)

The alternative to circular arguing on the question of the existence of miracles is to he open to the possibility that miracles have occurred.

Second, Hume does not truly ***weigh*** evidence for miracles; he really ***adds*** evidence against them. Since death occurs over and over and over again, and since resurrection occurs only on rare occasions (if ever), Hume simply adds up all the deaths against the very few alleged resurrections and then rejects the latter. In his own words,

> It is no miracle that a man, seemingly in good health, should die on a sudden, because such a kind of death has yet been frequently observed to happen. But it is a miracle that a dead man should come to life; because that has never been observed in any age or country. [Hence,] it is more probable that all men must die. (Hume, *ECHU*, 10.1.122.)

But Hume is not ***weighing*** evidence as to whether or not a given person, say, Jesus of Nazareth (see volume 3), has been raised from the dead; on what ***evidence*** is it postulated that resurrection has never been observed? Instead,

Hume is simply ***adding*** the evidence of all other people who have died and have not been raised.

There is another problem with Hume's concept of adding up events to determine truth. Even if a few resurrections ***have*** actually occurred, according to Hume's principles one should not believe them, since the number of deaths will always outweigh them. However, ***truth is not determined by majority vote.*** Hume seems to commit a kind of *consensus gentium* here, which is an informal logical fallacy arguing that something is true because it is believed by most people.

This argument actually equates evidence and probability. It says in effect that one should always believe what is most probable, what has the highest odds. On these grounds I should never believe the three dice I just rolled show three sixes on the first try, since the odds against it are 216 to 1. Or, you should never believe it if you're dealt a perfect bridge hand (which has happened), since the odds against it are 1,635,013,559,600 to 1. What Hume seems to overlook is that wise people base their beliefs on ***facts***, not on ***odds.*** Sometimes the odds against an event are very high, but the evidence for that event is very good.

Finally, Hume's concept of adding evidence would eliminate ***any*** unusual or unique event from the past, to say nothing of miracles. Richard Whateley satirized Hume's thesis in his famous pamphlet ***Historical Doubts Concerning the Existence of Napoleon Bonaparte.*** Since Napoleon's exploits were so fantastic, so extraordinary, so unprecedented, no intelligent person should believe that these events ever actually took place. After recounting the French leader's amazing and unparalleled military feats, Whateley wrote,

> Does anyone believe all this and yet refuse to believe a miracle? Or rather, what is this but a miracle? Is not this a violation of the laws of nature? … [If skeptics do not deny the existence of Napoleon, they] must at least acknowledge that they do not apply to that question the same plan of reasoning which they have made use of in others. (Whateley, *HDCENB*, 274, 290.)

Third, Hume's argument seems to prove too much; it appears to demonstrate that a person should not believe in a miracle even if it happens! However, there is something patently absurd about claiming that an event should be disbelieved even if one knows it has occurred.

Fourth, it would seem that Hume wants the "wise" person always to ***believe*** in advance that miracles will never occur. Even before one examines the evidence for a miracle, he should come pre-armed with the "uniform" and "unalterable" testimony of the past against it ***being*** a miracle. Remember the second premise of Hume's argument:

> If such conclusions are founded on an infallible experience, he expects the event with the last [i.e., highest] degree of assurance and regards his past experience as a full

proof of the future existence of that event. (Hume, *ECHU*, 10.1.118.)

But here again Hume's uniformitarian prejudice is evident. Only if one approaches the world with a kind of invincible bias that is believed in accordance with what has been supposedly perceived in the past, can he discount all claims for the miraculous. There are two important objections to this reasoning.

For one thing, Hume is inconsistent with his own epistemology.[3] Hume himself recognized the fallacy of this kind of reasoning when he argued that, based on past uniformity, we cannot even know for sure that the sun will rise tomorrow morning (Hume, ***THN***, 14–16). Hence, for Hume to deny future miracles based on past experience is inconsistent with his own principles and is a violation of his own ideological system.

For another thing, if it were true that no present exception can overthrow laws that are based on our uniform experience in the past, then there would be no true progress in our scientific understanding of the world, for ***established or repeatable exceptions to past patterns are precisely what prompt a change in scientific belief.*** When an observed exception to a past law is established, that law (L^1) is revised, with a new law (L^2) replacing and/or amending it. This is what happened when certain outer-spatial exceptions to Newton's law of gravitation were found, and Einstein's relativity was considered broader and more adequate. In short, ***Hume's objections to miracles seem to be unscientific.*** Exceptions to laws have a heuristic (discovery) value; they are goads to progress in our understanding of the universe. This does not necessarily mean that all exceptions to a known law call for another natural law to explain them. Since scientific understanding is based on regular and repeated events, one must be able to show how the exception is repeatable before he can claim it has a natural cause rather than a supernatural one. ***No single exception to a known scientific law calls for another broader natural law to explain it; only repeatable exceptions call for natural causes.*** An unrepeated exception may have a supernatural cause; indeed, if it has the earmarks of intelligent intervention from beyond the natural world (see chapter 2), then it may be held to have a supernatural cause, not a natural one.

Before leaving this point another observation is in order. Even though a rational or scientific understanding of the world is based on the observation of regular recurring events, it does not follow that the subject of this understanding must be a regular event. For instance, our general understanding of the paintings on the

ceiling of the Sistine Chapel is based on the experience of seeing other painters do similar things over and over. Yet the particular object of this understanding (the Creation scene) on the Sistine Chapel ceiling is an unrepeated singularity.

In the same way, SETI[4] scientists will accept a single message from outer space via radio telescope as indication that there are intelligent beings out there, only because these scientists have repeatedly observed intelligent beings produce similar messages. ***The basis for believing that an event has a supernatural cause is the observation of certain kinds of events being regularly connected with intelligent, not natural, causes.*** Nevertheless, the object of this understanding can be an unrepeated singularity—namely, a miracle. After all, an archaeologist need only find one piece of pottery to know there was an intelligent cause of it, even though he no doubt must have seen many potters make pottery (or the like) in order to know that only intelligent beings make these kinds of things. To restate the point, ***the basis of our understanding of whether an event has an intelligent supernatural cause is observing that intelligent beings regularly produce similar events within the natural world.*** However, the ***object*** of this understanding may be a singular event, such as the resurrection of Christ.

Indeed, as we have suggested, if scientists, based on their observation of regular causal conjunctions in the present (as Hume himself argued), can conclude that the weight of the cosmological evidence points to a Big-Bang singularity, billions of years ago, in which the material space-time universe exploded into being out of nothing, then not only are miracles possible but the biggest one has already happened. It remains, then, only to look at human history to see if other singularities have also occurred. What is seldom appreciated is that the very basis of this argument for the possibility (and even actuality) of miracles is David Hume's principle of "constant conjunction" (the "repeatability principle").[5] So rather than eliminating miracles, Hume's own maxim is actually the grounds for identifying them.

Antony Flew's Restatement of Hume's Argument Against Miracles

Variations of Hume's argument against miracles are still held to be valid by some

widely respected contemporary philosophers. In his article titled “Miracles” in the ***Encyclopedia of Philosophy***, Antony Flew argues against miracles on the grounds that they are unrepeatable. As he sees it, Hume’s argument really amounts to something like this.

(1) Every miracle is a violation of a law of nature.
(2) The evidence against any violation of nature is the strongest possible evidence.
(3) Therefore, the evidence against miracles is the strongest possible evidence (Edwards, ***EP***, 346–53).

Flew insists that “Hume was primarily concerned not with the question of fact, but with that of evidence. The problem was how the occurrence of a miracle could be proved rather than whether any such events had ever occurred.” However, adds Flew, “our sole ground for characterizing the reported occurrence as miraculous is at the same time a sufficient reason for calling it physically impossible.” Why, we may ask, is this so? Because “the critical historian, confronted with some story of a miracle, will usually dismiss it out of hand” (ibid.).
On what grounds are miracles dismissed by the critical historian? Flew answers,

> To justify his procedure he will have to appeal to precisely the principle which Hume advanced: the “absolute impossibility or miraculous nature” of the events attested must, “in the eyes of all reasonable people … alone be regarded as a sufficient refutation” (ibid.).

In short, even though miracles are not logically impossible, they are scientifically impossible:

> For it is only and precisely by presuming that the laws that hold today held in the past … that we can rationally interpret the detritus [fragments] of the past as evidence and from it construct our account of what actually happened (ibid.).

As to the charge that this uniformitarian approach to history is “irrationally dogmatic,” Flew answers with what is really the heart of his amplification of Hume’s argument. For one thing, “as Hume was insisting from first to last, the

possibility of miracles is a matter of evidence and not of dogmatism." Further, "the proposition reporting the [alleged] occurrence of the miracle will be singular, particular, and in the past tense." Propositions of this sort "cannot any longer be tested directly. It is this that gives propositions of the first sort [i.e., the general and repeatable] the vastly greater logical strength" (ibid.). In view of this, Flew's argument can now be stated as follows:

(1) Miracles are by nature particular and unrepeatable.
(2) Natural events are by nature general and repeatable.
(3) Now, in practice, the evidence for the general and repeatable is always greater than that for the particular and unrepeatable.
(4) Therefore, in practice, the evidence will always be greater against miracles than for them.

With these statements it becomes clear that for Flew generality and repeatability (in the present) are what give natural events greater evidential value than miracles. And since, of course, it will continue to be this way in the future, the evidence against miracles will always be greater than the evidence for them.

An Evaluation of Flew's Restatement of Hume's Argument Against Miracles

There is a ***central thread*** to the Hume/Flew argument: Both are based on what may be called the repeatability principle, which posits that the evidence for what occurs over and over is always greater than for what does not. Since miracles by their very nature are singularities, the evidence against them is always greater. However, as there are some ***distinctive features*** in the two presentations, our evaluation of Flew's will be separate.

First, like Flew, most modern naturalists accept some unrepeated singularities of their own. Many contemporary astronomers believe in the singular origin of the universe by a Big Bang, and nearly all scientists believe that the origin of life on this planet is a singular event that has never been repeated here. Indeed, all naturalistic scientists believe that life arose from nonlife as a singularity, which is not now being repeated. But if Flew's argument against miracles is correct, then it is also wrong for scientists to believe in these singularities that many of them consider natural events. Thus Flew's argument against supernaturalism

would eliminate some elemental naturalistic beliefs.

Second, Flew's view is subject to his own criticism of theists, namely, that it is an unfalsifiable position. No matter what state of affairs actually occurs (even a resurrection), Flew (contrary even to Hume's claims) would be obliged to believe it was not a miracle, for Flew argued,

> It often seems to people who are not religious as if there was no conceivable event or series of events the occurrence of which would be admitted by sophisticated religious people to be a sufficient reason for conceding "there wasn't a God after all" (Flew, "TF," in *NEPT*, 98).

In short, his accusation is that the belief of religious people is in actuality unfalsifiable. But in like manner we may ask Flew (rephrasing his own words), "What would have to occur or to have occurred to constitute for you a disproof of … your antisupernaturalism?" Flew's answer would be that no event in the world could falsify his naturalism, for he would respond that the evidence is always greater against miracles than for them.

Nor does it help for Flew to claim that his antisupernaturalism is falsifiable in principle but never in practice, on the grounds that in practice the evidence will always be greater for the repeatable. Surely he would then have to allow the theist to claim that, ***in principle***, the existence of God is falsifiable but that, ***in practice***, no event could disconfirm God's existence. The fact that Flew and other non-theists busy themselves to disprove God by arguing from the fact of evil in the world reveals their true interest; falsification in practice is what really concerns them.

It would appear that one cannot have it both ways. If naturalism is unfalsifiable in practice, then belief in God (or in miracles) can also be unfalsifiable in practice. On the other hand, if supernaturalism can never be established in practice, then neither can naturalism be so established. It is always possible for the theist to claim of every alleged natural event that "God is the ultimate cause of it." The theist may insist that all "natural" events (i.e., naturally repeatable ones) are the way God normally operates and that "miraculous" events are the way He works on special occasions. Now, on Flew's own grounds, there is no way, in practice, to falsify this theistic belief. Again, just as Flew claimed that naturalism is unfalsifiable in practice, so too the theist could claim the same for theism, for no matter what events (repeatable or unrepeatable) are produced in the natural world, the theist can still claim "God is the ultimate cause of it," and, on Flew's own grounds, no naturalist can disprove it.

Third, Flew's assumption that the repeatable always evidentially outweighs the unrepeatable is subject to serious challenge. If this were so, then, as Richard

Whateley pointed out (see earlier comments on Napoleon), one could not believe in the historicity of any unusual events from the past (none of which are repeatable). In fact, if repeatability in practice is the true test of superior evidence, then one should not believe that observed births or deaths occurred, for a person's birth and death are both unrepeatable in practice. Likewise, even historical geology is unrepeatable in practice, as is the history of our planet. Hence, if Flew were correct, the science of geology should be eliminated.
The truth is, as noted professor Stanley Jaki has observed, scientists do not reject unrepeated singularities out of hand:

> Luckily for science, scientists relatively rarely brush aside reports about a really new case with the remark: "It cannot be really different from the thousand other cases we have already investigated." The brave reply of the young assistant, "But, Sir, what if this is the thousand and first case?" which ... is precisely the rejoinder that is to be offered in connection with facts that fall under suspicion because of their miraculous character. (*MP*, 100.)

Plainly, then, if the naturalist pushes his arguments far enough to eliminate miracles, by implication he thereby eliminates the grounds for his own beliefs. If he qualifies them so as to include all the natural and scientific data he wishes, then he reopens the door for miracles.
However, that an event is unusual does not mean it is supernatural. It simply means that a miracle cannot be eliminated because it is unusual. As discussed above, in order for an unusual event to qualify as a supernatural act of God there must be

(1) a theistic God (see chapter 2);
(2) some supernatural earmarks of God on this event (such as of moral, theological, or teleological dimensions).

One cannot identify the fingerprints of God on an event unless he first knows what God's fingerprints are.

OTHER OBJECTIONS TO MIRACLES ARE

UNSUCCESSFUL

There are, of course, other objections to miracles (see Geisler, “M, AA” in ***BECA***). However, none of them is successful in eliminating the possibility of miracles. In point of fact, the only way to really disprove miracles is to disprove the existence of God—something anti-theists have found notoriously difficult. Indeed, each attempted argument is based on unjustified, unproven, or self-defeating premises (see Geisler, “G, AD” in ***BECA***). But if a theistic God cannot be disproved, then miracles are possible. Consider the following logic:

(1) Theism makes miracles possible.
(2) Theism has not been shown to be impossible (it actually has been shown [in chapter 2] to be credible).
(3) Hence, miracles have not been shown to be impossible.

This being the case, the supernatural precondition of evangelical theology is secure.

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CHAPTER FOUR

REVELATION: THE REVELATIONAL PRECONDITION

Another fundamental precondition of evangelical theology is revelation. If God has not unveiled Himself, then how can He be known? But God ***has*** chosen to disclose Himself, and His self-disclosure is called revelation. According to evangelical theology, God has revealed Himself in two ways: general revelation (in nature) and special revelation (in Scripture).

THE PREREQUISITES FOR DIVINE REVELATION

Divine revelation is not possible unless at least three basic things are in place:

(1) a Being capable of giving a revelation;
(2) a being capable of receiving a revelation;
(3) a medium through which a revelation can be given.

1. A Theistic God Is Capable of Giving a Revelation

Since there is good reason to believe a theistic God exists (see chapter 2), the first precondition for divine revelation exists. The theistic God is omniscient (all-knowing) and, hence, has truth to reveal. Further, He is omnipotent (all-powerful) and, thus, has the ability to create means of revealing this truth (see volume 2).

2. Human Beings Are Capable of Receiving a Revelation

According to the Bible, human beings are made in God's image (Gen. 1:27), and, therefore, they are like Him in that, among other things, they are ***rational and moral beings*** (see volume 2). Such beings are capable of receiving a ***rational and moral revelation*** from God. Evangelical theology affirms that this revelation can be found both in nature (Rom. 1:19–20) and in Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16–17). That it is found in nature has already been shown (in chapter 2) by virtue of the fact that we can discover through reason truths about both the existence and the nature of God. The special revelation that has been given by God in Scripture will be discussed later (in part 2). For now it will suffice to show that such a revelation between infinite God and finite man is possible.

3. The Medium Through Which Revelation Is Possible

In order for an infinite Mind to communicate with finite minds, certain things must be possible. To begin, there must be a common principle of reason that both possess. Since it can be shown that the basic laws of reason are based in the nature of God (who is the ultimate rational Being), they are common both to God and to finite rational creatures (see chapter 5). Thus, a necessary condition for divine revelation has been fulfilled.

Further, since both objective meaning (see chapter 6) and objective truth (see chapter 7) are possible, another necessary condition is in place. And the fact that

there is an analogy between God and creation (see chapter 9) shows that communication between an infinite Mind and a finite mind is possible; it demonstrates that there can be a similarity between the understanding of God and that of humans made in His image. This being the case, the basic ***necessary*** conditions for divine revelation have been met.
The ***sufficient*** condition for divine revelation, of course, is the will of God. Philosophy shows divine revelation is possible; only reality manifests that it is actual. Since the reality of God's special revelation in Scripture will be discussed later (in part 2), attention here will center on general revelation and its relationship to special revelation.

GOD'S GENERAL REVELATION

General revelation refers to God's revelation in nature, as opposed to His revelation in Scripture. More specifically, general revelation is manifest in several areas: for example, physical nature, human nature, and history. In each case God has disclosed something specific about Himself and His relationship to His creation.
General revelation is integral to Christian apologetics, since it is the data with which theists construct arguments for the existence of God (see chapter 2). Without it there would be no basis for apologetics.

God's Revelation in Physical Nature

"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands," the psalmist writes (Ps. 19:1). "The heavens proclaim his righteousness, and all the peoples see his glory" (Ps. 97:6). Job adds,

> Ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish of the sea inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of the
>
> Lord
>
> has done this? (
>
> Job 12:7–9
>
>)

Paul told men to

> Turn … to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them. In the past, he let all nations go their own way. Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy. (Acts 14:15–17)

He reminded the Greek philosophers,

> The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. (Acts 17:24–25)

Paul declares that even the heathen stand guilty before God:

> What may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. (Rom. 1:19–20)

In view of this the psalmist concludes, "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God' " (Ps. 14:1).

God is revealed in nature in two basic ways: as ***Creator*** and as ***Sustainer*** (see volume 2). He is the cause of the ***origin*** as well as the ***operation*** of the universe. The first speaks of God as the originator of all things: "By him all things ***were created***" and "in him all things ***hold together***" (Col. 1:16–17); God "***made*** the universe" and He also "***sustains*** all things by his powerful word" (Heb. 1:2–3); He "***created*** all things" and by Him all things "***have their being***" (Rev. 4:11). In addition to being their ***originator***, God is also the ***sustainer*** of all things. He was active not only in the universe's ***coming to be*** but is also active in its

continuing to be. The psalmist refers to this latter function when he says of God: "He makes springs pour water into ravines.… He makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate—bringing forth food from the earth" (104:10, 14).

God's Revelation in Human Nature

God created human beings in His image and likeness (Gen. 1:27); consequently, something about God can be learned from studying human beings (cf. Ps. 8). Since humans are like God, it is wrong to murder them (Gen. 9:6) and even to curse them (James 3:9–10). The redeemed are "renewed in knowledge in the image of [their] Creator" (Col. 3:10). Paul affirms that

> God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. "For in him we live and move and have our being." As some of your own poets have said, "We are his offspring." Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by man's design and skill. (Acts 17:27–29)

By looking at the creature we can learn something about the Creator (see chapter 9), for "Does he who implanted the ear not hear? Does he who formed the eye not see? Does he who disciplines nations not punish? Does he who teaches man lack knowledge?" (Ps. 94:9–10). Even Christ in the flesh is said to be the "image" of the invisible God (John 1:14; Heb. 1:3).

God is manifested not only in the intellectual nature of human beings but also in their moral nature (see volume 3). God's moral law is written in human hearts:

> When Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law … their consciences also bearing witness. (Rom. 2:14–15)

Since moral responsibility entails the ability to respond, man in God's image is also a free moral creature (Gen. 1:27; cf. 2:16–17).

God's Revelation in Human History

History has been called ***His***-story. It is the footprints of God in the sands of time. Paul declared that God "determined the times set for them [the nations] and the exact places they should live" (Acts 17:26). God disclosed to Daniel, "The Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men" (Dan. 4:17). God also entrusted to Daniel that human history is moving toward the ultimate goal of the kingdom of God on earth (Dan. 2, 7). So a proper understanding of history informs us about the plan and purpose of God.

God's Revelation in Human Arts

The Bible declares that God is beautiful and so is His creation. The psalmist praises, "O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" (Ps. 8:1). Isaiah beheld a marvelous display of God's beauty when he "saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple" (Isa. 6:1). The Scriptures encourage us to "worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness" (Ps. 29:2 NKJV; cf. Ps. 27:4).

Solomon points out that God "has made everything beautiful in its time" (Eccl. 3:11). The psalmist speaks of Zion, His city, as "perfect in beauty" (Ps. 50:2). What God created is good like Himself (Gen. 1:31; 1 Tim. 4:4), and the goodness of God is beautiful. Insofar as creation reflects God, it is also beautiful. Not only is God beautiful and has made a beautiful world but He has also created beings who can appreciate beauty. Like Him, they can also make beautiful things. Human beings are, as it were, "sub-creators" (see Sayers, ***MM***). God chooses to endow humans with special creative gifts that reveal something of His marvelous nature.

God's Revelation in Human Music

God apparently loves music, since He orchestrated the angelic choir at Creation when “the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy” (Job 38:7). Angels also continually chant the *tersanctus* in His presence: “Holy, holy, holy” (Isa. 6:3; Rev. 4:8). Furthermore, angels gather around God’s throne and “in a loud voice they sing: ‘Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain’ ” (Rev. 5:12). Moses’ sister, Miriam, led the triumphant Israelites in singing after God delivered them through the Red Sea (Ex. 15:20–21). David, the sweet psalmist of Israel, set up a choir for the temple and wrote many songs (psalms) to be sung in it. Paul admonished the church to “speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord” (Eph. 5:19). We learn something more about God’s nature through the human voice, a God-ordained instrument of music. Even the Jewish high priest entered into the Holy of Holies with bells on his garment. And the psalmist commanded that God be praised with trumpet, harp, lyre, tambourine, and cymbals (Ps. 150:3–5). In heaven the angels play trumpets (Rev. 8:2), and others play harps (Rev. 14:2). Music, too, is a gift and manifestation of God. Like the rest of His creation, it is an expression of His glory.

Even apart from God’s special revelation in Scripture, then, He has manifested Himself through general revelation in nature.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GENERAL AND SPECIAL REVELATION

While the Bible is God’s only ***written*** revelation (see part 2), it is not God’s ***only*** revelation; He has more to say to us than is in the Bible. His general revelation in nature, man, history, art, and music offers vast opportunities for continual exploration. The following chart summarizes this relationship:

General Revelation	**Special Revelation**
God As Creator	God As Redeemer
Norm for Society	Norm for Church

Means of Condemnation	Means of Salvation
in Nature	in Scripture

THE ROLE OF SPECIAL REVELATION

Special revelation contributes uniquely to Christian theology, for the Bible alone is infallible and inerrant (see part 2). Further, the Bible is the only source of both God's revelation as Redeemer and His plan of salvation (see volume 3). Thus, Scripture is normative for salvation (see part 2).

The Bible Alone Is Infallible and Inerrant

As a revelation of Jesus (Matt. 5:17; Luke 24:27, 44; John 5:39; Heb. 10:7), the Bible is normative for all Christian thought. The task of the Christian thinker, then, is "to bring every thought captive to Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5 NKJV) as revealed in Scripture. We must think, as well as live, Christocentrically (Phil. 1:21; Gal. 2:20).

The Bible Alone Reveals God As Redeemer

While general revelation manifests God as Creator, it does not reveal Him as Redeemer. The universe speaks of God's greatness (Ps. 8:1; Isa. 40:12–17), but only special revelation reveals His redemption (John 1:14). The heavens declare the glory of God (Ps. 19:1), but only Christ declared His saving grace (Titus 2:11–13). Nature may reveal the ages of the rocks, but only Scripture makes known the Rock of Ages.

The Bible Alone Has the Message of Salvation

In view of God's general revelation, all men are "without excuse" (Rom. 1:20), for "all who sin apart from the [written] law will also perish apart from the law" (Rom. 2:12). General revelation is sufficient ground for man's condemnation; however, it is not sufficient for his salvation. One can tell how the heavens go by studying general revelation, but he cannot discover from it how to go to heaven, for "there is no other name under heaven [except Christ's] given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). In order to be saved people must confess, "Jesus is Lord" and believe in their hearts "that God has raised him from the dead" (Rom. 10:9). But they cannot call upon someone of whom they have not heard, "and how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" (Rom. 10:14). Thus preaching the gospel in all the world is the Christian's Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20).

The Bible Is the Written Norm for Believers

Without the apostolic truth embedded in Scripture there would be no church, for the church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets" (Eph. 2:20). The revealed Word of God is the norm for faith and practice. Paul says, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). Of course, not all unbelievers have access to a Bible. Nonetheless, God holds them accountable to His general revelation. The reason there is justice in this is that "all who sin apart from the [written] law will also perish apart from the law," since ***all people have God's law in their hearts*** (Rom. 2:12, 14–15).

THE ROLE OF GENERAL REVELATION

While the Bible is all true, God has not revealed all truth in the Bible. Whereas the Bible is only truth, the Bible is not the only truth; some truth lies outside of it. Said another way, all truth is God's truth, but not all God's truth is in the Bible (see chapter 7). General revelation, then, plays an important role in God's plan, and as such it has several unique roles.

General Revelation Is Broader Than Special Revelation

General revelation encompasses much more than special revelation. Most of the truths of science, history, mathematics, and the arts are not in God's Word; the bulk of truth in all these areas is found only in God's general revelation. While the Bible is scientifically accurate, it is not a textbook on science. The mandate for doing science is not a ***redemption*** mandate but a ***creation*** mandate; right after God created Adam He commanded him to "fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen. 1:28). Likewise, there are no mathematical errors in God's inerrant Word, but then again there is very little geometry or algebra and no calculus in it either. Similarly, the Bible records accurately much of the history of Israel, but has little on the history of the world, except as it bears on Israel. The same is true of most every area of the arts and science. Whenever the Bible speaks in these areas, it speaks authoritatively, but God has largely left the discoveries of His truths in these areas to a study of general revelation.

General Revelation Is Essential to Human Thought

No one—even an unbeliever—thinks apart from God's general revelation in human reason (see chapter 5). God is a rational Being, and man is made in His image (Gen. 1:27). Since God thinks rationally, man was given the same capacity. Brute beasts, by contrast, are called "irrational" (Jude 10). Indeed, the highest use of human reason is to love the Lord with "all our mind" (Matt. 22:37).

The basic laws of human reason are common to believer and unbeliever (again, see chapter 5); without them, no writing, thinking, or rational inferences would be possible. But nowhere are these laws of thought spelled out in the Bible. Rather, they are part of God's general revelation and the special object of philosophical thought.

General Revelation Is Essential to Human Government

God has ordained that believers live by His written Law, but He has also written His law in the hearts of unbelievers (Rom. 2:12–15). Divine law in Scripture is the norm for Christians, but natural law is binding on all men. Nowhere in Scripture does God judge the nations by either the law of Moses He gave to Israel (Ex. 19–20) or by the law of Christ He enjoins on Christians; to think otherwise is the central error of theonomists (see House, ***DT***).[1] That sojourners in Israel had to abide by Jewish law (see Lev. 25:10f.) no more proves Gentiles are bound by the law of Moses than does the reality that Christians visiting Saudia Arabia have to abide by Qur'anic law prove that Christians are under the Qur'an. Both of these simply mean that visitors must respect the law of the land they are visiting.

The law of Moses, for example, clearly was not given to the Gentiles (Rom. 2:14). The psalmist explains, "He has revealed his word to Jacob, his laws and decrees to Israel. He has done this for no other nation; they do not know his laws" (Ps. 147:19–20). This is confirmed by the fact that, in spite of the many condemnations of the Gentiles' sins in the Old Testament, never once were they condemned for not worshiping on the Sabbath or not bringing sacrifices or tithes to Jerusalem. Nonbelievers ***are*** bound by the law "written in their hearts"; while they have no special revelation in Holy Scripture, they are responsible to general revelation in human nature.

General Revelation Is Essential to Christian Apologetics

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, without general revelation there would be no real basis for Christian apologetics, for if God had not revealed Himself in nature, there would be no way to argue from the design evident within it to the existence of a Designer (known as the teleological argument for God's existence, see chapter 2). Nor would there be any way to argue from the beginning or contingency of the world to the existence of a First Cause (known as the cosmological argument). Likewise, unless God had revealed Himself in the moral nature of human beings, it would not be possible to argue for a Moral

Lawgiver. And, of course, without a God who can act in creating the world, there could be no special acts of God (miracles) in it (see chapter 3).

SOME OBJECTIONS TO GENERAL REVELATION

One of the most commonly heard Christian arguments against the objectivity of general revelation in natural law, as opposed to moral laws revealed in the Bible, is that natural law is not clear. Opponents claim that there is no place one can read of these natural laws. As the argument goes, they are vague, if not vacuous. Natural laws can be easily distorted by depraved minds.[2] On the other hand, these Christians insist that the Bible is clear and not lacking in content.

Rebuttal of the Idea That Natural Revelation Is Unclear and Without Content

In their evangelical zeal to exalt God's special revelation in the Bible, some have overstated their case. That the Bible is superior in content to natural revelation does not mean natural revelation is not perfectly adequate for its God-given task. True, sin impairs humankind's ability to apply natural revelation to life. Yet this is not a defect in the revelation but in people's refusal to accept it and order life according to it. According to Romans 1, natural revelation "is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them" (v. 19). The problem with such persons is not that they do not apprehend the truth, but that "the man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. 2:14). It is not that they do not ***perceive*** it, but that they do not ***receive*** it.[3] The Greek word ***dekomai*** used in 1 Corinthians 2:14 means "to receive" or "to welcome." When there is no welcome of the truth, they cannot "know" (Gr: ***ginosko***) it by experience (v. 14).

Rebuttal of the Idea That Natural Revelation Is Distorted by Sin

As was shown earlier, God has clearly revealed Himself in nature and in the conscience of humanity. So the problem with unbelievers is not that they do not ***see*** the truth of natural revelation but that they ***shun*** the truth it reveals to them (Rom. 1:18). Rejecting revealed truth is not unique to unbelievers in their response to God's ***general*** revelation; neither do believers always live according to the truth of God's ***special*** revelation.

To claim that general revelation is inadequate because unbelievers have distorted it is to reject special revelation for the same reason. Peter, for example, tells us, "People distort [Paul's writings], as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction" (2 Peter 3:15–16). There is practically nothing that God has revealed in Scripture that has not been subjected to the same kind of misrepresentation as those moral truths He has revealed to all people in His natural law. There is no defect with either of God's revelations; the problem is not with God's revelation but with humankind's rejection of it. The difficulty is not with God's disclosure but with humanity's distortion of it.

The existence of hundreds of religious sects and cults all claiming that the Bible is their revelation is ample testimony that even the teachings of supernatural revelation are not immune to misinterpretation or mutilation. In fact, the perversions of the teachings of the natural law (general revelation) among various human cultures are no greater than the perversions of the teachings of supernatural revelation among the various cults. Careful examination of both areas indicates that in spite of the clarity of both revelations, depraved human beings have found a way to deflect, divert, or distort God's commands; therefore, the teachings of God's Word have no more immunity from tortured contortion than does the reality of God's world.

Rebuttal of the Idea That Natural Revelation Isn't Identifiable

Others have argued that the Bible has an advantage over natural law in moral matters in that the Scriptures have a specifiable content. We know where to go to get a Bible, and we can read what it says, but where does one go to read about

natural law? The biblical response to this question is twofold: It is "***written on the hearts***" of all men, and it can be seen in what they "***do by nature***" (Rom. 2:14–15, emphasis added). The first of these two manifestations is the inner side of the natural law and the latter the outer side. There are two areas in which the natural law is revealed: both external and internal. Natural law is made manifest externally in nature (Rom. 1), and it is revealed internally in human nature (Rom. 2).

External Manifestations of Natural Revelation Are Identifiable

Since this point has been discussed earlier (chapter 2), only brief comments about it will be made here. There are several ways in which God has indirectly revealed Himself externally in nature. These include the mutability (changeability), temporality, and order of the world. From these facts of our experience the great arguments for the existence of God are built, for if the world is temporal, then it must have had a beginning. But since human reason naturally believes, even from special revelation, that every event has a cause, there must have been a Cause of this temporal world. Theists will recognize this as the *kalam* (horizontal) cosmological argument for God.[4] Likewise, if the world is contingent or dependent there must be a God, for what is dependent for its existence could not exist by itself. But nothing can actualize its own existence. Hence, there must be an Actuality outside of this changing world that actualizes the actual existence of all that exists but that could be nonexistent. In short, natural revelation involves the use of natural reason on the natural world.

Internal Manifestations of Natural Revelation Are Identifiable

What is written on perishable paper can be erased, but what is written on the heart of an imperishable person is not completely deletable. Virtually all theologians agree, no matter how Calvinistic they are, that the image of God is not completely destroyed in fallen humankind: It was effaced but not erased. This was true of Augustine and Calvin (1509–1564)[5] and it is also true of Luther (1483–1546).[6]

The Bible is very clear that ***all*** human beings bear God's image. As mentioned previously, it is wrong to kill (Gen. 9:6) or even to curse human beings (James 3:9) for this reason.

In the same way that we know God's external natural revelation, we also come to know God's natural revelation in our internal moral nature, the one "written on our hearts." The natural moral law is written in a way everyone can read. No lessons in language are necessary, and no books are needed. Natural law can be seen "instinctively' (Rom. 2:14 NASB). We know what is right and wrong by our own natural intuitions; our very nature predisposes us in that direction.

The most basic key to that natural moral law is found in human inclinations. Since we are made in God's moral image (Gen. 1:27; 9:6; James 3:9), it is understandable that we have in our very nature a natural inclination toward ***knowing*** what is morally right. To be sure, as fallen beings we do not always follow it (Rom. 7) and, thus, have a natural tendency toward ***doing*** what is wrong. However, we ***know*** what is right instinctively, even when we do not ***do*** it. We know it by way of ***inclination***, even when we do not perform it by way of ***action.*** Further, we ***know*** what is wrong deep down inside, even when we do not ***think*** it is wrong, for we know things by ***inclination*** even when we sometimes reject them by ***cognition.*** This is because our cognition is influenced by our depraved condition. Our ***choosing*** obscures our ***knowing.***

To put it hermeneutically,[7] we are inconsistent in our use of the proper principles of interpretation of these basic moral inclinations. This doesn't mean that human reason is unnecessary for knowing what is right and wrong by natural revelation, for the natural moral law, while not without content, is minimal: It only informs us to do good and to shun evil. Human reason is necessary for two things:

(1) It puts specificity on the general moral law.
(2) It aids us in knowing what it means to utilize in order to attain the good end.

Another clue to understanding natural revelation is our basic moral ***inclinations.*** This is why our best understanding of the natural law comes not from seeing our actions but from observing our reactions: ***We know the moral law instinctively.*** We don't have to read it in any book; we know it intuitively, written as it is on our own heart. So when interpreting the natural law, we must be careful to do so

from reactions truly indicative of it. These are not necessarily the ones we ***do to others***, but more often those that we ***desire to be done to us.*** Once again, Paul speaks to this point when he writes of the things we "do by nature" that "show" the moral law "written on our hearts" (Rom. 2:14–15).

Our moral inclinations are manifested in our reactions when others violate ***our*** rights; we don't see the moral law nearly as clearly when we violate ***others'*** rights. Herein is revealed our depravity. But again our sinfulness is not found in our inability to know what the moral duty is but in our unwillingness to do it to others.

The kind of reactions that manifest the natural moral law were brought home forcefully to me when a professor, after carefully reading a student's well-researched paper defending moral relativity, wrote: "***F. I do not like blue folders.***" After receiving his grade, the student stormed into his professor's office, protesting, "That's not fair. That's not just!" The student's reaction to the injustice done to him revealed, contrary to what he wrote, that deep down inside he really did believe in an objective moral principle of rightness. The real measure of his morals was not what he had written in his paper but what God had written on his heart. What he really believed was right manifested itself when he was wronged.

Natural Law Is Expressed in Writings

If there were a natural inclination toward what is right, one would expect to see some sort of expression of this in human culture. But as is widely known, moral conduct is diverse from culture to culture. However, what is not as well known is that while human ***behavior*** differs greatly, human ***ethical creeds*** are significantly alike. Since human beings are not perfect, one would anticipate that their conduct would not always measure up to their creeds. The latter, though, is a much better indicator of the moral law than the former.

Contrary to popular belief, the great moral writings of the world do not present a total diversity of perspectives; indeed, there is a striking similarity among them. In fact, the resemblance within writings expressing the natural law is just as great as that within writings on the divine law. That is, the great ethicists have read general revelation with as much agreement as the great theologians have read special revelation. Within both groups there are conservatives and liberals, rightists and leftists, strict constructionists and broad constructionists. The stark

truth is that it matters little whether it is the Bible that is being viewed, general revelation, or the United States Constitution. A bad hermeneutic can distort one as well as the other. The problem is not with divine revelation but with human misinterpretation of it. No revelation is immune from distortion by fallible and fallen human beings who wish to make it fit their own depraved desires and actions.

In spite of human misrepresentations of God's general revelation, there nonetheless remains among non-Christian writers a general consensus on the nature of the natural law. C. S. Lewis has provided a noteworthy service in cataloging many of these expressions of the natural moral law (***AM***, appendix A). Of course, there also is diversity of ethical expression among the great cultures. But this diversity no more negates their essential unanimity regarding natural law than diversity of belief among evangelicals negates their unity on the essential Christian teachings.

INTERACTION BETWEEN GENERAL AND SPECIAL REVELATION

Since it is the task of a systematic thinker to organize all truth about God and His relation to His creation, both general and special revelation are needed. However, since special revelation overlaps with general revelation, it is necessary to discuss the interaction between the two. God has revealed Himself in His Word and in His world. His truth is found both in Scripture and in science. The problem is what we do when they seem to conflict. It is much too simplistic to conclude that the Bible is always right and science is wrong. Of course, ***the Bible is always right*** (see Part 2), ***but our interpretation of it is not.***

An Important Distinction

When dealing with conflicts between Christianity and culture, we must be careful to distinguish between ***God's Word***, which is infallible, and ***our interpretation*** of it, which is not. Likewise, we must distinguish between ***God's timeless revelation*** in His world, which is always true, and ***man's current***

understanding of it, which is not always correct. The very progress of scientific understanding indicates that what was once believed to be true is no longer held to be so.

Two important things follow from these distinctions. ***First***, God's revelations in His Word and His world never contradict each other. God is consistent; He never talks out of both sides of His mouth. ***Second***, whenever there is a real conflict, it is between a human interpretation of God's Word and a human understanding of His world. Either one or both of these are wrong, but God has not erred.

Which Revelation Has Priority?

When conflicts in understanding God's general and special revelations occur, which one gets the priority? The temptation might be to give precedent to the biblical interpretation because the Bible is infallible, but this overlooks the crucial distinction just made. The Bible is inerrant, but not all of our interpretations of it are without error. The history of interpretation reveals that God's infallible Word is as subject to man's fallible misunderstandings as is anything else. Likewise, the history of the arts and science exposes human misunderstandings of God's general revelation that are as bad as the human history of misconstruing His special revelation.

This does not leave one in an impasse, for whenever there is a conflict between an interpretation of the Bible and a current understanding of God's general revelation, priority should generally be given to the interpretation that is more certain. Sometimes this is our understanding of special revelation, and sometimes it is our understanding of general revelation, depending on which one is more thoroughly proven. A few examples will help to illuminate the point.

Some interpreters have wrongly concluded on the basis of biblical references to "the four corners of the earth" (e.g., Rev. 7:1) that the earth is flat. However, science has proven with ***certainty*** that this is wrong. Therefore, in this case the certainty in interpreting God's general revelation takes precedence over whatever uncertainty there may be in interpreting these biblical references. "Four corners" can be understood as a figure of speech, and the Bible uses such literary devices (such as God having eyes, arms, and legs).

Others have claimed that the sun moves around the earth on the basis of Bible references to "sunrise" (Josh. 1:15) or to the sun's "standing still" (Josh. 10:13).

However, this interpretation is not necessary; these expressions may be only the language of appearance from an on-the-face-of-the-earth observer's point of view (see part 2, chapter 15). Furthermore, since the time of Copernicus there is extremely good reason to believe that the sun does not move around the earth. Hence, we assign a higher probability to the heliocentric interpretation of God's world at this point than to a geocentric interpretation of His Word.
Unfortunately some are willing to believe in a given interpretation of God's Word, even if it involves a logical contradiction. But general revelation demands (by way of the law of noncontradiction) that opposites cannot both be true (see chapter 8). Therefore, we cannot believe that God is both one person and also three persons at the same time and in the same sense. Thus, monotheism so defined and trinitarianism (see volume 2) cannot both be true. We can, and do, believe that God is three ***Persons*** in one ***Essence***, for even though this is a mystery, it is not a contradiction. Consequently, we can be ***absolutely certain*** that any interpretation of Scripture involving a contradiction is false.
However, there are times when an interpretation of Scripture should take precedence over even highly popular views in science. Macroevolution[8] is a good example (see volume 2). It is ***virtually certain*** that the Bible cannot be properly interpreted to accommodate macroevolution. Or to put it the other way, it is most evident that the Bible teaches that God brought the universe into existence out of nothing (Gen. 1:1), that He created every basic kind of animal and plant (Gen. 1:21), and that He specially and directly created man and woman in His image (Gen. 1:27). In spite of the prevailing and trendy evolutionary views to the contrary, then, the Christian must give priority to this highly probable interpretation of Scripture over the extremely improbable theory of macroevolution (see volume 2).

Mutual Enrichment

Often there is no serious conflict between widely accepted biblical interpretation and the general understanding of the scientific world; rather, there is mutual enrichment. For example, knowledge of the content of the Bible is essential for much of Western art and literature. Furthermore, biblical history and world history overlap significantly, so much so that neither should ever be ignorant of

the other. More neglected is the relationship between modern science and the biblical idea of Creation. In this connection it is important to note that the biblical concept of Creation helped give rise to modern science (see Whitehead, ***SMW***, 13, and Foster, "CDCRMNS"). Of course, in the study of origins there is a direct overlap of, and mutual enrichment between, the scientific and biblical data.

In theology the interaction between biblical studies and other disciplines should always be a two-way street. No one provides a monologue for the other; all engage in a continual dialogue. Although the Bible is infallible in whatever it addresses, it does not speak to every issue. Furthermore, as we have seen, while the Bible is infallible, our interpretations of it are not. Thus, those in biblical studies must listen to as well as speak to the other disciplines. Only in this way can a complete and correct systematic worldview be constructed (see chapter 11).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Evangelicals believe the Bible is essential both to systematic thinking and to apologetics. It is the only infallible writing we have (see part 2). It speaks with unerring authority on every topic it covers, whether spiritual or scientific, whether heavenly or earthly. However, the Bible is not God's only revelation to humanity. God has spoken in His world as well as in His Word. It is the task of the Christian theologian to appropriate the information from both and to form a worldview that includes a theocentric interpretation of science, history, human beings, and the arts. However, without God's revelation (both general and special) as the basis, this task is as impossible as moving the world with no place to put one's fulcrum. Without question, in building a solid systematic theology both special revelation and general revelation are necessary.

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CHAPTER FIVE

LOGIC: THE RATIONAL PRECONDITION

Logic deals with the methods of valid thinking; it reveals how to draw proper conclusions from premises. It is a prerequisite of ***all*** thinking, including all theological thought. Logic is such an inescapable tool that even those who deny it cannot avoid using it, for it is built into the very fabric of the rational universe.[1]

THE FUNDAMENTAL LAWS OF THOUGHT

There are three elemental laws of all rational thinking:

(1) the law of noncontradiction (A is not non-A);
(2) the law of identity (A is A);
(3) the law of excluded middle (either A or non-A).

Each of these laws serves an indispensable function in theology.

The Law of Noncontradiction

Without the law of noncontradiction we could not say that God is not non-God (G is not non-G). Thus, God could be the devil or whatever is anti-God.

The Law of Identity

If the law of identity were not binding, we could not say that God is God (G is G). Without the law of identity, God would not be identical to Himself; He could be something other than Himself (e.g., the devil), which is plainly absurd.

The Law of Excluded Middle

Likewise, if the law of excluded middle didn't exist we could not affirm that it is either God or not God that we are speaking about. When we use the term "God," we could be referring to both God and not God. This clearly is meaningless. Hence these three principles are necessary for all thinking, including all thought about God. Since theology is thinking about God, theology cannot escape the use of these three fundamental laws of all thought.

A DEFENSE OF THE LAWS OF THOUGHT

Why should anyone accept these three laws? Indeed, many reject them, at least when applied to the ultimate level. Zen Buddhism, for example, claims that the Tao (the Ultimate) goes beyond all categories, including true and false (see Suzuki, ***IZB***). How can the primary standards of thought be defended against

such criticism?

Actually, the laws of thought are self-evident and do not need any defense. As regards the law of identity, for instance, the predicate says the same thing as the subject (A is A); therefore, it neither needs nor admits direct proof. ***Once one understands the terms, they speak for themselves.*** For example, once one knows what "triangle" and "three-sided figure" mean, there is no need to prove that a triangle is a three-sided figure. It is simply seen (by rational intuition) to be true.

However, there is an indirect way of defending the basic laws of thought as self-evident. This can be shown in that they cannot be denied without using them; that is, any attempt to deny them is self-destructive. It is like saying, "I think that I cannot think," or "I know that I cannot know," or "I reason that I cannot reason." In each case, one is doing exactly what he claims he cannot do.

In the same manner, if the law of noncontradiction is not binding, then what is true can also be not true (false). But this is self-defeating, for that very sentence claims to be true and not false. If it does not claim to be true, then it is not even in the arena of truth and can be ignored by all who seek truth.

THE LAWS OF RATIONAL INFERENCE

In addition to the three fundamental laws of thought, there are laws of valid inference whereby a conclusion can be properly drawn from given premises. These fall into two broad categories: ***deductive*** logic and ***inductive*** logic.

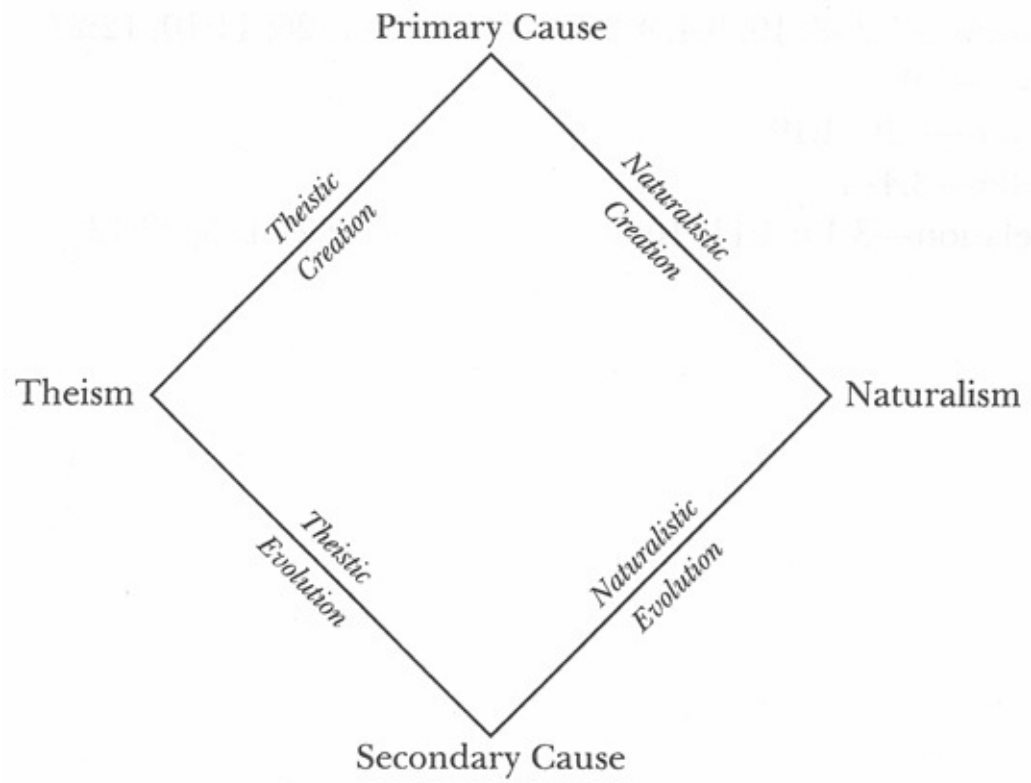
The validity of these laws is dependent on the law of noncontradiction, for if these necessary rational inferences are not valid, then contradiction follows (see the following example).

DEDUCTIVE LOGIC

Deductive thinking is where one proposition is correctly deduced or drawn from others. For example, if:

(1) all A is inside of B, and
(2) all B is inside of C, then it follows that

(3) all A is inside of C.



If all A is not inside (in the class of) C, then contradiction follows, for then B would both be inside C (according to the second premise) and not inside C. If B is inside C, then A must be inside C, too, since A is inside B. Without question it is contradictory to both have and not have A inside of B (as according to the first premise).

The device by which one proposition can be correctly drawn from others is called a syllogism.[2] Deductive logic comes in three forms:

(1) categorical syllogisms
(2) hypothetical syllogisms

(3) disjunctive syllogisms (see Aristotle, ***PrA*** and ***PoA***).

Categorical Syllogisms

A categorical (unconditional) syllogism is one where a categorical (unconditional) proposition is deduced from two other categorical propositions. For example:

(1) All human beings are sinful.
(2) John is a human being.
(3) Therefore, John is sinful.

There are rules for categorical syllogisms that must be followed if the conclusions are going to be correct, and if these are not followed, then the undeniable law of noncontradiction is violated. These syllogistic rules and the fallacies that violate them can be understood if some of the essential terms are defined first.

Propositions

A proposition is a declarative sentence that affirms or denies something. A proposition is composed of a ***subject*** (the subject of the affirmation/ denial, e.g., "John"), a ***predicate*** (what is affirmed/denied of the subject, e.g., "sinful"), and a ***copula*** (the connector of the subject and predicate, e.g., "is (are)" or "is (are) not"). Stated together: "John (subject) is (copula) sinful (predicate)."[3]
The subject can be ***universal*** (including all in its class) or ***particular*** (specific, including only some in its class). For instance, "***All*** dogs (universal) are four-legged creatures"; "***some*** dogs (particular) are brown." Universal propositions are said to be strong and particular ones weak. Propositions also can be either ***affirmative*** ("is" or "are") or ***negative*** ("is not" or "are not").
Combining universals and particulars with affirmatives and negatives yields four different kinds of propositions:

A Universal affirmative (***All*** humans ***are*** sinners).
E Universal negative (***All*** humans ***are not*** sinners) (or ***no*** humans ***are*** sinners).
I Particular affirmative (***Some*** humans ***are*** sinners).
O Particular negative (***Some*** humans ***are not*** sinners).

Distribution

In A-type propositions (universal affirmative) the subject is distributed and the predicate is not distributed.[4] Take, for instance, a proposition similar to what we have just seen: “All human beings are rational.” The subject is distributed because “all humans” includes all in its class, and the predicate is undistributed because “rational” means only some of its class—there are, after all, other rational beings, such as God and angels.
The distribution (D) or undistribution (U) of terms in all four kinds of propositions is as follows:

A All S(D) is P(U).
E No S(D) is P(D); or All S(D) is not P(D).
I Some S(U) is P(U).
O Some S(U) is not P(D).

For example:
A All human beings (D) are rational (U).
E No human being (D) is rational (D).
I Some human beings (U) are rational (U).
O Some human beings (U) are not rational (D).[5]

Again, a categorical syllogism contains two propositions from which a third is deduced. The syllogism as a whole contains three terms: a ***subject term*** (ST), a ***predicate term*** (PT), and a ***middle term*** (MT). The subject and the predicate are the subject and predicate of the ***conclusion***, and the middle term occurs once in each premise, along with one occurrence each of the subject and predicate. For example:

All humans (middle term) are lost (predicate term). [A-type proposition]
John (subject term) is a human (middle term).
Therefore, John (subject term) is lost (predicate term).

The Rules of Categorical Syllogisms

Breaking any one of the seven rules of categorical syllogisms leads to an invalid conclusion, meaning that the conclusion does not follow (***non sequitur***) from the premises regardless of whether or not the conclusion happens to be true.

(1) There must be only three terms.
(2) The middle term must be distributed at least once.
(3) Terms distributed in the conclusion must be distributed in the premises.
(4) The conclusion always follows the weaker premises (i.e., negative and particular ones).
(5) No conclusion follows from two negative premises.
(6) No conclusion follows from two particular premises.
(7) No negative conclusion follows from two affirmative premises.

The Fallacies of Categorical Syllogisms

Likewise, committing any one of the four fallacies of categorical syllogisms leads to an invalid conclusion.

(1) ***Illicit major*** is the fallacy where the major term is distributed in the conclusion but not in the premise.[6]
(2) ***Illicit minor*** is the fallacy where the minor term is distributed in the conclusion but not in the premise.[7]
(3) ***Undistributed middle*** is the fallacy where the middle term is not distributed at least once.
(4) ***Four-term fallacy*** is the fallacy where there are not three and only three terms in the syllogism (includes the fallacies of “ambiguous middle” and “equivocal middle”).

Of course, the middle term must appear only once in each premise but never in the conclusion; else, a fallacy of form occurs. A more detailed explanation can be found elsewhere (see Geisler and Brooks, ***CLUR***).

Hypothetical Syllogisms

Hypothetical syllogisms are an "If … then …" type of reasoning. If A, then B follows. For instance,

(1) If God is all-just, then He must punish all sin.
(2) God is all-just.
(3) Therefore, He must punish all sin.

There are only two ways to draw valid conclusions from a hypothetical syllogism:

(1) affirming the antecedent (the part of the sentence coming before "then");
(2) denying the consequent (the part of the sentence coming after "then").

The above example (regarding sin and God's justice) is one of affirming the antecedent (called *modus pollens* [8]), and the following is one of denying the consequent (called *modus tollens* [9]):

(1) If the Qur'an is God's Word, then it cannot err.
(2) The Qur'an has errors.
(3) Therefore, the Qur'an is not God's Word.

Disjunctive Syllogisms

A disjunctive syllogism is an either/or type of reasoning. It takes the following form:

(1) It is either A or not A (but not both).
(2) It is not non-A.
(3) Therefore, it is A.

To use a theological example:

(1) Either God is existent or He is nonexistent.
(2) God is not nonexistent.
(3) Therefore, God is existent.

There are two ways to draw a valid conclusion from a disjunctive syllogism: Either by denying one alternate or by denying the other alternate. An alternate is the statement on one side or the other of the "or."
These three types of logical thinking—categorical, hypothetical, and disjunctive—are used constantly in theology. Without them theology would not be possible, since they are the rules of rational thought, and systematic theology is a form of rational thinking.

INDUCTIVE LOGIC

Another type of logic is inductive reasoning. While Aristotle wrote on inductive reasoning (***T***), he is more famous for deductive logic. Inductive and experimental logic were most fully developed by Francis Bacon (see ***NO***), the father of modern scientific thinking, and John Stuart Mill (see ***SL***).

The Nature of Inductive Reasoning

Broadly speaking, while ***deductive*** reasoning is from the general to the particular, ***inductive*** reasoning is from the particular to the general. For example,

deductive logic proceeds from the general statement that

(1) all human beings are rational beings, and notes that
(2) Mary is a human being, to the particular conclusion that
(3) Mary is a rational being.

Inductive logic begins with any number of particulars and makes a generalization about them. For instance, "Human beings such as Janna, John, Joan, Jim, and others have two legs and walk upright; therefore, all humans walk upright." Of course, unlike deductive logic, one cannot be absolutely sure of this conclusion, since all human beings have not been observed. Hence, the inductive conclusion is ***generalizing.*** It is a projection or ***extrapolation*** being made: "Since all humans we observe have two legs and walk upright, then even those we have not observed ***probably*** do the same."
There is, of course, such a thing as a ***perfect induction***, where every particular instance has been examined. In this case, one can be certain about the conclusion. For example, "Every coin in my pocket is a penny" can be known for sure, since my pocket is a limited space and every coin in it can be scrutinized. Likewise, the Bible contains a limited amount of information, all of which can be examined. Hence, one can have a kind of certainty about what it teaches if every verse has been probed carefully.

The Rules of Inductive Logic

Several inductive reasoning guidelines must be followed. Put in question form:

How Many Cases Were Examined?

The degree of certainty about the conclusion will depend in part on how broad was the number of cases examined. The broader the sample, the better the chances are that the conclusion will be correct.

How Representative Was the Evidence?

Since it is usually not possible to examine all the cases, the quality of the samples examined is crucial to the validity of the conclusion. For example, the validity of a poll will depend on the representative nature of the sum of the people who were polled.

How Carefully Was the Evidence Examined?

Careful inductions are comprised of many factors. What were the similarities of the samples that were studied? What were the differences? Were all possible explanations accounted for? Were the results isolated from other factors? In short, how critically was the evidence examined?

How Does the Information Gained Correlate With Other Knowledge?

Finally, how well does the information that was gleaned match up with other things that are known to be true? Does it contradict other things known with certainty? Does it better explain things than other explanations do? Sometimes new evidence rocks foundations that were thought settled (such as Copernicus's view that the earth moved around the sun).

Kinds of Probability

There are two major kinds of probability in inductive reasoning: ***a priori*** (***ah*** pree-***oh***-ree) and ***a posteriori*** (***ah*** paw-ster-ee-***oh***-ree). A priori probability is probability prior to and independent of the facts; a posteriori probability is probability that arises after examining the facts. Both kinds have an application to theology and apologetics.

A Priori Probability

A priori probability is mathematical in nature, dealing with the advanced

likelihood or odds of an event occurring. For example, the likelihood of getting three sixes on a roll of three dice before they are tossed is 1 in 216 (1/6×1/6×1/6). This does not mean that the dice must be thrown 216 times to get it; it simply means that these are the mathematical odds, for three dice with six sides numbered one through six offer that many combinations.

A priori probability has convinced even some former atheists to believe there must have been an Intelligent Designer of first life. After calculating that the odds for life to arise by only natural laws was 1 in 10 to the 40,000th power (one followed by 40,000 zeros), Sir Fred Hoyle (b. 1915) abandoned his God-denying beliefs. This chance, one in $10^{40,000}$, is less than that of finding one single particular atom while searching the entire universe (see ***EFS***, 45–46).[10]

A Posteriori Probability

While a priori probability is probability before the fact, a posterior probability is probability after the fact. In science, it is ***empirical*** probability, also called scientific probability. A posteriori probability offers varying degrees of certainty that something is true based on an examination of the available evidence. This is generally done with the guidance of the principles listed above (under "The Rules of Inductive Logic").

Degrees of Probability

According to the inductive method, there are various degrees of probability, depending on the kind and extent of evidence available. These range from virtually impossible on the one end to virtually certain on the other end.

Absolute certainty, at least of a ***mathematical*** type,[11] is possible only in deductive logic. A perfect induction, however, can provide ***practical*** certainty, since every one of the cases was examined.

LOGIC AND GOD

If logic is the basis of all thinking, and theology is thinking about God, then it follows that logic is the basis of all thinking about God. Nevertheless, some object to this conclusion, claiming that God is sovereign over all things, including logic, and that making logic the basis of thinking about God makes God subject to logic (see Dooyeweerd, ***NCTT***).

Logic Is Subject to God Ontologically

It is true that in reality God is prior to everything else. In this sense, God is prior to logic in the order of being. Logic is a form of rational thought, and God is the ultimate rational Being. So ontologically,[12] logic is subject to God.
However, this does not mean that logic is arbitrary—God does not merely choose to be rational and consistent. ***He is rational by His very nature.*** The Scriptures inform us, for example, "It is impossible for God to lie" (Heb. 6:18) and that "He cannot deny Himself" (2 Tim. 2:13 NKJV). Likewise, God cannot be irrational. It is contrary to His nature as the ultimate, perfect, absolutely rational Being in the universe to violate the laws of logic.

God Is Subject to Logic Epistemologically

While God is prior to logic ***in the order of being*** (ontologically), nevertheless, logic is prior to God ***in the order of knowing*** (epistemologically). No knowledge is possible without the laws of thought; if this is not true, then nothing else follows. Even the statement "God is God" makes no sense unless the law of identity holds (A is A). Likewise, the affirmation that "God exists" cannot be true if the law of noncontradiction is not binding, otherwise God could exist and not exist at the same time and in the same sense.
Is God subject to something beyond Himself? No. When God is subject to good reason (logic), He is subject to ***His own nature*** (see Clark, ***CVMT***), since He is the ultimate Reason or ***Logos*** (John 1:1). Likewise, when God is subject to the

law of justice, He is not bound by something ***beyond*** Himself but to something ***within*** Himself, namely, to His own unchangeable nature (see volume 2). Technically speaking, in theology it is not God who is subject to logic; it is our ***statements*** about God that are subject to logic. Systematic theology is a series of statements about God that, if true, inform us about Him. No statement about God can make any sense, to say nothing of being true, unless it abides by the undeniable rules of reason.

Rationality or Rationalism?

Some object that making God subject to logic is a form of rationalism, since it makes truths about God subject to human reason. However, there is a difference between the use of good ***reason***, which the Bible commends to ***discover*** truth (Isa. 1:18; Matt. 22:37; 1 Peter 3:15), and the use of ***rationalism*** to ***determine*** truth, which Scripture does not commend. Good reason does not subject God to finite minds but rather subjects our finite minds to His infinite Mind (2 Cor. 10:5; 1 Cor. 1:21).

Further, since we are created in the image of an infinitely intelligent God, it is not a form of rationalism to imitate His rationality. Rather, it is a way to express our love for Him (with all our minds) as Jesus commanded (Matt. 22:37).

Even special revelation cannot be known or communicated apart from logic. We could not distinguish between a revelation that is from God or one that is not from God without the law of noncontradiction. Nor could we determine which book was God's of the many that claim to be (e.g., the Bible, the Qur'an, the Book of Mormon) without using our reason to examine the evidence.

Finally, note that reason is a means of ***discovering*** truth, whereas rationalism is an attempt at ***determining*** truth. Christian theology falls into the former category. All truth is ***revealed*** by God, whether in special or general revelation (see chapter 4), but all truth is received by ***reason.***

DID ARISTOTLE INVENT LOGIC?

Some critics object to the use of deductive logic, insisting that it was invented by

Aristotle and that there is no reason we should accept "Western logic" over "Eastern logic," which does not accept the law of noncontradiction.

However, this criticism is misdirected for several reasons. ***First***, Aristotle did not ***invent*** logic; at best, he simply ***discovered*** it. All rational creatures were using logic since the beginning; Aristotle was merely the first one known to put it down in written form (see ***PrA*** and ***PoA***).

Second, this criticism implies that "Eastern thought" can somehow avoid using "Western logic." But this is impossible—logic does not have geographic boundaries. Inasmuch as logic is based on the law of noncontradiction, it is unavoidable, for it is impossible to deny this law without using it. Any statement to the effect that "truth claims do not have to be either true or false" is itself claiming to be true as opposed to false.

Third, no Eastern philosopher can even think without the law of noncontradiction; again, the very denial of noncontradiction employs it, and any statement to the effect that "ultimate reality [say, the Tao] goes beyond, the law of noncontradiction" (see Suzuki, ***IZB***) is itself a statement that uses the law of noncontradiction of ultimate reality, for it claims to be true, as opposed to false. If it is not a truth claim at all, then it is not even in the arena of truth and need not be considered by anyone in pursuit of truth.

Are There Different Logics?

Others object that there are many kinds of logic; why choose one and make it the norm over all others? In response, it should be pointed out that there are no kinds of logic that do not use the law of noncontradiction. ***All*** systems of valid thought —whether they are deductive logic, inductive logic, symbolic logic, modal logic, or whatever—employ the law of noncontradiction. Indeed, Alfred North Whitehead and Bertrand Russell demonstrated in *Principia Mathematica* that all mathematics is based on logic. It is literally impossible to think without logic.

Can't an Omnipotent God Break the Laws of Logic?

Some theologians argue that if God is omnipotent, then He can do anything, including breaking the laws of logic. The Bible says, “Nothing is impossible with God” (Matt. 19:26), and if this is so, it is suggested, it would seem to follow that God could violate the laws of thought if He wished.

However, this objection is based on a misconception. When the Bible declares that God can do anything, it does not mean that He can do what is impossible. It means that God can do anything that is ***possible*** to do. Indeed, the Scriptures declare that there are many things that are impossible for God. Hebrews 6:18 affirms, “It is impossible for God to lie”; 2 Timothy 2:13 NKJV adds, “He cannot deny Himself.” It would be a denial of Himself for God to deny the laws of rational thought, since they are based on His rational nature.

Can’t God Transcend Logic As He Does Natural Law?

Some have suggested that since God made natural law and can transcend it by supernatural intervention, it would seem to follow that He can do the same with the rational laws He has made. In short, if God can break His laws of physics, why can’t He break His laws of rationality?

The response to this is that God did not ***make*** or ***create*** the laws of thought any more than He created Himself. ***The laws of reason are based on God’s uncreated nature.*** That is the way He is, always has been, and always will be. God cannot change His nature and, hence, cannot break the laws that flow from His nature. The laws of physics are created, not uncreated, and can be transcended by God like everything else that is created. But as the laws of thought are based on God’s uncreated nature, God can no more change them than He can cease to be God.

Are Not the Mysteries of the Faith Against Logic?

From inside Christian theology, several other objections have been set forth flowing from the great mysteries of the faith: The Trinity, the Incarnation, and the doctrine of predestination/free will.

The Trinity

The orthodox view of the Trinity posits that there is only one God and yet three different Persons make up that one God. This appears to some to violate the law of noncontradiction; how can God be only one and yet three at the same time and in the same sense?

Put in this way, the answer is that He cannot, but this misstates the doctrine of the Trinity. According to evangelical theology, God is not both three and only one ***in the same sense.*** He is only one ***in nature*** (essence) but three in a different sense—***in Persons.***

Three persons in one essence is no more a contradiction than are three corners on one triangle or three ones in one to the third power (1×1×1=1). God has one ***what*** (nature) with three ***whos*** (persons). This is a mystery (cf. 1 Tim. 3:16) but not a contradiction. To be contradictory God would have to be both three and only one at the same time and in the same sense; that is, He would have to be three Persons and yet only one Person at the same time and in the same sense. Or, He would have to be three Natures and yet only one Nature at the same time and in the same sense. But this is not what orthodox theologians claim about the Trinity.

The Incarnation

Like the Trinity, the Incarnation is also a great mystery. Some even claim it is a contradiction, for it affirms that in Christ God became man, and this is impossible, since God is infinite and man is finite—an infinite cannot become finite. The Eternal cannot become temporal any more than the Uncreated can become a creature. How then can we claim that the Incarnation does not violate the law of noncontradiction?

The answer to this apparent contradiction lies in the misstatement of what the Incarnation really is. It was not God ***becoming*** man, but the second person of the Godhead ***adding*** humanity; in other words, the Son of God did not stop being divine in order to become human, but rather He embraced another nature—humanity—in addition to His divinity. In the Incarnation, the infinite nature of God did not become finite; the second person of the Godhead, who retained His infinite nature, also assumed another nature (a finite one). As we put it before, in

God there is one ***what*** (nature) and three ***whos*** (persons).

	THE CRUCIAL DIFFERENCES	
	Artificial selection	**Natural selection**
Goal	Aim (end) in view	No aim (end) in view
Process	Intelligently guided process	Blind process
Choices	Intelligent choice of breeds	No intelligent choice of breeds
Protection	Breeds guarded from destructive processes	Breeds not guarded from destructive processes
Freaks	Preserves desired freaks	Eliminates most freaks
Interruptions	Continued interruptions to reach desired goal	No continued interruptions to reach any goal
Survival	Preferential survival	Nonpreferential survival

In the Incarnation, Who^2 took on What^2, a human nature, in addition to the What^1 He retained (His divine nature). This is not a contradiction because the infinite did not become finite, nor the Uncreated become the created, which would be a contradiction.
In the Godhead there is one What and three Whos; in Christ, the second person of the Godhead, there is one Who and two Whats. In the Incarnation, one Who in God assumed another What, so that there were two Whats (natures) in one Who (person). Again, this is an amazing mystery but not a contradiction.

Predestination and Free Will

For everyone except extreme Calvinists (see volume 3), who deny free will in this matter, or extreme Arminians, who deny God's infallible fore knowledge, there is a seeming paradox between God's predetermination and human free choice. How can God determine the end from the beginning (Isa. 46:10), and how could He have chosen His elect before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4), when the Bible also affirms that human beings are free to accept or reject God's gift of salvation (John 1:12; Rom. 6:23; Matt. 23:37; 2 Peter 3:9)? If God determined in advance who will be saved and who will not be saved, then how can humans be free (see volume 3)?

The answer to this apparent dilemma resides in an understanding of how God predetermines events like these. God does not force them to happen ***against our free will;*** rather He predetermines that they will occur ***through our free will.*** Or, to put it minimally, God does not have to ***make*** these events occur; He can ***see*** them occur—from His eternal vantage point.[13]

A person standing on top of a building foreseeing a collision (between two cars that cannot see each other around the corner) does not cause the crash. Likewise, God, who can by His omniscience foresee what we will freely do, need not cause us to do it. And even if He is the ***ultimate*** cause of all things, He is not the ***immediate*** cause of them. ***Free moral agents*** are the immediate cause of all free actions. God (the primary cause) produced the ***fact*** of freedom, and free agents (secondary causes), by God's grace, produce the ***acts*** of freedom (see volume 3). Further, one and the same event can be both determined and yet free with no contradiction. For example, when one watches a recording of a televised game, it is already determined; nothing can be changed. It will turn out exactly the same, score and all, no matter how many times one watches it. Yet when the game was played, each and every person played according to his or her own free will. No one was forced to do anything. Thus, one and the same events were both determined and yet free (see Geisler, ***CBF***, chapters 1–3).

To the objection that this is so because we are looking back on the game, the theist could reply, "God in His omniscience looks forward with an even greater certainty than we look backward." This leads to another point.

The God of orthodox theology is eternal, not temporal. Therefore, He does not really look ***forward*** to the future; He simply looks ***downward*** on it (see volume 2), since it is present to Him in His eternal now (as the great ***I AM*** of Ex. 3:14). To illustrate, a person in a cave can look out the tunnel and see only one train car going by at a time—the present one. He cannot see the one already past or the one yet to come. But the person on the top of that mountain can see all of them at the same time. Likewise, God can see past, present, and future all in His eternal present (the now). He sees the future, not because it has already occurred, but because it preexists in Him as the eternal Cause of all that was, is, and will be.

If God is eternal, there is no problem with an event being determined in advance (and, thus, not being free), for then God is actively seeing in His eternal present what we are freely doing. He is not passively seeing the future (as though He had to wait on it to occur). He is not literally ***foreseeing*** anything. It is only called

foreseeing and predetermining from our standpoint in time, not from God's vantage point in eternity.

In point of fact, God knows the future not because He is looking ***down*** or ***ahead***; He is simply looking ***within*** Himself, for all effects preexist in their cause,[14] and God is the Cause of all things, including the future.[15] Hence, God is seeing them in His eternal nature, before they ever occur, with the same certainty as if they had already occurred (see Aquinas, ***ST***, 1a.14.6–9). There is no contradiction between God's predestination and our free will.

Finally, the harmony between predestination and free choice can be demonstrated from God's omniscience alone. Consider the following argument:

(1) God is all-knowing.
(2) An all-knowing Being knows everything, including the future.
(3) What an all-knowing Being knows will come to pass—must come to pass (if it did not, then God would have been wrong about what He foreknew. But an all-knowing God cannot be wrong about anything He knows).
(4) God knows all future free acts.
(5) Therefore, these free acts ***must come to pass.*** (If they didn't, then an all-knowing God would have been wrong.)
(6) But what must come to pass is determined.
(7) Therefore, our free acts are predetermined by God.

While the logic of this argument is tight, many believe that it proves we aren't free. This is not the case. What it demonstrates is that God can know for sure (has determined) what we will freely do. So one and the same event is ***determined*** from the standpoint of God's knowledge and ***free*** from the vantage point of our choice. Again, this may be a mystery, but the great mystery of predestination and free will, whatever else it is, is not a logical contradiction.

CONCLUSION

Systematic theology is dependent on logic in many ways. All of its claims are subject to the basic laws of thought. Contradictions cannot both be true and

false. Likewise, as will be seen in chapter 12, the methods used in doing systematic theology are both deductive- and inductive-type logic. Systematic theology begins with an inductive study of both special revelation (in the Bible) and general revelation (in nature), it makes deductions from them, and these are put together in a unified and systematic whole. Without logic, this would not be possible; hence, philosophy (especially logic) is truly the handmaid of theology.

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CHAPTER SIX

MEANING: THE SEMANTICAL PRECONDITION

Christianity makes truth claims. It asserts that a theistic God exists (see chapter 2), that Christ is the Son of God (see volume 2), and that the Bible is the Word of God (see part 2). These truths are held to be objectively (rather than merely subjectively) true; that is, they are true not only for me but for everyone (see chapter 7).

However, all true statements must be ***meaningful***—they must make sense. Nonsensical statements are neither true nor false (e.g., "Zuplops cadlure gugemonts"). Likewise, emotive statements (like "Ouch!") have no cognitive meaning; they also are neither true nor false, but are simply an expression of our feelings.[1] Yet both true ***and*** false statements are meaningful statements. For example, "The capital of the United States is Canton, Ohio" is meaningful, but it is false. So, by definition, in order to be cognitively meaningful a statement must be either true or false.[2]

Now, if all true statements are meaningful, then all objectively true statements (as Christianity claims to possess) must be objectively meaningful. Thus the objectivity of truth is dependent on the objectivity of meaning. Unfortunately,

the dominant view in the contemporary world is opposed to an objective embrace of meaning. This dominant view is called conventionalism.

CONVENTIONALISM VS. ESSENTIALISM

Conventionalism is the theory that all ***meaning*** is relative. Since all truth claims are meaningful statements, conventionalism necessarily holds that all ***truth*** is relative. But this is contrary to the Christian claim that there is absolute truth—truths that are true at all times, in all places, and for all people (see chapter 7).

Conventionalism: A Reaction to Platonic Essentialism

Conventionalism is a reaction to essentialism, which (following Plato) claims that all language has an unchanging essence or form. By contrast, conventionalism maintains that all meaning is relative to changing situations; meaning is arbitrary and varies according to its context. According to conventionalism, there are no forms of meaning that transcend time and place (transcultural forms). Language (meaning) has no form or essence; linguistic meaning is therefore derived from the changing, relative experience on which language is based.

Essentialism: Plato's View of Absolute Meaning

Plato (c. 427–347 B.C.) defended a form of essentialism in his dialogue titled ***Cratylus.*** Augustine (A.D. 354–430) did also in his *Principia Dialtecticae* (384), *De Magistro* (389), and *De Trinitate* (394–419), although Augustine apparently did not hold to Plato's picture theory of meaning (the idea that language pictures meaning),[3] which Ludwig Wittgenstein critiqued in his famous *Tractatus*.

Simply stated, essentialism (also called naturalism)[4] insists that ***there is a***

natural or essential relation between our statements and what they mean. Language is not arbitrarily related to meaning; rather, there is a one-to-one correspondence between them.

Conventionalism: Challenging Platonic Essentialism

Three names loom large in the modern relativization of meaning: Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913), Gottlob Frege (1848–1925), and Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951). Their presentation of conventionalism is widely accepted in current linguistic philosophy.

Ferdinand Saussure

The forerunner of modern conventionalism was the famous Swiss linguist Ferdinand Saussure. His ***Course in General Linguistics*** is still a standard in the field.

Gottlob Frege

Although Frege wrote relatively little, his teachings, put together from the notes of his students, have had a strong influence on the adoption of conventionalism by modern linguists. These teachings are found in ***Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege.***

Ludwig Wittgenstein

Leaning on the works of his predecessors, Ludwig Wittgenstein is credited with making conventionalism the predominant view in philosophical and religious thought. His mature perspective is expressed in his ***Philosophical Investigations;*** section I presents a critique of "a particular picture of the essence of human language," which contains the following theses:

(1) The function of language is to state facts.

(2) All words are names (the referential theory of meaning).[5]
(3) The meaning of a name is the object denoted.
(4) Meaning is taught by ostensive definition.[6]

All of these theses are rejected by Wittgenstein as being either an oversimplification of language (theses 1 and 2), or, in the case of thesis 4, mistaken ("an ostensive definition can be variously interpreted in every case," ***PI***, 1:28), or, as in thesis 3, shown to be absurd by giving examples (e.g., exclamations, ***PI***, 1:27; ***PI***, 1:39).
Other theses that are closely connected with the picture theory of meaning and that come in for criticism are the following:

(1) Meaning is a matter of producing mental images.
(2) Analysis of propositions = Clarification of propositions (***PI***, 1:60).
(3) Words have a determinate sense.[7]

Wittgenstein offers an alternative view of meaning that employs:

(1) family resemblances (***PI*** 1:67);
(2) language games (***PI*** 1:7);[8]
(3) forms of life (***PI***, 1:19, 23, 241; II, 194, 226).

Since Wittgenstein rejected both univocal[9] and analogical language[10] (see chapter 9), he held an ***equivocal*** view[11] reflected in family resemblances and based on changing experience. As such he is one of the strongest proponents of conventionalism.

Wittgenstein and Religious Language

In Wittgenstein's earlier work *Tractatus*, religious language was placed in the realm of the inexpressible. He ended *Tractatus* with the famous line, "That of which you cannot speak, speak not thereof." It is alleged that religious discourse has no factual meaning, and there is an unbridgeable gulf between fact and value.[12] Thus, according to consistent conventionalism, God-talk is nonsense. It is clear from Wittgenstein's ***Notebooks*** that such feelings as dependence, as well as the recognition that "to believe in a God means to see that the facts of the world are not the end of the matter" (***T***, 11), are elements that Wittgenstein "knows" but that are not expressible in language. They are supposedly outside the limits of language and thought.

That the higher and transcendent are inexpressible does not say they are totally incommunicable, for they can be shown yet not said. This is called the doctrine of "showing and saying."[13] An apparent contradiction in the *Tractatus* is found in that although propositions about language are employed, nevertheless they are, strictly speaking, nonsensical because they are not propositions of natural science. Wittgenstein acknowledges that they are nonsensical and thus can only serve as elucidations (***T***, 6:45). The fairest interpretation to put on this is to treat the *Tractatus* as an example of the doctrine of showing and saying. Otherwise, it is inconsistent.

Later, in ***Philosophical Investigations***, Wittgenstein does not directly speak about religious discourse, but seems to indicate that praying and theology are legitimate and meaningful linguistic activities. (Praying, in particular, is mentioned as a language game.) Since stating facts is only one of a multiplicity of meaningful linguistic activities, there is no a priori bar against the meaningfulness of religious language. This also means that since language games have an intrinsic (internal) criterion of meaning, and since religious language is a language game, religious language must be judged by its own standards and not by standards imposed upon it, which is a form of fideism.[14]

In Wittgenstein's ***Lectures and Conversations*** religious language is portrayed as having the possibility of being meaningful (as a language game). But it is clear

from this work that Wittgenstein is a religious acognostic,[15] meaning that he rejects any cognitive knowledge in religious language. He recognizes the legitimacy of a form of life that could "culminate in an utterance of belief in a last judgment" (Wittgenstein, ***LC*** 58). He believes that it would be impossible to contradict such a belief or even say that it is possibly true.

The only sense in which such a belief might be a blunder is if it is a blunder in its particular system (ibid., 59), that is, inside of a given language game. Such beliefs are not based on evidence—they are purely a matter of (blind) faith. However, Wittgenstein would not ridicule those who have such a belief—only those who claim it is based on evidence, e.g., historical apologetics. Belief in these cases is used in an extraordinary way (not in an ordinary way). He wrote,

> It has been said that Christianity rests on an historical basis. It has [also] been said a thousand times by intelligent people that indubitability is not enough in this case. Even if there is as much evidence [for Christianity] as for Napoleon. Because the indubitability wouldn't be enough to make me change my whole life (ibid., 57).

Religious beliefs have commissive force; that is, they orient our lives. However, says Wittgenstein, they are not informative about reality. We are allegedly locked in a linguistic bubble, and while religious language is meaningful as a language game, it tells us nothing about God or ultimate reality. God-talk is experientially meaningful, but God-talk is not ***real*** talk about God; God is still the inexpressible. Human language is not capable of making any objectively meaningful statements about God, whether these statements are univocal or analogical (see chapter 9). All meaning is culturally and experientially relative—thus says conventionalism.

Distinction Between Conventional Symbols and Conventional Meaning

There is an important difference between a conventionalist theory of ***symbols*** and a conventionalist theory of ***meaning.*** Other than natural symbols (like smoke to fire) and onomatopoeic terms (like crash, bang, and boom),[16] whose sound ***is*** their meaning, virtually all linguists acknowledge that symbols are conventionally relative. That is to say, the word ***bark*** has no intrinsic relation to the sound of the canine mammal to which it may refer; it can also mean the outer coating of a tree. Indeed, different languages have different names for the same

referents. And this is true of most such words.
However, admitting that most words in a sentence are conventional or relative is not the same as claiming that the ***meaning*** of a sentence is culturally relative; it means only that the ***words*** used to convey meaning are relative. That is, individual symbols change in meaning, but the meaning of a ***sentence*** (a unit of thought composed of words) does not change.

Critique of Conventionalism's Theory of Meaning

As a theory of meaning, conventionalism suffers from some serious faults. Several can be briefly noted.
First, conventionalism is self-falsifying. If the statement "All linguistic meaning is conventional" were true, then this statement itself would be relative, for it claims to be an objectively meaningful statement affirming that there are no such objectively meaningful statements. It offers itself as a nonrelative statement affirming that the meaning of all statements is relative.
Second, if conventionalism were correct, then universal statements would not necessarily translate into all languages as universal statements, but they do. For example, "All triangles have three sides" translates as universally true, everywhere, all the time. So does "All wives are married women." If meaning were only culturally relative, then no such universal, transcultural statements would be possible.
Third, if conventionalism were true there would not be any universal truths in any language, but there are. For instance, mathematical statements, such as 4+3=7, are universally true. So also are the basic laws of logic, such as the law of noncontradiction (see chapter 5). In fact, no conventionalist can even deny these first principles of thought without using them. The very statement "The meaning of all statements is relative to a culture" is dependent for its meaning on the fact that there are laws of logic that are not relative to a culture but that transcend all cultures and languages.
Fourth, if conventionalism were true, we would not know any truth independent of and/or prior to knowing the conventions of that truth in that language. But we know 2+1=3 before we know the conventions of a language. Mathematics may depend on relative symbols to express itself, but the truths of mathematics are not dependent on any culture.

Fifth, the laws of logic are not based on human conventions; they are true apart from ***all*** linguistic conventions. Logic is not arbitrary. We do not ***choose*** its laws; rather, we are ***ruled*** by them. We do not ***create*** them but merely ***discover*** them. They are logically prior to and independent of the culture in which they are expressed; cultures do not think them up or even think them up differently. ***Without them, people in a culture could not even think.*** People in every culture must use them before they think about them.

Sixth, conventionalism confuses the immediate ***source*** of meaning with its ultimate ***grounds.*** The ***source*** of learning that "all bachelors are unmarried" may be social; for example, one may have learned it from his parents or teachers. But the ***grounds*** for knowing this are not social but logical, for, like other first principles, the predicate is reducible to the subject. It is true by definition, not by acculturation.

Seventh, if conventionalism were correct, then no meaning would be possible. If all meaning is based on changing experience, which in turn gets its meaning from changing experience, etc., then there is actually no basis for the meaning. An infinite series is no more possible in meaning than it is in causes. Forever putting off the basis for meaning is not the same as finding the basis for it. And a statement without any basis for its meaning is a baseless affirmation.

Eighth, conventionalism has only an internal criterion for meaning, such as coherence. But internal criteria cannot adjudicate conflicts in meaning regarding the same statements from different worldview vantage points. For example, the statement "God is a Necessary Being" can be interpreted either pantheistically or theistically. Mere internal criteria, such as coherence or logical consistency, cannot determine which of these is correct.

Ninth, conventionalism involves a circular argument. It does not ***justify*** its claims; it simply ***asserts*** them. When a conventionalist is asked for the basis of his belief that all meaning is conventional, he cannot give a non-conventional basis, for then he would no longer be a conventionalist. But if he gives merely a conventional basis for his conventionalism, i.e., a relative basis for his relativism, then he argues in a circle.

Tenth, conventionalists often distinguish between surface and depth grammar[17] to avoid certain problems, such as those just given. But such a distinction assumes they have a vantage point independent of language and experience in order to make such a distinction, and conventionalism by its very nature does not allow such a vantage point outside of one's culture. Hence, the very distinction

they make is not possible on the theory they espouse.
Eleventh, no truly descriptive knowledge of God is possible in a conventionalist view of language, since in conventionalism, language is simply based on our experience. It tells us only what God ***seems to be*** (to us) in our experience but not what He ***really is*** (in Himself). This reduces to self-defeating agnosticism (the claim that we know that we cannot know anything about the nature of God). Thus conventionalism reduces the meaning of "God" to a mere interpretive framework rather than an extra-cosmic Being beyond the world, which theism shows Him to be (see chapter 2).

REALISM: AN ALTERNATIVE TO ESSENTIALISM AND CONVENTIONALISM

The conventionalist's view of meaning is clearly an overreaction against platonic essentialism. There is a third alternative that avoids the rigidity of essentialism and the relativism of conventionalism: realism. Realism contends that meaning is objective, even though symbols are culturally relative, for meaning transcends our symbols and linguistic means of expressing it. Meaning is objective and absolute, not because a given linguistic expression of it is, but because there is an absolute Mind, God (see chapter 2), who has communicated it to finite minds (human beings) through a common but analogous means of human language (see chapter 9) that utilizes transcendent principles of logic common to both God and humans (see chapter 5).

A Framework for Understanding the Meaning of Meaning

The traditional six causes will help explain the point. Following Aristotle, scholastic philosophers distinguished six different causes:

(1) efficient cause—that ***by which*** something comes to be;
(2) final cause—that ***for which*** something comes to be;
(3) formal cause—that ***of which*** something comes to be;

(4) material cause—that ***out of*** which something comes to be;
(5) exemplar cause—that ***after which*** something comes to be;
(6) instrumental cause—that ***through which*** something comes to be.

For example, a wooden chair has a carpenter as an efficient cause, to provide something to sit on as a final cause, its structure as a chair as its formal cause, wood as its material cause, its blueprint as its exemplar cause, and the carpenter's tools as its instrumental cause.

Meaning Is Found in the Formal Cause

Applying these six causes to the meaning of a written text yields the following analysis:

(1) The writer is the ***efficient*** cause of the meaning of a text.
(2) The writer's purpose is the ***final*** cause of its meaning.
(3) The writing is the ***formal*** cause of its meaning.
(4) The words are the ***material*** cause of its meaning.
(5) The writer's ideas are the ***exemplar*** cause of its meaning.
(6) The laws of thought are the ***instrumental*** cause of its meaning.

The meaning (formal cause) of an intelligible expression, such as a writing, is not found in the "meaner"; he is the efficient cause of the meaning. The formal cause of meaning is in ***the writing itself.*** What is signified is found in the signs that signify it; verbal meaning is found in the very structure and grammar of the sentences, ***in*** the literary text itself (formal cause), not in its purpose (final cause). Note that meaning is ***not*** found in the individual words (material cause). Words in themselves have no actual meaning; they have only potential meaning. Words have usage in a sentence, which is the smallest unity of meaning. To go back to an earlier example, the word ***bark*** has no inherent meaning, but it has several different usages (in sentences) that do have meaning, such as in the example below for the word ***board:***

(1) The board came from an oak tree.
(2) The board member came from New York.

Words are only the parts of a whole (the whole sentence), which does have meaning. Likewise, pigments have no beauty but are the parts of a whole that does have beauty in a painting. Meaning, then, is found in the text as a whole, not in the parts independently.

The Locus of Meaning

A text's meaning is not found ***beyond*** the text (in the author's mind), ***beneath*** the text (in the mystic's mind), or ***behind*** the text (in the author's unexpressed intention); rather, it is found ***in*** the text (in the author's expressed meaning). In the same way, the beauty of a painting is not found behind, beneath, or beyond the painting; rather, it is expressed in the painting.
All textual meaning is ***in*** the text. The sentences (in the context of their paragraphs in the context of the whole piece of literature) are the formal cause of meaning. They are the form that gives meaning to all the parts (words, punctuation, etc.).

The Unity of Meaning

Since the meaning of Scripture comes ultimately from an objective Mind (God) and is found in an objective text that uses terms with the same meaning for both God and human beings (see chapter 9), it follows that there is only ***one meaning*** in a biblical text—the one given to it by the author. Of course, there can be ***many implications and applications***—indeed, it can be expressed in different ways in the same language. This is made possible because there is an objective meaner, an objective means of meaning (logic), and a common medium (language) between meaner and meanee that is capable of expressing this meaning (see

chapter 9). This objective meaning is found in the formal cause (language), which provides the structure or form of meaning. Thus the meaning of God's revelation, whether in Scripture or nature (see chapter 4) is found in an objective expression of the meaner. Thus, while the *sensus unum* (one sense) view is correct when it affirms only one meaning to a text, there is, however, a *sensus plenior* (full sense) in terms of implications and applications. For example, Einstein (1879–1955) knew that $e=mc^2$ (energy equals mass times the speed of light [constant] squared) and so does an average high school science student. However, Einstein knew many more implications and applications of this than the average high school student.

Likewise, God, inasmuch as He inspired the text (2 Tim. 3:16), knows infinitely more about the topic and sees more implications and applications in a biblical affirmation than does the human author (1 Pet. 1:10–12). ***But He does not affirm any more meaning in the text than the human author does***, for whatever the Bible says, God says; whatever the Bible affirms is true, God affirms is true. Both the divine and human authors of Scripture affirm one and the same meaning in one and the same text. There are not two texts, and there are not two meanings of the text.

The Objectivity of Meaning

Human languages vary, but meaning does not. The same objective meaning can be expressed in widely diverse language.

Unlike essentialism, which insists on a one-to-one correlation between the meaning and the expression, and unlike conventionalism, which contends there is a many-to-one correlation between the meaning and the expression, realism affirms that there is a one-to-many correlation. That is, one meaning can be expressed in many different ways in many languages and even in the same language. Thus ***language can and does change, but the meaning it expresses does not.*** The usage of a word changes from time to time, but the meaning of that word in a sentence does not change. For example, in the King James Version of 1611 the word ***let*** (cf. 2 Thess. 2:7) meant to "hinder." (Today it means the opposite.) But the ***meaning expressed*** by the ***New King James Version*** (1982) when it renders it "restrain" is the same as that of the old King James Version (1611). Usage of words change, but meaning does not.

Another example of the same point is mathematical meaning. Whether one writes “Two plus two equals four” or “2+2=4” the meaning is the same, even though the mode of expression is different. Further, the meaning is objective, even though the mode of expression is relative.

CONCLUSION

The objectivity of truth that Christianity embraces is based on the premise that meaning is objective. This objectivity in meaning is rejected by much of contemporary linguistics; the prevailing conventionalist theory of meaning is a form of semantical relativism. However, in addition to being an overreaction to platonic essentialism, conventionalism is self-defeating, for, as we have seen, the very theory of conventionalism that “all meaning is relative” is itself a nonrelative statement. “All meaning is relative” is a meaningful statement intended to apply to ***all*** meaningful statements; it is a nonconventional statement claiming that ***all*** statements are conventional. As such, it self-destructs, for in the very process of expressing itself it implies a theory of meaning that is contrary to the one it claims is true of all meaningful statements. The usages of symbols and words do change, but the meaning properly expressed by them does not.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

TRUTH: THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL PRECONDITION

Another important precondition of evangelical theology is the nature of truth. Up to modernity, orthodox theology has held that truth is what corresponds to the objects of its affirmations—this is called a correspondence view of truth. This paradigm, however, has been seriously challenged in more recent times. It is necessary, therefore, to discuss and defend the biblical and theological basis for the correspondence view of truth.[1]

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE DEFINITION OF TRUTH

The Bible claims to be true. The psalmist declared, “Your law is truth” (Ps. 119:142 NKJV), and Jesus prayed, “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth” (John 17:17 NKJV). Yet Pilate’s question remains: “What is truth?”
The nature of truth is crucial to the Christian faith. Not only does Christianity claim there is absolute truth (which is true for everyone, everywhere, always) but

it also insists that truth is that which corresponds to the way things really are. For example, the statement "God exists" means that there truly is a God outside the universe, an extra-cosmic Being. Likewise, the claim that "God raised Christ from the dead" means that the dead corpse of Jesus of Nazareth supernaturally vacated its tomb—alive—after its burial. Christian truth claims actually correspond to the state of affairs about which they claim to inform us.
The nature of truth will determine what is meant by the claim that the Bible is true. Also, it will seriously affect an important discussion about whether the Bible is without error and precisely what is meant by inerrancy (see part 2, chapter 27), for if truth is not what corresponds to the facts, but rather merely what the author intends, then the Bible can be wholly true and yet contain factual errors—as strange as this may seem.

THE DEFINITION OF TRUTH

Truth can be understood both from what it is and from what it is not. Before we can know what truth is, we must examine what truth is not.

What Truth Is Not

There are many inadequate views of the nature of truth. Most of these result from confusion between the nature (definition) of truth and a test (defense) of truth, or from not distinguishing the result from the rule. (This will be clarified below, in the examples of what truth isn't.)

Truth Is Not "That Which Works"

One popular theory of truth is the pragmatism of William James (1842–1910) and his followers. According to the pragmatic view (see James, ***P***), truth is what works; truth is found in the "cash value" of a statement. In William James's own words, "Truth is the expedient in the way of knowing." This means that a statement is known to be true if it brings the right results. It is present expedience as confirmed by future experience.

The inadequacy of this view of truth is evident from several considerations.
First, the proponents of it do not expect us to understand their expression of their view of truth for pragmatism but for correspondence. That is, they do not want us to accept a pragmatic view of truth because it seems to be effective but because it corresponds with the way they believe things really are.
Second, the pragmatic view confuses cause and effect. If something is true it will work, at least in the long run. But that something ***works*** does not make it ***true.*** Lies often work, but their effectiveness doesn't make them true; they remain false, regardless of their result.
Third, the concept of truth as "what works" is a narrow and restrictive view of truth. At best it refers only to practical truths, not to theoretical or mathematical truths (5+5=10 not because it works but because it is correct), or to metaphysical truths (see chapter 2).
Fourth, pragmatism's presentation of "truth" is not how truth is understood in everyday life, or in court, where knowing and telling the truth can be a matter of life and death. No judge would accept the testimony of anyone who says, "I swear to tell the expedient, the whole expedient, and nothing but the expedient, so help me future experience."
Fifth, results do not settle the question of truth, for even when the results are already in, one can still ask whether or not the initial statement corresponded to the facts. If it did not, then it isn't true, no matter what the results were.

Truth Is Not "That Which Coheres"

Some thinkers have suggested that truth is what is internally consistent; what coheres within; what is self-consistent. However, this also is an inadequate definition of truth for two basic reasons:
First, the very statement "Truth is that which coheres" is offered by the coherentist as a statement that corresponds to reality. Hence, the coherence theory depends on the opposing correspondence view of truth even to express itself. No coherentist wants us to accept his view simply because he believes it coheres but because he believes it is true (i.e., because he says it correctly represents the state of affairs to which it refers).
Second, empty statements can cohere or stand together even though they are devoid of content (meaning that they do not refer to anything). For example, "All wives are married women" is internally consistent, but it's empty—it tells

us nothing about the real world. The statement would be true even if there were no wives; it really means, "***If*** there is a wife, then she must be married," but it does not inform us that there is a wife anywhere in the universe. Also, a set of false statements can be internally consistent; such is the case in a conspiracy to lie under oath. In addition, coherence is at best only a negative test of truth—that is, statements are wrong if they are inconsistent, but not necessarily true if they are consistent.

Truth Is Not "That Which Was Intended"

Others have suggested that truth is found in intentions, not necessarily in affirmations. That is, a statement is true if the author intends it to be true, and a statement is false if he does not intend it to be true (see Rogers, ***BAI***). But there are likewise serious problems with this position.

First, as with coherence, a proponent of the intentionalist view of truth has to use a correspondence view of truth to express his view, for the very statement "The intentionalist view of truth is ***true***" is true not because he ***intended*** to say it but only if it ***corresponds*** to its referent. The word ***true*** in that sentence means "correct" or "corresponds," otherwise the claim makes no sense.

Second, many statements agree with the intention of the author, but they are mistaken nonetheless. Slips of the tongue do occur, and they are false. But if a statement was true because it was intended to be true, even if it was mistaken, then all such errors would be true.

Third, if something is true because someone intended it to be true, then all sincere statements ever uttered would be true—even those that were patently absurd. But many sincere people have been sincerely wrong. Hence, the intentionalist view of truth is inadequate.

Truth Is Not "That Which is Comprehensive"

Others claim that truth is found in what is most comprehensive. That is to say, the view that explains the most data is true, and those that are not as comprehensive are not true—at least not ***as*** true. This theory of truth falls far short of being a comprehensive definition of truth for several reasons.

First, as we have seen with the other examples, the claim that "the comprehensiveness view of truth is ***true***" depends for its truth on the

correspondence view of truth. The word ***true*** in that sentence means what corresponds to reality, to what is correct.
Second, comprehensiveness is at best only a ***test*** for truth, not the ***definition*** of truth. Certainly a good theory will explain all the relevant data, and a true worldview will be comprehensive. However, this is only a ***negative*** test of whether or not it is true—the ***affirmations*** of that view must still correspond with the alleged state of affairs in order to be true.
Third, if a view were true simply because it is more encyclopedic, then a comprehensive view of error would be true and a brief presentation of truth would be in error; automatically, long-winded presentations would be true and concise ones false. But this is plainly ridiculous—clearly one can have an exhaustive view of what is false and an incomplete view of what is true.

Truth Is Not "That Which Is Existentially Relevant"

Following Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855), other existentialist philosophers have insisted that what is relevant to our existence or life is true, and what is not relevant to our existence or life is false. Truth is subjectivity, as Kierkegaard put it; truth is what is livable.[2] As another existentialist (Martin Buber, 1878–1965) stated, truth is found in persons not in propositions (***IAT***). There are a number of problems with the existential definition of truth.
First, the very statement "Truth is not found in propositions" is itself a propositional truth claim. In other words, it is self-defeating.
Second, the existentialist confuses the ***nature*** of truth and the ***application*** of truth. Of course, all applicable truth should be applied to one's life; that is, all objective truth should be appropriated subjectively where possible. But this does not mean that truth itself is subjective.
Third, existentialism presents too narrow a definition of all truth. Even if truth is existential in some sense, not all truth fits into this category—there are many other kinds of truth, including physical, mathematical, historical, and theoretical truths. If truth by its very nature were found only in existential relevance, then none of these could be true. ***Existential relevance fails as a complete definition of truth.***
Fourth, what is true will always be relevant, but not everything that is relevant is true. A pen is relevant to an atheistic writer, and a gun is relevant to a murderer.

But relevance makes neither the former true nor the latter good. A truth about life will be relevant to one's life, but not everything relevant to one's life will be true.

Fifth, many existentialists make a false dichotomy between fact and value, relegating religious truth to the nonfactual domain. This, however, is not possible because one cannot separate the spiritual significance of Christ's death and resurrection from the objective facts of His literal death, empty tomb, and physical appearances (1 Cor. 15:1–19).

Truth Is Not "That Which Feels Good"

The popular subjectivist view is that truth is what provides a satisfying feeling, while error is what feels bad. Accordingly, truth is found in our subjective feelings. Many mystics and New Agers hold to versions of this model (Shirley MacLaine, ***Out On a Limb***); however, this view is faulty for many reasons.

First, this view is self-defeating, for the claim that "What feels good is ***true***" is so only if it corresponds to the way things ***are.*** Thus it depends on a correspondence view of truth to make sense out of its claim to be true in a factual or objective sense. Subjectivism is actually claiming that its view of truth is correct only if it corresponds to the facts of the matter, not simply because it feels good.

Second, it is evident that bad news (which makes us feel bad) can be true. But if what feels good is always true, then this would not be possible. Poor report cards do not make a student feel good, even though they are true. The truth is, the truth often hurts.

Third, feelings are relative to individuals, and thus what feels good to one may feel bad to another. If this were because of truth, then truth would be relative. But all truth cannot be relative, for the truth claim that "all truth is relative" is itself offered as an absolute statement and therefore as an absolute truth (see page 119, "A Response to Arguments for a Relative View of Truth").

Fourth, even if truth makes us feel good, we cannot be convinced that what feels good is necessarily true—there is a confusion here of the cart and the horse. The nature of truth is not the same as the result of truth.

What Truth Is: Truth Is That Which Corresponds to Its Object

Now that the inadequate views of the nature of truth have been examined, it remains to state the positive view. ***Truth is found in correspondence.*** Truth is what corresponds to its object (referent), whether this object is abstract or concrete. As applied to the world, truth is the way things really are. Truth is "telling it like it is."

Of course, there can be truth about abstract realities as well as tangible realities. For example, there are mathematical truths, and there are also truths about ideas, such as the ideas in one's mind. Truth is what accurately expresses these states of affairs, whatever they may be.

By contrast, falsehood is that which does not correspond to its referent (object). Falsehood does not tell it like it is, but like it is not; it is a misrepresentation of the way things are. Statements are false if they are mistaken, even if the speaker intended to say the correct things.

Philosophical Arguments for a Correspondence View of Truth

There are many reasons that support a correspondence view of the nature of truth —the view that truth is what accurately describes its referent. Several are enumerated as follows:

First, noncorrespondence views of truth are self-defeating. As we have seen again and again, all noncorrespondence views of truth imply a correspondence view of truth in their very attempt to deny the correspondence model. For example, the claim that "the noncorrespondence view is true" implies that noncorrespondence corresponds to reality; therefore, the noncorrespondence view cannot even express itself without using the correspondence view of truth.

Second, even lies are impossible without a correspondence view of truth. If one's statements need not correspond to the facts in order to be true, then any factually incorrect statement could be true. And if this is the case, then lies become impossible because any statement is compatible with any given state of affairs.

Third, without correspondence there could be no such thing as truth or falsity. In order to know that something is true as opposed to knowing that something is false, there must be a real difference between things and the statements about the things. But this real difference between thought and things is precisely what is

entailed in a correspondence view of ***truth.***

Fourth, factual communication would break down without a correspondence view of truth. Factual communication depends on informative statements, but informative statements must be factually true (that is, they must correspond to the facts) in order to inform one correctly. Further, all communication seems to depend ultimately on something being literally or factually true, for we cannot know something (like a metaphor) is not literally true unless we understand what is literal. This being the case, it follows that all communication depends in the final analysis on a correspondence view of truth.

Fifth, even the intentionalist theory depends on the correspondence view of truth. The intentionalist theory claims something is true only if the accomplishments correspond to the intentions. Consequently, within the intentionalist system, without correspondence of intentions and accomplished facts there is no truth.

Biblical Arguments for a Correspondence View of Truth

From a theological point of view, it is important to know whether the biblical authors employed a correspondence view of truth. There are many lines of evidence to confirm that they did (see Preus, ***IS***, 24).

First, the ninth commandment is predicated on a correspondence view of truth. "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor" (Ex. 20:16) depends for its very meaning and effectiveness on correspondence, implying that a statement is false if it does not correspond to reality.

Indeed, this is precisely how the term "lie" is used in Scripture. Satan is called a liar (John 8:44); his statement to Eve, "You will not surely die" (Gen. 3:4), did not correspond to what God ***really*** said, namely, "You will surely die" (Gen. 2:17). Ananias and Sapphira lied to the apostles by misrepresenting the factual state of affairs concerning their finances (Acts 5:1–4).

Second, the Bible gives numerous examples of the correspondence view of truth. Joseph said to his brothers, "Send one of your number to get your brother; the rest of you will be kept in prison, so that your words may be tested to see if you are telling the truth" (Gen. 42:16).

Moses commanded that false prophets be tested on the grounds that "if what a prophet proclaims … does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken" (Deut. 18:22).

Solomon prayed at the dedication of the temple, “And now, O God of Israel, let your word that you promised your servant David my father [that there would be a temple] come true” (1 Kings 8:26).

The prophecies of Micaiah were considered “true” and the false prophets’ false words “lies” because the former corresponded with the facts of reality (1 Kings 22:16–22).

Something was considered a “falsehood” if it did not correspond to God’s law—truth (Ps. 119:163).

Proverbs states, “A truthful witness saves lives, but a false witness is deceitful” (Prov. 14:25), which implies that truth is factually correct. In court, intentions alone will not save innocent lives when they have been accused. Only “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth” will do it.

Nebuchadnezzar demanded of his wise men to know the ***facts;*** he considered anything else “misleading” (Dan. 2:9).

Jesus’ statement in John 5:33 entails a correspondence view of truth: “You have sent to John and he has testified to the truth.”

In Acts 24 there is an unmistakable usage of the correspondence view. The Jews said to the governor about Paul, “By examining him yourself you will be able to learn the truth about all these charges we are bringing, against him” (v. 8). They continued, “You can easily verify [the facts]” (v. 11).

Paul clearly implied a correspondence view of truth when he wrote, “Each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor” (Eph. 4:25).

Third, the biblical use of the word ***err*** does not support the intentionalist theory of truth, since it is used of unintentional “errors” (cf. Lev. 4:2, 27, etc.). Certain acts were wrong, whether the trespassers intended to commit them or not, and hence a guilt offering was called for to atone for their error. Of the five times ***shagag*** (“to err”) is used in the Old Testament (Gen. 6:3; Lev. 5:18; Num. 15:28; Job 12:16; Ps. 119:67), the Leviticus and Numbers references plainly refer to erring unintentionally.

Further, the noun ***shegagah*** (“error”) is used nineteen times, and all but two are of unintentional errors (Lev. 4:2, 22, 27; 5:15, 18; 22:14; Num. 15:25 [twice], 26, 27, 28, 29 [twice]; 35:11 [twice]; Josh. 20:3, 9.) Only Ecclesiastes 5:6 and 10:5 could be understood as using ***shegagah*** to refer to intentional errors.

To summarize, the Bible consistently employs a correspondence view of truth. A statement is true if it corresponds to the facts and false if it does not. Rarely are there even apparent exceptions to this usage. John 5:31 appears to be an exception. Jesus said, “If I testify about myself, my testimony is not valid.” This

would seem to imply that Jesus' factually correct statements about Himself were not "true."

However, this would not make sense even by an intentionalist's definition of truth, for surely Jesus ***intended*** truth about Himself. What is meant here is that a self-testimony was not ***established*** as true. Or, as the NIV puts it, such "testimony of two or three [other] witnesses" is needed, that every word might be ***established*** (Matt. 18:16; cf. John 8:17) and not by one's own word. Elsewhere Jesus clearly said, "Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid" (John 8:14), meaning that it is factually correct, even if they did not accept it.

If the biblical arguments are this strong for a correspondence view of truth, why is it that many Christians—even some who believe in inerrancy—claim to hold a noncorrespondence (intentionalist) view of truth? Actually the reason is often quite simple: There is a confusion between ***theory*** of truth and ***test*** of truth. That is, often both parties hold the correspondence theory of truth but differ in their claims as to how truth is tested. In short, truth should be ***defined*** as correspondence but may be ***defended*** in some other way.

Answering Objections to Truth as Correspondence

Objections to the correspondence view of truth come from within as well as without; they emanate from both Christian and non-Christian sources. The major objections from both sides include the following:

Objection One

When Jesus said "I am the truth" (John 14:6), He demonstrated that truth is personal, not propositional. This falsifies the correspondence view of truth in which truth is a characteristic of propositions (or expressions) about reality.

Reply One

What Jesus said does not refute the correspondence view of truth. A person can

be “true” in the sense that he is the reality of which true statements are made. Further, a person can correspond to reality as well as a proposition can. As the “exact image” of the invisible God (Heb. 1:3), Jesus perfectly corresponds to the Father (John 1:18); He said to Philip, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). So a person can correspond to another in his character and actions, and in this sense, persons can be said to be true, or express the truth.

Objection Two

God is truth, yet there is nothing outside of Himself to which He corresponds. But according to the correspondence view, all truth is that which correctly represents reality. And since there is nothing outside God to which He can correspond, it would follow that He is not true as the Bible says He is (Rom. 3:4).

Reply Two

Truth as correspondence relates to God in several ways. ***First***, God’s words correspond to His thoughts, so God is said to be true in the sense that His Word can be trusted.
Second, God’s thoughts are identical to themselves, which is a kind of perfect “correspondence.” In this sense, God is “true” to Himself.
Third, if truth is understood as what corresponds to another, then in this sense God would not be true; he would simply be the ultimate reality to which something else corresponds.
Fourth, the basic fallacy in this objection is an equivocal use of the definition. If correspondence means to something ***outside*** oneself, then of course God cannot be truth but only that ultimate reality to which all truth must correspond. If, on the other hand, correspondence can also be ***inside***, then God can correspond to Himself in the most perfect way. In this sense, God is truth in a perfect way by self-identity.
Consider the following fallacious thinking:

(1) All who submit to the authority of the Pope are Roman Catholic.
(2) The Pope cannot submit to himself.

(3) Therefore, the Pope is not Roman Catholic.

The mistake is in the second premise. Contrary to the claim, the Pope ***can*** submit to himself; he simply has to follow the standards he lays down for every Roman Catholic, including himself. Likewise, God can and does live in accord with His own authority, and in this sense He is true to Himself and, thus, cannot lie (Heb. 6:18).

SUMMARY OF TRUTH'S DEFINITION

Truth may be tested in many ways, but it should be understood in only one way, namely, as correspondence. There may be many different ways to ***defend*** different truth claims, but there is only one proper way to ***define*** truth. The confusion between the nature of truth and the verification of truth is at the heart of the rejection of a correspondence view of truth.

Likewise, there is a difference between what truth ***is*** and what truth ***does.*** Truth is ***correspondence***, but truth has certain ***consequences.*** Truth itself should not be confused with its results or with its application. The failure to make this distinction leads to wrong views of the nature of truth. ***Truth is that which corresponds to its referent, i.e., to the state of affairs it purports to describe.*** Falsehood is what does not correspond.

THE NATURE OF TRUTH AS ABSOLUTE

Not only is truth correspondence, truth is also absolute. Evangelical theology is predicated on the premise that the Bible is ***the*** truth (John 17:17), not just ***a*** truth; it is God's Word (John 10:34–35), and God cannot lie (Heb. 6:18; Titus 1:2). Thus Christianity is not just true for me, it is true for everyone (see chapter 8). It is not only true subjectively, but it is also true objectively.

This view, of course, runs headlong into the mainstream of our present relativistic culture. Hence, it calls for a discussion and defense of the absolute nature of truth.

The Relative View of Truth

By “relative” is meant any one of several things. For one, some things are true only for some people but not for all. For another, some things are true only for some times but not for all times. Or maybe some things are only true in some places but not in all places. By an absolute truth, then, is meant something that would be true for all people, at all times, and in all places.

A Response to Arguments for a Relative View of Truth

Contemporarily, the idea of the relativity of truth is popular. However, truth is not determined by majority vote. Let’s take a look at the reasons people give for the belief that truth is relative.

Are Some Things True Only at Some Times?

First, relativists argue that some things are true at some times and not at others. For example, people once believed the world was square; now we know this is wrong. It would seem that this truth changed with the times. Or did it? Did the truth change, or did ***beliefs*** about what is true change? Certainly the world did not morph from a box to a sphere. What was altered is our belief, not our earth. The change was from a false affirmation to a true one.

Are Some Things True Only for Some People?

Second, other things appear to be true only for some people but not for others. For example, “I feel warm” may be true for me but not for you; you may feel cold. Isn’t this an example of a relative truth? Not really. Actually, the statement “I (Norman Geisler) feel warm” (said May 1, 2001) is true for everyone in the universe. Why? Because it is not true for anyone that Norman Geisler did not

feel warm on May 1, 2001. In fact, it is not only true for every ***one*** but it is also true every ***where*** that Norman Geisler felt warm on May 1, 2001. And it will be true in all places—in Moscow, Peking, Washington, and even in outer space—that Norman Geisler felt warm on May 1, 2001. But if it is true for all people in all places for all time, then it is an absolute truth. So what at first looked relative turned out to be unchanging.

Let's take another example of a supposed relative truth. If a teacher, facing her class, says, "The door to this room is on my right," when it is on the left for the class, then this truth would seem to be relative to the teacher since it is false for the class. However, this is not so, since the referent in the statement is the place from where the professor stands, not from where the class sits. That the door is on the professor's right is really an absolute truth, for it will never be true for anyone, anywhere, at any time, that the door was on the professor's left. It will always, everywhere, and for everyone be true that the door was on her right. Likewise, the other truth—that the door was on the students' left—will always be true for everyone everywhere.

Are Some Things True Only in Some Places?

Third, it seems obvious enough that it is hot in Mexico but cold at the North Pole. So some things appear to be true for some places but not for other places. This is true, but it misses the point, since those are two different statements (both of which are true) about two different places. It is not affirming that it is both cool and hot at the North Pole (or Mexico) at the same time.

Each statement is absolutely true with regard to its referent. The statement "It is cold at the North Pole" is true in Mexico, even in the summertime. It is true everywhere that "It is cold at the North Pole." Likewise, the statement "It is hot in Mexico" is true at the North Pole and everywhere else. Truth is what corresponds to the facts, and the fact is that it is cold at the North Pole. And this truth (that it is cold at the North Pole) is true everywhere, for there is nowhere that this statement does not correspond to the facts at the North Pole.

The truth of the matter is that ***all truth is absolute—there are no relative truths.*** If something really is true, then it really is true everywhere and for everyone. After all, 7+3=10, and it's not just true for mathematics majors. It's true everywhere, not just in math class but in your workplace and at home as well. Like an old apple, relativism may look good on the surface but it is rotten at the

core. Let’s take a look at some of the problems.

Relativism Is Self-Defeating

Most relativists really believe relativism is true for everybody, not just for them. But that is the one thing they cannot believe if they are truly relativists, for a relative truth is true for me but not necessarily for everyone. So if the relativist thinks relativism is true for everyone, then he really believes that it is an absolute truth. Of course, this being the case, he is no longer truly a relativist, since he believes in at least one absolute truth.

Here is the dilemma: A consistent relativist cannot say, “It is an absolute truth for everyone that truth is only relatively true for me.” If he says it is absolutely true that relativism is true, then he is not a relativist but an absolutist. If, on the other hand, he says, “It is only relatively true that relativism is true,” then we cannot know if relativism is really true, for if it is only relatively true for him (but not for all), then relativism may be false for me. Why then should it be accepted as true?

Furthermore, for the relativist it can only be relatively true that it is relatively true for him, and so on infinitely. Either the claim that truth is relative is an absolute claim, which would falsify the relativist position, or it is an assertion that can never be made, because every time you make it you have to add another “relatively.” It is just the beginning of an infinite regress that will never pay off in a real statement.

The only way the relativist can avoid the painful dilemma of relativism is to admit that there is absolute truth. Indeed, as already noted, most relativists really believe that relativism is absolutely true, for they really believe that everyone should be a relativist. Therein is the basic self-destructive nature of the relativist: He stands on the pinnacle of his own absolute truth to relativize everything else. But as the mythological Hercules understood, one needs a firm place to put a fulcrum before he can move the world. The sinking sand of relativism is not a firm place to set anything.

Relativism Entails a World Filled With Contradictions

If relativism were true, then the world would be full of contradictory conditions, for if something is true for one but false for another, then opposite conditions exist. If one person says, “There is milk in the refrigerator,” and another insists, “There is no milk in the refrigerator”—and they are both right—then there must both be and not be milk in the refrigerator at the same time and in the same sense. This is impossible, since it violates the law of noncontradiction (see chapter 5). So if truth were relative, the impossible would be actual. But that is not possible.

In the religious realm it would mean that Billy Graham was telling the truth when he said “God exists,” and Madalyn Murray O’Hair was also right when she claimed “God does not exist.” But, as even a child knows, these two statements cannot both be true. If one is true, then the other is false. And since they exhaust the only possibilities, one of them must be true.

Relativism Means No One Has Ever Been Wrong About Anything

If truth is relative, then no one is ever wrong—even when he is. As long as something is true to him, then he is right even when he is wrong. The drawback to this is that I could never learn anything, either, because learning is moving from a false belief to a true one—that is, from an absolutely false belief to an absolutely true one.

Answering Some Objections to a View of Truth As Absolute

Relativists have leveled several objections to the view of truth as absolute. The following are the most important ones:

Objection One: Absolute Knowledge Is Not Possible

It is objected that truth cannot be absolute since we do not have an absolute

knowledge of truth. Even most absolutists admit that most things are known only in terms of degrees of probability. How then can all truth be absolute?

Reply One

This objection is misdirected, for absolute certainty is possible of some things. One can be absolutely sure that he exists. In fact, one's own existence is undeniable, for one would have to exist in order to make the statement "I do not exist." One can also be absolutely sure that he cannot both exist and not exist at the same time. Just as he can be certain, for example, that there are no square circles.

Of course, there are many more things of which absolute certainty is not possible. But even here relativists miss the mark in rejecting absolute truth simply because of the lack of absolute evidence that some things are true, for they fail to recognize that the truth can be absolute no matter what our grounds for believing it are. For instance, if it is true that Sydney, Australia, is next to the ocean, then it is absolutely true no matter what my evidence or lack of evidence may be. An absolute truth is absolutely true in and of itself no matter what evidence there is for it. ***Evidence (or the lack thereof) does not change the facts.*** And truth is what corresponds to the facts. The truth doesn't change simply because we learn something more about it.

Objection Two: Some Things Are In Between

Another objection is that many things are in between—like relative sizes, such as shorter and taller. As such, they cannot be absolute truths, since they change depending on the object to which they are relative. For example, some people behave nicely compared to Hitler but poorly compared to Mother Teresa.

Reply Two

Contrary to the claim of relativists, in between things do not disprove absolutism. For the facts that "John is short in relation to most NBA players" and "John is tall compared to most jockeys" are absolutely true for all times and all people. John is in between in size, and determining whether he is short or tall

depends on to whom he is being compared. Nonetheless, it is absolutely true that John (being 5’10”) is short compared to Shaquille O’Neal and tall compared to a Pygmy. The same thing is true of other in between things, such as warmer or colder, and better or worse.

Objection Three: New Truth (or Progress) Is Not Possible

Relativists claim that if truth never changes, then there can’t be any new truth. This would mean that no progress is possible.

Reply Three

In response to this, “new truth” can be understood in two ways. It might mean “new to us,” like a new discovery in science. But that is only a matter of our discovering an “old” truth. After all, the law of gravity was there long before Newton discovered it. Many truths have always been there, but we are just finding out about them. In this sense we do come to know new truths—that’s what scientific discovery is all about.

The other way we might understand “new truth” is that something new has come into existence that makes it possible to make a new statement about it that is only then true for the first time. This is not a problem. When January 1, 2020, arrives, a new truth will be born, because it will not be true until that day to say, “This is January 1, 2020.” But when that happens, it will be true for all people and places forever more that that day was January 1, 2020. So “old” truths don’t change and neither do “new” truths when they come to pass. Once it is true, it is always true—for everyone.

Objection Four: Truth Changes With Our Growth in Knowledge

It is also objected that knowledge of truth is not absolute, since we grow in truth. What is true today may be false tomorrow. The progress of science is proof that truth is constantly changing.

Reply Four

This objection fails to note that it is not the truth that is changing but our ***understanding*** of what is true. When science truly progresses it does not move from an old truth to a new truth but from error to truth. When Nicolaus Copernicus (1473–1543) argued that the earth moves around the sun and not the reverse, truth did not change. What changed was the scientific understanding about what moves around what.

Objection Five: Absolute Truth Is Too Narrow

Relativists often complain that absolute truth is narrow.

Reply Five

This objection is common but without substantive basis. ***Of course truth is narrow.*** There is only one answer for what is 4+4. It is not 1. It is not 2. It is not 3. It is not 4, 5, 6, 7, or any other number from 9 on to infinity. It is only 8 and nothing else. That's narrow! But it's correct. Non-Christians often claim that Christians are narrow-minded because Christians claim that Christianity is true and all non-Christian systems are false (see chapter 8). However, the same is true of non-Christians, who claim that their view is true and all opposing beliefs are false.

The truth of the matter is that if C (Christianity) is true, then it follows that all non-C is false. Likewise, if H (Humanism) were true, then all non-H would be false. Both views are equally narrow. That's the way truth is. Whenever anyone makes a truth claim, he has thereby claimed that whatever opposes it is false. Christianity is not narrower than anything else that claims to be true, whether it is atheism, agnosticism, skepticism, or pantheism.

Objection Six: Belief in Absolute Truth Is Dogmatic

Relativists also claim that those who believe in absolute truth are dogmatic. And, besides being untenable, dogmatism is obnoxious.

Reply Six

This objection misses the point. All truth is absolute, for, as we have seen, if something is really true, then it is true for all people, times, and places. So in this sense everyone who claims anything is true is "dogmatic." (And, as has been demonstrated, there isn't anyone who doesn't claim that something is true.) Even the relativist who claims that relativism is true is dogmatic. Indeed, the relativist who claims that relativism is absolutely true is particularly dogmatic, for he is claiming that he has the only absolute truth that can be uttered, namely, that everything else is relative.

Further, something important is overlooked in this charge of dogmatism. There is a big difference between the pejorative charge that belief in absolute truth is dogmatic and the manner in which someone may hold to this belief. No doubt the way many absolutists have held to and conveyed their belief in what truth is has been less than humble. However, no agnostic would consider it a telling argument against agnosticism that some agnostics have held to and communicated their agnosticism in a very dogmatic manner. What we have here is an entirely different issue, and while it is one that certainly is worthy of our examination, it has nothing to do with truth being absolute.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Expressed truth is what corresponds to its object. To deny this is self-defeating, since to deny assumes that one's denial corresponds to the facts.

Likewise, the noncorrespondence view, like the relative view of truth, is self-defeating. The relativism of truth cannot be affirmed as truth unless relativism is false; it is absurd to affirm that it is objectively true for all that truth is not objectively true for all. Absolute truth is literally undeniable, and therefore it is not illegitimate to make absolute truth claims about the Bible or Christianity, such as evangelical theology does.

There is an important distinction to keep in mind, nonetheless: Truth is absolute, but our grasp of it is not; that there is absolute truth does not mean our understanding of it is absolute. This fact in itself should cause absolutists to temper their convictions with humility. As finite creatures, we grow in our understanding of truth; indeed, our knowledge of divine truth is not univocal but analogical (see chapter 9). In the words of Scripture, "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face" (1 Cor. 13:12).

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CHAPTER EIGHT

EXCLUSIVISM: THE OPPOSITIONAL PRECONDITION

SOME IMPORTANT DEFINITIONS

Several terms related to religions need to be distinguished: pluralism, relativism, inclusivism, and exclusivism.

Pluralism is the belief that every religion is true, that each provides a genuine encounter with the Ultimate. One may be better than the others, but all are adequate.

Relativism is similar to pluralism, claiming each religion is true to the individual who holds it. Relativists believe that since there is no objective truth in religion, there are no criteria by which one can tell which religion is true or which religions are false.

Inclusivism claims that one religion is explicitly true, and all others are implicitly true.

Exclusivism is the belief that only one religion is true, and all others opposed to it are false.

Since Christianity claims to be ***the*** true religion, it is at odds with the dominant trend in modern comparative religions. Alister McGrath set the stage properly: "How can Christianity's claims to truth be taken seriously when there are so many rival alternatives and when 'truth' itself has become a devalued notion?"

He adds that according to current popular belief “no one can lay claim to possession of the truth. It is all a question of perspective. All claims to truth are equally valid. There is no universal or privileged vantage point that allows anyone to decide what is right and what is wrong” (McGrath, “CPCCC” in ***JETS*** 365).

THE ALLEGED MORAL AND SPIRITUAL EQUALITY OF ALL WORLD RELIGIONS

A Statement of the Argument for Pluralism

Pluralist John Hick argues, “I have not found that the people of the other world religions are, in general, on a different moral and spiritual level from Christians,” for “the basic ideal of love and concern for others and of treating them as you would wish them to treat you is, in fact, taught by all the great religious traditions” (“PV,” 39). Hick offers as proof that statements similar to Christianity’s Golden Rule can be found in other religions (ibid., 39–40).

A Response to the Argument for Pluralism

Hick’s conclusion can be challenged at several levels. ***First***, it is debatable whether “the fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22–23) can be found in non-Christian religions. While no one denies there are good people in other religions, this is not to say they are manifesting the widely recognized highest moral standard, *agape* love. One can lead a philanthropic life and even die for his beliefs without having true love (see 1 Cor. 13:3). While God’s common grace enables even evil men to do good (see Matt. 7:11), nonetheless, only the supernatural love of God can motivate a person to express *agape* (cf. John 15:13; Rom. 5:6–8; 1 John 4:7).

Before people too quickly conclude that William James (1842–1910)

demonstrated the equality of all forms of saintliness in his famous ***Varieties of Religious Experience***, they should read carefully Jonathan Edwards' ***Religious Affections.*** Edwards (1703–1758) argues forcefully that there are unique manifestations of Christian godliness. A careful half-century study of the matter confirms to this writer that there is a difference in the highest level of Christian and non-Christian piety in favor of the former.

Second, even if one could demonstrate a kind of moral equality of practice among most adherents of the great religions, this would not in itself prove there was no moral superiority in the teachings of Christianity over the other religions. There are several reasons for this.

For one thing, a person perfectly practicing a lesser moral code may appear to be better than a person imperfectly living according to a higher ethical standard. In order to make a fair comparison one must do two things: Compare the highest moral teachings of the various religions, and compare the best examples of the adherents to each. A close comparison between Mother Teresa and Mahatma Gandhi demonstrates the superiority of Christian compassion for the needy. What is more, one must sort out what was inherent to another religion before the advent of Christian influence and what was incorporated into it as the result of Christian missionary activity. For example, Hinduism as a system did not generate social compassion. ***The social compassion found in some forms of current Hinduism is not indigenous; it is a foreign import from Christianity.*** Indeed, the degree to which Gandhi manifested such compassion comes from his training in Christianity and his self-confessed admiration for the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.

Finally, finding a moral principle akin to the Golden Rule of Judeo-Christian belief (cf. Matt. 7:12) would not be enough to show equality of all religions. This is a manifestation of general revelation—the law written in the hearts of ***all*** men (Rom. 2:12–15) by God. This is not the same as the supernatural manifestations of love, joy, and peace (Gal. 5:22–23). Indeed, while applied Christian morality has produced dynamic social compassion, Eastern religions have produced stagnant societies and Islam intolerant ones (Pinnock, ***WGM***, 61).

Third, Hick's analysis begs the question, for only by assuming that the moral common denominator of all religions is the standard by which they should all be judged does he arrive at the not too surprising conclusion that they are all equal. One has to negate the superior aspects of Christian morality or teaching in order to show that Christianity is not superior. Hick seems to acknowledge this tacitly in confessing that the "acceptance of some form of the pluralistic view prompts

each to de-emphasize and eventually winnow out that aspect of its self-understanding that entails a claim to unique superiority among the religions of the world" (Hick, "PV" in Okholm, ***MTOW***, 51).

Fourth, the moral manifestation of a belief does not settle the truth question. For example, that there are good Mormons does not prove that Joseph Smith (1805–1844) was a true prophet. In fact, there is strong evidence that he was not a true prophet, since he gave demonstrably false prophecies (see Tanner, ***CWM***, chapters 5,11, 14). In addition, there is evidence for whether something is true apart from the way its adherents live. Truth is what corresponds to reality (see chapter 7) and, hence, a religion is true if its central tenets correspond to the real world, not merely whether its followers live a good life or even a better one than adherents of another religion.

Fifth, in the final analysis, the moral superiority of Christianity does not rest on our imperfection as Christians but on Christ's unique perfection (see volume 2, part 1). It is not based on our fallible moral character but on His impeccable moral character (John 8:46; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 1 John 3:3). In this context, Christianity is clearly morally superior to all other religions.

THE ALLEGED REDEMPTIVE EQUALITY OF ALL RELIGIONS

The Statement of the Argument for Redemptive Equality

As for the Christian claim to a superior mode of salvation, Hick believes this either begs the question or is not evident in practice:

> If we define salvation as being forgiven and accepted by God because of Jesus' death on the cross, then it becomes a tautology [1] that Christianity alone knows and is able to preach the source of salvation.

And,

> If we define salvation as an actual human change, a gradual transformation from natural self-centeredness (with all the human evils that flow from this) to a radically new orientation centered in God and manifest in the "fruit of the Spirit," then it seems clear that salvation is taking place within all of the world religions—and taking place, so far as we can tell, to more or less the same extent. (Hick, "PV" in Okholm, *MTOW*,

Further, what is common to all world religions is for Hick an adequate response to the Ultimate: “But they seem to constitute more or less equally authentic human awareness of and response to the Ultimate, the Real, the final ground and source of everything” (ibid., 45). There are, of course, “a plurality of religious traditions constituting different, but apparently more or less equally salvific, human responses to the Ultimate. These are the great world faiths” (ibid., 47).

A Response to the Argument for Redemptive Equality

There appear to be a net of problems in this analysis. ***First***, it’s based on the assumption that all religions have a proper relation to what is truly Ultimate. This begs the question; maybe some are not connected at all to what is ***truly Ultimate.*** Or, perhaps they are not ***rightly related*** to what is truly Ultimate. After all, as Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) pointed out in his famous ***Future of an Illusion***, deception is possible.

Second, Hick wrongly assumes that all religions are merely a human response to the Ultimate. But this begs the question in favor of antisupernatural views of religion (see chapter 3). In fact, it assumes a pantheistic view of the Ultimate as what transcends all particular cultural manifestations of the Ultimate in the various world religions.

Third, this denial of the truth of any particular religion is itself a form of exclusivism, for it favors the worldview known as pantheism in order to deny the particularity of the worldview known as Christian theism. That is to say, even the pantheist is making a particular truth claim, one that is opposed to all nonpantheistic views. But to assume a pantheistic position as a basis for one’s analysis of all religions, including nonpantheistic ones, again begs the question. Or, to put it another way, when the pluralist denies any particular religion is true as opposed to others, he thereby makes a particular truth claim.

Fourth, the pluralist view often degenerates to the position that whatever is sincerely believed is true. But this would mean that it matters not whether one is a passionate Nazi, Satanist, or Flat-Earth adherent, for in any event the holder’s view would be truth. This is patently incorrect; ***sincerity is clearly not a test of truth.*** The road to destruction is paved with good intentions, and many sincere people have been sincerely wrong about many things.

Fifth, the argument for redemptive equality implies that all truth claims are a matter of both/and and not either/or. But on this ground, there could be touted such absurdities as triangular squares and educated illiterates. Whether we like it or not, ***opposites cannot both be true***, for the opposite of true is false. Hence, opposing truth claims of various religions cannot be mutually inclusive. For example, Hindu pantheism and Christian theism cannot both be true, since they affirm mutually exclusive worldviews. Likewise, Islam, which denies that Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead three days later, and Christianity, which affirms this fact about Jesus, cannot both be true.

THE ALLEGATION THAT CHRIST IS NOT UNIQUE

A Statement of the Argument Against Christ's Uniqueness

As for the Christian dogma about the uniqueness of Christ (see volume 2, part 1) as God incarnate in human flesh, John Hick contends that there are two main problems. He is misinformed on both points.

A Statement of the First Allegation

> The first problem is that the historical Jesus did not teach this doctrine.... Among mainline New Testament scholars today there is a general consensus that these are not pronouncements of the historical Jesus but words put in his mouth some sixty or seventy years later by a Christian writer expressing the theology that had developed in his part of the expanding church. (Hick, "PV" in Okholm, *MTOW*, 52–53.)

Hick then cites a list of biblical scholars who allegedly agreed that "Jesus did not claim deity for himself" (ibid.).

A Response to the First Allegation

The New Testament documents are historically reliable, and their historicity has been abundantly attested (see part 2). The New Testament books that are crucial

to this issue were not written after the eyewitnesses were dead, but while they were still alive. Indeed, the gospel of John claims to have been written by an eyewitness apostle (John 21:24), and Luke was written by a contemporary disciple who knew the eyewitnesses (Luke 1:1–4). First Corinthians, which even biblical critics admit was written about A.D. 55–56, speaks of five hundred eyewitnesses (1 Cor. 15:5–7), most of whom were still alive when Paul wrote it only twenty-two years after Jesus' death. Even the late Bishop John A. T. Robinson, a liberal New Testament scholar, dated Gospels as early as A.D. 40–60, much too early to support Hick's view of books written by a later generation who had already formulated a view contrary to that of the historical Jesus. Therefore, since the Gospels are reporting, not creating, the words and deeds of Jesus, they are firm support for His unique claims to be God incarnate (see volume 2, part 1).

A Statement of the Second Allegation

> The second problem is that it has not proved possible, after some fifteen centuries of intermittent effort, to give any clear meaning to the idea that Jesus had two complete natures, one human and the other divine.... Is it really possible for infinite knowledge to be housed in a finite human brain? ... Do we really want to claim that Jesus was literally omnipotent but pretended not to be, as in
>
> Mark 6:5
>
> ? ... While he was good, loving, wise, just, and merciful, there is an obvious problem about how a finite human being could have these qualities in an *infinite* degree.... A finite being cannot have *infinite* attributes (ibid., 55–56).

A Response to the Second Allegation

First, Hick falls short of claiming that the Incarnation involves an outright logical contradiction, though his language could be taken to imply the same. If the Incarnation is not, however, a logical contradiction, then there is no demonstrated incoherence in the view. Indeed, Hick himself admits, "It is logically permissible to believe anything that is not self-contradictory" (***MGI***, 104). As for the claim that it is difficult to show just how the Incarnation is true, on the same grounds one would have to reject much of our common experience as well as modern science (which, for instance, has difficulty explaining how light can be both waves and particles).

Second, Hick appears to be misinformed about the view of the two natures of

Christ. Indeed, his objections assume the unorthodox Monophysite view, which confuses Christ's two natures. His question as to whether it's "really possible for infinite knowledge to be housed in a finite human brain" reveals such a confusion, for the orthodox view does not claim that there was infinite knowledge in the finite brain of Christ. Rather, it affirms that Christ had two distinct natures, one infinite and the other finite. So the person of Christ did not have infinite knowledge in his finite brain, but infinite knowledge in His infinite nature. As God, He knew all things; as man, Jesus grew in knowledge (Luke 2:52). The same thing applies to Jesus' other attributes—as God, He was omnipotent; as man, He was not (see volume 2, part 1).

THE ALLEGATION OF INTOLERANCE

A Statement of the Objection From Intolerance

Another charge laid at the feet of exclusivism is that of intolerance, which is directed at the exclusivist's view that one religious view is true and those opposed to it are false. This, to pluralists, seems to be bigotry; after all, why should only one view have a franchise on the truth and all the others be disenfranchised?

A Response to the Objection From Intolerance

A number of observations are relevant in this connection. ***First***, if holding an exclusivist view makes one intolerant, then pluralists are also intolerant, for they claim their view is true to the exclusion of opposing views (like exclusivism); they certainly would not tolerate the position that their pluralistic view and the opposing nonpluralistic views were both true.
Second, if the charge of intolerance is leveled because of the manner in which one holds his view, then nonpluralists have no monopoly on the market, for if consistent with the nature of his position against nonpluralism, a pluralist is as "intolerant" as anyone else.

Third, the very concept of tolerance implies a real disagreement. One does not ***tolerate*** that with which he agrees, he ***embraces*** it. Hence, the concept of tolerance presupposes a nonpluralist view of truth.

THE ALLEGATION OF NARROW-MINDEDNESS

One of the favorite allegations of pluralists is that nonpluralists are narrow-minded, for nonpluralists claim that their view is true while everyone else is in error. This seems utterly presumptuous on the face of it. Why should only exclusivists be in possession of the truth?

The response to this is clear: ***Both*** the pluralists (P) and the exclusivists (E) make an equal claim to truth and error. ***Both*** claim that their view is true and that whatever opposes it is false. For example, if E is true, then all non-E is false. Likewise, if P is true, then all non-P is false. What the facts reveal is that exclusivism and pluralism are equally "narrow." In point of fact, all truth is narrow. Remember what we saw in the last chapter—2 plus 3 is not 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 or any other number on to infinity. There is only one true answer, and while this is narrow, that is the very nature of truth.

THE ALLEGATION OF INTELLECTUAL IMPERIALISM

Another charge against exclusivism is that of intellectual imperialism; pluralists claim exclusivists are totalitarian with regard to truth, and that they should be more open to input from many sources, not just to one. Indeed, some postmodern pluralists go so far as to claim that not only ***truth*** but the very idea of ***meaning*** smacks of fascism (cited by Alister McGrath, "RJH" in Okholm, ***MTOW***, 364). While this allegation has a certain appeal, especially to those of a particular political mindset, it is without merit in determining what is true and what is false with regard to religions. ***First***, the frequent intention of this allegation is a form of the *ad hominem* logical fallacy—it attacks the person rather than the position. *Second*, this objection has an unjustified presumption, namely, that truth should be more democratic. But truth does not hinge on the percentage of its adherents. Truth is what corresponds to reality (see chapter 7), whether the majority

believes it or not.
Third, do pluralists really believe that all views are equally true and good? Is fascism or communism as good as democracy? Was Nazism as good as any other form of government? Should one have tolerated the burning of widows in the Hindu funerals of their husbands? No, we see thereby that pluralists don't truly believe in pluralism.

SOME CHALLENGEABLE PRESUPPOSITIONS OF PLURALISM

The Claim That There Are Universally Agreed-Upon TransReligious Moral Criteria

In order to make effective the argument for moral equality, one must assume a set of moral criteria not unique to any particular religion by which all can be evaluated. But pluralists generally deny any universally binding moral law. If there were such absolute moral laws, then there would need to be an absolute Moral Lawgiver. At best, however, only broadly theistic-type religions accept these criteria, and even then some reject the absolute perfect nature of God, e.g., some finite godists. Further, if there is a moral law common to all religions, then it is not unique to one, and by the tenets of pluralism no religion can be judged inferior for lacking it. Finally, if there are no such universal moral laws, then there is no way to morally judge all religions from any standard beyond them, and it is not fair to take the standards of one religion and apply them to another, claiming that the other falls short.

The Claim That All Religious Phenomena Can Be Explained Naturalistically

Beneath the pluralist's attack on exclusivism is a naturalistic presupposition: All religious phenomena can be explained naturalistically; no supernatural

explanations are allowed. But this presumptive naturalism is without justification; miracles cannot be ruled out a priori (see chapter 3). Neither, as David Hume claimed, are miracles incredible, nor are miracles without evidence. Indeed, there is substantial support for the greatest miracle of all, the ex nihilo ("out of nothing") creation of the world (see chapter 3). Also, there is abundant evidence that the miracle of the resurrection of Christ has occurred (see volume 2, part 1).

The Claim That the World Is "Religiously Ambiguous"

Hick believes "the universe, as presently accessible to us, is capable of being interpreted intellectually and experientially in both religious and naturalistic ways" (Hick, ***IR***, 129). Meaning, "The Real is perfectly undifferentiated; that is, it has no properties to which our concepts veridically [truly] apply" (Geivett, in ***MTOW***, 77).

In response, some important observations should be made. ***First***, it is self-defeating to claim that we know that we cannot know the Real (see Geisler, ***BECA***, "Agnosticism").

Second, that we do not know reality exhaustively does not mean we cannot know it truly. As Geivett notes, "To the extent that God is known at all, he is known truly" (ibid.).

Third, the very notion of an undifferentiated Real is implausible, if not self-defeating. Hick's claim that the Real can be symbolized by the concept of Sunyata in Buddhism is a case in point, for if the Real is so undifferentiated, then how can any symbol represent it?

Fourth, neither can the Real be manifested in various traditions, as Hick claims. In order for something to be manifested, at least some of its characteristics must be revealed (ibid.). But the Real as totally undifferentiated has no discernible characteristics. Hence, it could not be manifested in our experience in any meaningful way.

Fifth, there is a kind of mystical epistemology presumed in this "God is unknowable" approach. It has a rather imperialist degree on how God can and cannot reveal Himself. But one wonders what pipeline to metaphysical truth could have supplied this absolute information (ibid.).

The Claim That Pluralistic Dialogue Is the Only Way to Truth

Another seriously flawed presupposition is the position that pluralistic interreligious dialogue is the only valid way to discover truth. No genuine religious dialogue, supposedly, is possible if one assumes his religion is true in advance of the dialogue. This is sure proof that he is not open to truth. True dialogue assumes one is tolerant, open, humble, willing to listen and learn, engage in a shared search for truth in a self-sacrificing, other-oriented love (ibid., 239).

In response, a number of things are necessary to point out. ***First***, true dialogue is possible without adopting a pluralistic position on truth. One can have the attitude of humility, openness, and willingness to listen and learn without sacrificing his convictions about truth.

Second, the pluralist is not willing to relinquish his commitment to pluralism as a condition for such dialogue; hence, he violates his own imperative.

Third, the very idea of tolerance implies that some views are in error, for it makes no more sense to say one tolerates truth than one tolerates good. It is error and evil that are tolerated, not truth and good.

The Claim That Hick's View Is Religiously Neutral

John Hick feigns religious neutrality, but no such thing exists. His alleged pluralism is not religiously neutral at all; it is patterned after Hinduism's conception of the Ultimate, and it is antagonistic to the core principles of Christianity.

Furthermore, it does not truly encourage genuine dialogue between the traditions; indeed, it renders vacuous the concept of being "in a given religious tradition." After all, according to pluralists, every tradition is essentially the same. So to accept pluralism is to reject one's own tradition for another—the pluralist's tradition.

The Claim That a Relativistic View of Truth Is Correct

Beneath the pluralist's assertion that all major religions have equal claim to the truth is a relativistic view of truth. But as we have seen (in chapter 7), the denial of absolute truth is self-defeating. It claims that relativism is true for everyone, everywhere, always. But what is true for everyone, everywhere, and always is an absolute truth. Therefore, it claims that relativism is absolutely true. The relativist is well advised to exercise a healthy hermeneutic of suspicion with regard to his own platform.

CONCLUSION

As a challenge to the evangelical claim to truth, pluralism is impotent. In fact, it is self-defeating, since the claim that pluralism is true as opposed to nonpluralism is itself exclusivistic—the view that insists it is inherently wrong to make exclusive truth claims is filled with exclusive truth claims of its own. So the evangelical claim to objective truth (see chapter 7) as opposed to all views that are contradictory is left standing.

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CHAPTER NINE

LANGUAGE: THE LINGUISTIC PRECONDITION

Evangelicals believe that the Bible is God's Word in human words; therefore, another precondition for doing evangelical theology is the belief that finite human language is capable of meaningfully expressing the nature of the infinite God of Christian theism, which is displayed in both general and special revelation.

THREE BASIC ALTERNATIVES

Evangelicals reject any alternative that denies it is possible to speak meaningfully about God. This includes views such as are embraced by many atheists, agnostics, skeptics, and even religious mystics and existentialists. Logically, there are only three possible views with regard to God-talk:

(1) It is equivocal (totally different from the way God actually is).
(2) It is univocal (totally the same as God actually is).

(3) It is analogous (similar to the way God actually is).

Evangelicals have defended versions of both univocal and analogical religious language; some have combined the two views. But, as we shall see, both equivocal and univocal God-talk have serious problems: the former leads to self-defeating skepticism, and the latter to an unacceptable dogmatism. We are left, then, with some form of analogy by which God communicates with us.

Equivocal God-Talk

Equivocal God-talk leaves us in total ignorance about God. At best, one can only feel, intuit, or sense God in some experiential way, but no human expressions can describe what it is that is being experienced. Evangelical theology rejects this alternative for several reasons.

First, it is self-defeating, since it affirms with human language about God that we cannot affirm anything about God. Religious mystics certainly write books about God. In brief, any attempt to express the equivocal view about God implies that some non-equivocal language about God is possible.

Second, the Bible declares that God can be described in human language. Indeed, Scripture as a whole is an attempt to inform us about God and to evoke a response from us. Even the colorful, figurative, and metaphorical language of the Bible implies a literal understanding beneath the nonliteral expressions, for one cannot even understand that a figure of speech (e.g., God has arms) is not literal unless he knows what is literally true (viz., that He is pure Spirit [John 4:24]).

Third, there is a continual and consistent tradition in orthodox theology from the earliest centuries to the present that assumes human language can express truth about the transcendent God. This is manifest in the great confessions, creeds, and councils of the Christian church (see Schaff, ***CC***), to say nothing of all the theological treatises of the great Fathers of the church from the second century to the present.

Univocal God-Talk

Some Christian thinkers like John Duns Scotus (1266–1308), following Plato and Augustine, have argued that God-talk is univocal. While there is an important element of truth in this view (see below), it was severely criticized by Thomas Aquinas and has come in for hard times in contemporary thought—with good reason.

A more detailed discussion is found later, but here the two most basic problems are noted. ***First***, how can our understanding of God be entirely the same as God's (i.e., univocal)? Our understanding and expressions are finite, and God's are infinite, and there is an infinite gulf between finite and infinite. As transcendent, God is not only beyond our limited understanding, but He is also beyond our finite expressions.

Second, the Bible makes it clear that God is far above our thoughts and words. As the prophet Isaiah aptly put it, "'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' " declares the LORD. "'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts' " (Isa. 55:8–9). For a mortal human being to know as God knows, he would have to be God, since only God knows infinitely.

Analogous God-Talk

It appears, then, that the only viable alternative to avoid self-defeating skepticism on the one hand and self-deifying dogmatism on the other is to demonstrate that legitimate God-talk is analogous to the way God actually is. That is to say, language about God is neither equivocal (totally different) nor univocal (totally the same), but is similar (analogous) to the way God truly exists.

TWO ATTEMPTS TO DEVELOP A POSITIVE GOD-TALK

There are two basic attempts to develop a positive God-talk. One is by way of

univocal language and the other by way of analogical language. The former was expounded by John Duns Scotus, and the latter by Thomas Aquinas. Although the positions seem to be mutually exclusive, their complementarity provides a crucial insight into the nature of religious language.

The Scotistic Insistence on Univocal *Concepts*

John Duns Scotus made one point unmistakably clear: There can be no meaningful positive talk about God unless at the basis of it univocal concepts are involved, for equivocal or analogical concepts leave one in skepticism. Scotus's argument may be summarized in two parts: first, the impossibility of analogous concepts; and second, the necessity of univocal concepts.

The Impossibility of Analogous Concepts of God

Henry of Ghent (c.1217–1293), a contemporary of Scotus, defended what he called an "analogous concept of being." According to Henry, God is known in terms of a universal concept, which while conceived of as though it were only one notion (because of its close resemblance to the concepts within it), in reality the concepts (of God and humans) are diverse. Therefore, the concept of being common to both God and creatures is really not one concept but two, yet because of the similarities in these two concepts, the mind fails to distinguish between them, as two distant objects tend to fuse before the eye. This dual concept is what Henry calls ***analogous*** (Scotus, ***PW***, 20–21, 180–81).

Scotus strongly objected to Henry's analogous concept. ***First***, Scotus reminded Henry that if God and creatures are distinguished only by a negation (that is, by what we don't know about God), then there is no distinction at all, for "there is no need to make the distinction that we cannot know what God is; we can only know what He is not. For every denial is intelligible only in terms of some affirmation."

Second, Scotus noted that since an analogous concept is really two different concepts, it is actually equivocal, for either there is at the base of these two concepts one univocal concept from which they draw their common meaning or else they are two entirely different concepts. If the ***former***, then there must be a univocal concept at the basis of the so-called analogous concept, as whatever is predicated of God and creatures by way of an equivocal concept must mean two

entirely different things. Therefore, if concepts of God truly were analogous, they would be equivocal (ibid., 18, 22–23). If the ***latter***, then they are equivocal, at any rate. According to Scotus, in either event, then, an analogous concept tells us nothing about God.

The Necessity of Univocal Concepts of God

In the outlook of Scotus, language about God is not equivocal or analogical; it is univocal, and hence it evades the alternative of skepticism. By univocal Scotus means that which "possesses sufficient unity in itself, so that to affirm and deny it of one and the same thing would be a contradiction. It also has sufficient unity to serve as the middle terms of a syllogism." Scotus gives four arguments to support his contention that concepts must be univocally understood of both God and man (ibid., 23).

First, "every intellect that is certain about one concept, but dubious about others, has … another concept of which it is certain." Scotus offered proof of this premise as follows: "One and the same concept cannot be both certain and dubious, or [else] there is no concept at all, and consequently no certitude about any concept." The other premise is this: "Every philosopher was certain that what he postulated as a first principle was a being.… Yet he was not certain whether it was created or an uncreated being, whether it was first or not first." The reason for this is, "Someone perceiving the disagreement among philosophers can still be certain that any of the things that they have acclaimed as the first principle has being [e.g., fire, water]."

Scotus dismissed the possibility that the different philosophers had different concepts of ***being.*** He said,

> By such an evasion all possibility of proving the unity of any concept would be destroyed. The fact of great similarity plus the irreducible simplicity of all the concepts argue that ultimately they are one. Further, if there were two different formal concepts, one would have to conclude that there were two formally opposed first principles of being (ibid., 23–25).

In summation, if the intellect can be certain about the concept of being without knowing whether it refers to created or uncreated being, and if it is necessary to have a univocal concept in order to be certain about anything, then we must have a univocal concept of God's being. Otherwise, we would have no knowledge at all of God, which is contrary to both faith and philosophy.

Second, the concepts used of God must be univocally understood because:

> No object will produce a simple and proper concept of itself and a simple and proper concept of another object, unless it contains this second object essentially or virtually. No created object, however, contains Uncreated essentially or virtually.... Therefore, it produces no simple and proper concept of the "uncreated" at all. But no concept

> could arise in virtue of the active intellect and the sense image [which are the way all created objects are understood in this life] that is not univocal but only analogous with, or wholly other than, what is revealed in the sense image. Hence, it would be impossible to have any natural knowledge of God unless it is known via univocal concepts. But we do have natural knowledge of God. Therefore, this knowledge must come by way of univocal concepts (ibid., 25–26).

Third, our concept of God must be univocal, since ***it is wrong to argue as follows.***

> The proper concept of any subject provides sufficient ground for concluding to everything conceivable which necessarily inheres in that subject. But we have no concept of God … that enables us to know every necessary attribute which we conceive of Him, as is evident from the fact of the Trinity, and other necessary attributes that we know by faith.

Therefore, we have no proper concept of God.

Scotus insists that this is patently false, as revelation teaches us much about God. Hence, we must have at least some concept that is properly (i.e., univocally) applicable to Him (ibid., 26).

Fourth,

> Either some pure perfection has a common meaning as applied to God and creatures or not. If not, it is either because its meaning does not apply formally to God at all (which is inadmissible), or else it has a meaning that is wholly proper to God [and not to creatures].... But this latter alternative is contrary to the truth affirmed by Anselm that "we first know something to be a pure perfection and secondly we attribute this perfection to God" (Anselm, *M*, appendix).

Furthermore, if pure perfections were found only in God, there would be no such perfections among creatures. The proper metaphysical approach is to begin with a concept (such as will or intellect) and, finding that it contains no imperfection, "attribute [it] to God—but in a most perfect degree." Finally,

> If you maintain that this is not true, but that the formal concept of what pertains to God is another notion of anything found in creatures, nothing at all can be inferred about God, for the notion of what is in each is wholly different (ibid., 27–28).

Beneath these four arguments for univocity is one fundamental contention: If there is no univocity in our concepts about God, then there is no certainty in our knowledge about God, for again, "one and the same concept cannot be both certain and dubious. Therefore, either there is another concept [which is certain], or there is no concept at all, and consequently no certitude about any concept." In other words, if there is no univocal basis for meaning, then one is forced to an infinite regress of non-univocal concepts in search for the one elusive univocal concept by which the non-univocal ambiguity can be resolved. "For every intellect that is certain about one concept, but dubious about others has, in addition to the concept about which it is in doubt, another concept about which it is certain." Hence, Scotus concluded, "I say that God is conceived … in some

concept univocal to Himself and to a creature" (ibid., 23).

In summation, there are only three alternatives in our concepts about God. Either the concepts of God are understood equivocally (i.e., in a totally different sense), in which case we know nothing about God; or they are understood analogically (i.e., with partly the same but partly different meaning), in which case, at any rate, we must have some univocal concept of God enabling us to know which part of the analogous concept applies to God and which does not apply to Him; or they are understood univocally (i.e., having totally the same meaning) in the first place. Therefore, either there are univocal concepts about God or else we know nothing about God. There must be either univocity or skepticism.

It would appear that Scotus made his point. Equivocal God-talk says nothing about God, and analogical God-talk seems to work only if there is in the analogy an identifiable univocal element. If there is no such identifiable univocal element, the concept is at best ambiguous and at worst equivocal. If it is ambiguous, it can be clarified only in terms of a non-ambiguous univocal concept. But if there is an identifiable univocal element in the analogy, then analogy is actually a form of univocal understanding of God, for it involves an identifiable univocal concept that can be applied to Him without change, along with the other elements of the combined analogous statement that cannot be applied to God. In brief, analogy either has a univocal element in it or it does not. If it does not, it is ultimately equivocal talk, which leaves us in skepticism about God. On the other hand, if analogy does have a univocal element in it, then it really contains a univocal concept after all, which proves some true knowledge about God.

This same argument for the necessity of a univocal concept has been repeated by many evangelicals. See, for example, W. G. T. Shedd, ***Dogmatic Theology*** (1:89ff.), and Stuart Hackett, ***The Resurrection of Theism*** (127–30).

The Thomistic Defense of Analogous *Predication* (Affirmation)

Thomas Aquinas was familiar with and flatly rejected the insistence on univocal God-talk. He wrote, "It is impossible for anything to be predicated univocally of God and a creature" (Aquinas, ***OPG***, 7.7, body).

Rejection of Univocal Predication

Aquinas's rejection of univocal predication of God involves two important facts: ***First***, there cannot be a one-to-one understanding between the finite minds of humanity and the infinite Mind of God. ***Second***, it is necessary to admit that there is a negative element in our knowledge of God—that is, we know what God is not (e.g., He is not finite).

Arguments Against Univocal Predication

In the *Summa Contra Gentiles* Aquinas offered six arguments against univocal predication of God and creatures. Several crucial ones are noted (***SCG***, 1.32).
First, only those effects that receive from their cause the specific form of that cause can receive a univocal predication of that form of them and of God. But "the forms of the things God has made do not measure up to a specific likeness of the divine power." All creatures are "in a divided and particular way that which in Him is found in a simple and universal way." So "it is evident that nothing can be said univocally of God and other things." [Arguments 2 and 3 are omitted here.]
Fourth, "What is predicated of many things univocally is simpler than both of them, at least in concept. Now, there can be nothing simpler than God either in reality or in concept. Nothing, therefore, is predicated univocally of God and other things." Since the one thing in common is always simpler than the many things having it in common, any univocal predication of God and others would have to be simpler than God, which is impossible.
Fifth, "Everything that is predicated univocally of many things belongs through participation to each of the things of which it is predicated.… But nothing is said of God by participation.… Nothing, therefore, can be predicated of God and other things" in a univocal way. In short, God does not participate in anything; rather, all things participate in Him. If there were a common univocal predication in which God participated, then this something would be more ultimate than God.
Sixth, "Nothing is predicated of God and creatures as though they were in the same order, but rather, according to priority and posteriority." This is true because God is Being ***essentially***, and all other things have being only by participation in God. However, "what is predicated of some things according to priority and posteriority is certainly not predicated univocally," for the prior

possesses the characteristic essentially and the posterior possesses it only by participation in the prior. “It is impossible, therefore, that anything be predicated univocally of God and other things.”

In the *Summa Theologica* (1.13.5) Aquinas rests his case against univocal predication on the first argument from *Summa Contra Gentiles:* “All perfections existing in creatures dividedly and multiply preexist in God unitedly.” Therefore, any perfection applied to God signifies God’s very essence; for example, creatures ***have*** wisdom but God ***is*** wisdom. “Hence it is evident that the term wise is not applied in the same way to God and to man. The same applies to other terms. Hence, no name is predicated univocally of God and other creatures.”

Implied in Aquinas’s objection to univocal predication is another argument, one with which he did agree:

> God is more distant from creatures than any creatures are from each other. But the difference of some creatures [from each other makes any univocal predication of them impossible], as in the case of those things which are not in the same genus. Therefore, much less can anything be predicated univocally of God and creatures.

In essence, then, the argument for analogous God-talk is this: Between an infinitely perfect Being and finitely perfect beings there is an infinite difference in perfection (certainly an infinite differs from a finite in more than a finite way). Also, where there is an infinite difference in perfection there cannot be a univocal predication. A given perfection cannot mean totally the same thing as applied to God and creatures, for God and creatures are separated by an infinite degree of perfection. As Aquinas put it elsewhere, “Every effect of a univocal agent is adequate to the agent’s power: and no creature being finite, can be adequate to the power of the first agent which is infinite” (***OPG***, 7.7).

What is true of power is likewise true of any other perfection. An infinitely perfect Cause produced finitely perfect effects, and the perfections found in these effects cannot be predicated in exactly the same manner (i.e., univocally) as God.

The Need for the Via Negativa

At this point the need for the *via negativa* (the way of negation) becomes apparent. As Plotinus correctly observed, God cannot possess perfections the way created things possess them; in this sense God does “produce what he does not possess” (see Plotinus, ***E***, 5.3.14–15), because God doesn’t really possess the

finite characteristics found in His creation. God does not ***have*** being and wisdom; God ***is*** being and wisdom. Hence, whatever limitations are found in creaturely perfections must be completely negated of God, since He is unlimited (infinite) in His being.

It is for this reason that univocal predication must be rejected, for it destroys the distance between God and creatures necessitated by the different kinds of beings that they are. God is an infinitely perfect Being, and all other beings are only finitely perfect. If any attribute were predicated in the same way (i.e., univocally) of both God and creatures, then it would either imply the finitude of God or else the infinitude of creatures. As long as God is viewed as infinitely perfect, nothing that is finitely perfect can be applied to God without qualifications. The proponents of negative theology appreciated the necessity for these qualifications in order to preserve God's transcendence. When a perfection taken from the finite world is applied to God, it must be applied to God infinitely, since He is an infinite Being. Unless the finite conditions of perfection can be negated, there is no way it can be appropriately applied to an infinite Being.

The Rejection of Equivocal Predication

However, the *via negativa* alone will not suffice, for if all meaning is negated when one removes the finite connotations of a term, he is speaking mere equivocations. Unless there is some common meaning that applies to both God and creatures, the meaning it has as applied to creatures is totally different from the meaning it has as applied to God. And a totally different meaning is an equivocation that leaves us in a state of skepticism about God.

Aquinas agrees with Scotus that equivocal language deprives one of any knowledge of God. Although Aquinas refers to God as an "equivocal Cause" (i.e., of a different order than finite causes), he offers several arguments against equivocal prediction of that Cause (***SCG***, 1.33).

First, in equivocals, "it is entirely accidental that one name is applied to diverse things: The application of the name to one of them does not signify that it has an order to the other." But "this is not the situation with names said of God and creatures, since we note in the community of such names the order of cause and effect.… It is not, therefore, in the manner of pure equivocation that something is predicated of God and other things." That is, terms with the same spelling but

different meaning [as we have seen with “bark,” of a tree or a dog] are equivocals by chance. Yet where one thing is the cause of the other, there is no mere chance connection between the terms expressing these things, but there is an order of reference that signifies that one is related to the other.

Second, “Where there is pure equivocation, there is not likeness in things themselves; there is only a unity of a name. But … there is a certain mode of likeness of things to God. It remains, then, that names are not said of God in a purely equivocal way.” The minor premise was supported by a preceding article (***SCG*** 1.29), where Aquinas argued, “Some likeness must be found between them [cause and effect], since it belongs to the nature of action that an agent produce its like, since each thing acts according as it is in act.” The similarity of Creator and creature is supported, too, by Holy Scripture, which says that God made man in His image and likeness (Gen. 1:27).

Third, “When one name is predicated of several things in a purely equivocal way, we cannot from one of them be led to the knowledge of another.…” But “from what we find in other things, we do arrive at a knowledge of divine things, as is evident from what we have said.” Therefore, “such names are not said of God and other things in a purely equivocal way.” That is to say, unless there is some likeness between creatures and God, we could never rise, as we do, from a knowledge of created things to a knowledge of God.

Fourth, “Equivocation in a name impedes the progress of reasoning,” and “if nothing was said of God and creatures except in a purely equivocal way, no reasoning proceeding from creatures to God would take place. But the contrary is evident from all those who have spoken about God.” That is to say, not only would equivocation make knowledge of God impossible (as the third argument contends) but it would also impede any reasoning about God built on knowledge gained from the world, in which reasoning all theologians engage.

Fifth, “It is also a fact that a name is predicated of some being uselessly, unless through that name we understand something of the being. But if names are said of God and creatures in a purely equivocal way, we understand nothing of God through those names,” for “the meanings of those names are known to us solely to the extent that they are said of creatures. In vain, therefore, would it be said or proved of God that He is a being, good, or the like.”

Sixth, even if non-equivocal names tell us only what God is not, at least they agree in what they deny of God. A totally equivocal denial of God would be the same as affirming the same thing that is being denied of God. Hence, even negations of God cannot be equivocal.

In a later work, Aquinas rests the case against equivocal predication on one central argument: Equivocal predication is impossible "because if that were so, it follows that from creatures nothing at all could be known or demonstrated about God" (***ST***, 1.13.5). It is patently false that we know nothing about God; hence, there must be some non-equivocal predications about God. For instance, we know things about Him from both special revelation in the Bible and general revelation in nature (Rom. 1:19–20).

Analogical Predication: The Only Alternative

If terms can be applied to God neither univocally nor equivocally, then they must be predicated of Him analogically. In Aquinas's own words,

> This name God … is taken neither univocally nor equivocally, but analogically. This is apparent from this reason—univocal names have absolutely the same meaning, while equivocal names have absolutely diverse meanings; whereas analogical, a name taken in one signification must be placed in the definition of the same name taken in other significations. (*ST*, 1.13.10.)

Therefore, terms denoting perfections taken from creatures can be applied to God only in an analogous way:

> We can name God only from creatures. Hence, whatever is said of God and creatures is said according as there is some relation of the creature to God as to its principal cause, wherein all the perfections preexist excellently.

Further,

> This mode of communication [i.e., analogy] is a means between pure equivocation and simple univocation. For in analogies the idea is not, as in univocals, one and the same [in its application]; yet it is not totally diverse as in equivocals; but the name which is used in a multiple sense signifies various proportions to some one thing. (*ST*, 1.13.5.)

For example, God is named Good because He is the Cause of goodness. The Cause is Good and hence when it causes goodness in something else it communicates of what it is to what its creature has by created participation. The causal connection between Creator and creature cannot be totally unlike its Creator, since every perfection it possesses it has acquired from Him.

There is another fundamental argument for analogy that takes us back to the dilemma of Parmenides the monist[1] (see chapter 2): If there is more than one being in the universe, these beings must differ by either being or nonbeing. But they cannot differ by nonbeing for that is nothing, and to differ by nothing is not to differ at all. Neither can things differ by being, for that is the very respect in which they are identical, and they cannot differ in the very respect in which they

are identical. Hence, there cannot be more than one being in the universe. Thus there is only one being—that is, monism. Now there are only two horns to this dilemma.

Either one's principle of differentiation is inside of being or it is outside of being. If outside, then things do not differ in being; they are identical in being, and monism is true. The only way to maintain a pluralism essential to theism is to insist that things differ in their very being. Yet how can they differ by what they have in common? The answer is that they cannot, if being is univocal. But it isn't.

Since being is used analogously between God and creatures, being can be predicated of God and creatures only in an analogous way. Otherwise, we end in monism. In short, analogy of being (and predication) is the only salvation from monism and from skepticism. It is the only alternative to monism, since if beings cannot differ there can be only one being. It is the salvation from skepticism, because unless there is a similarity in being, there can be no knowledge of infinite Being derived from finite beings.

A POSITIVE SYNTHESIS OF UNIVOCAL CONCEPTS AND ANALOGICAL PREDICATION

One apparent contradiction has not yet been resolved. Scotus demonstrated that analogous ***concepts*** would not save one from skepticism; only univocal concepts can guarantee knowledge of God. But if Aquinas rejects univocal ***predication***, how then can he avoid skepticism, for God possesses the common perfection infinitely, and creatures possess it only finitely.

Univocal Concepts But Analogical Predication

The answer and reconciliation between scotism and thomism lies in the distinction between a ***concept*** and a ***predication.*** Scotus was right that the concept applied to both God and man must be univocally ***understood***, but Aquinas was correct in arguing that this concept must be analogically ***affirmed***

of God and creatures.[2] That is, the ***definition*** of the attribute ***applicable*** to both God and creatures must be the same, but the ***application*** of it differs, for in the one case (God's) it is applied without limits, while in the other (humankind's) it is predicated with limitations.

God, for instance, is good infinitely; man is good only finitely. Good may be defined in the same way for both, for example, as "that which is desired for its own sake." But God is to be desired for His own sake absolutely, whereas creatures are to be desired for their own sakes only relatively. Likewise, being may be defined univocally as "that which is," but this univocal concept is predicated of God and creatures in an analogous way. God is "that which is" infinitely; a creature is "that which is" only finitely. Or, more properly, God ***is*** Existence and creatures merely ***have*** existence.

This distinction has not always been fully appreciated by thomists, but in more recent works on analogy they have come to recognize its validity. Armand Maurer stated the difference clearly: "It is not generally realized that St. Thomas's doctrine of analogy is above all a doctrine of the ***judgment*** of analogy, and not of the analogy of concept.…" ("STAG" in ***NS***, 143). Generic concepts are univocal when abstracted, but analogical when asserted of different things, as man and dog are equally animal but are not equal animals. ***Animal*** is defined the same way (say, as "a sentient being"), but ***animality*** is predicated differently of Fido and of Socrates (c. 470–399 B.C.). (Socrates possesses animality in a higher sense than Fido does.) Likewise, both the flower and God are said to be beautiful, but God is beautiful in an infinitely higher sense than flowers are.[3] While this tells us nothing directly about the similarity between God and creation, it does inform us about the difference between an infinite being and a finite being. For if beauty means "that which, being seen, pleases," then the pleasure of the beatific vision of God is infinitely greater than the pleasure of viewing a flower. In brief, Scotus was correct in insisting that our concepts must be univocally understood and defined. But Aquinas was right in insisting that any concept drawn from the finite world must be predicated of God in an analogous way.

Finite Concepts and Predication About the Infinite

Aquinas recognized that all concepts are finite; they are limited by the very finite circumstances in which they arise (***ST***, 1.84.1–8). People never derive infinite concepts from sensory experience:

> Since God infinitely exceeds the power of our intellect, any form we conceive cannot completely represent the divine essence, but merely has in some small measure an imitation of it. (*OT*, 2.1, body.)

This is why Aquinas said God "is one in reality and many things logically" (***OPG***, 7.6, body), for the simple essence of God is not known by any concept of it but only by way of many predications about it.

No concept taken from creation is adequate to express the essence of divinity, yet many things can be affirmed of the essence of God. We cannot know the substance of God, but we can predicate many substantive things about God (***ST***, 1.12.4; 1.13.2).

The Mode of Signification Differs From What Is Signified

How can univocally understood finite concepts be predicated analogously of God without losing their meaning? Does not a limited concept lose all of its meaning when it is applied without limits to an infinite Being? Aquinas answered this question by making a distinction between the (unlimited) thing signified and the (limited) mode of signification. The mode in which concepts are conceived is always finite for human beings, but what these concepts signify is not necessarily finite (Aquinas, ***SCG***, 1.29).

In fact,

> Since every perfection of creatures is to be found in God, albeit in another and more eminent way, whatever terms denote perfections absolutely and without any defect whatever, are predicated of God and other things; for instance, goodness, wisdom, and so forth.

On the other hand,

> Any term that denotes such like perfections together with a mode proper to creatures, cannot be said of God except by similitude and metaphor (ibid., 1.29).

Some terms by their very denotation cannot be applied to an unlimited Being. Other terms, however, do not necessarily denote what is limited, even though they are conceived in finite concepts. For instance, there is nothing essentially limited about the term "being" (that which is) or "goodness" (that which is desired for its own sake) or "beauty" (that which, being seen, pleases). Hence, these terms may be predicated of God metaphysically (i.e., actually) and not

merely metaphorically (i.e., symbolically). Such terms do not lose their content, because they retain the same univocal definition. Neither do these terms carry with them the necessary implications of finitude, because they are not applied to God univocally (i.e., in the same way they are applied to creatures). They are predicated analogically, meaning neither identically nor in a totally different way.

The Need for Intrinsic Analogy Based on Causality

How is it known that God must be (in an infinitely perfect way) what these terms denote? Because God is the cause of these perfections in a mode appropriate to the effects they cause. An infinitely perfect God communicated perfections to His creatures in a finitely perfect manner. Hence, even though there is an infinite difference in perfection between God and creatures, there is nevertheless not a total lack of similarity. The created sequents are similar to their creative Source, because the creature must bear some similarity to its Creator.

It could be argued that metaphysics, let alone natural theology, is impossible apart from having first established the analogical nature of religious language. After all, such terms as “First Cause” or “Creator of the Universe” must be understood analogically. But then it would appear that we are caught in a vicious circle, since, as we shall see, analogy is dependent on the reality of the metaphysical relationship between God and the world. Thus natural theology works because of analogy, and analogy works because of natural theology. Each grounds the other, which means that neither is grounded.

Can this progression be avoided? Yes, because even though both sides are dependent on each other, the dependencies are of two different kinds. Thus, there is no vicious circularity. In natural theology we establish certain conclusions by using religious language, which then turns out to be analogical. But we did not have to know that analogy was at work. The language was analogical, whether we were ever cognizant of that fact or not. When we’re dealing with analogy, we are in a sense merely discovering what has been true of the nature of our language all along. It is only in explaining how this language works that we need to make reference to metaphysical truths. Niels C. Nielsen Jr. has elaborated the ontological requisites for analogy, particularly in theological contexts (Nielsen, ***AKG***).

The Causal Basis for Analogy Between God and Creatures

Aquinas rested the case for a similarity between God and creatures in the causal relation. Each of the first four ways of proving God's existence is clearly based on causality. (Causality is also implied in the fifth way.) Even the very platonic appearance of the fourth way imports causality to complete the argument (***ST***, 1.2.3), and once it is shown by causality ***that*** God is, then Aquinas can demonstrate ***what*** God is from the analogy implied in this causal relation. Just how often Aquinas makes explicit reference to causality as the basis for analogy will become apparent in the following quotations. The important question here is, "What kind of causality is the basis for the similarity between God and creatures?" The most helpful work on Aquinas's doctrine at this point is the classic by Battista Mondin, ***The Principle of Analogy in Protestant and Catholic Theology.*** The analysis here follows his.

(1) ***Analogy is based in intrinsic causality.*** Unlike Maimonides (1135–1204) and the neoplatonists, Aquinas held to an intrinsic causal relationship between God and creation. An extrinsic causal relationship is such that only one thing possesses the characteristic properly—the other thing possesses the characteristic improperly, by virtue of a causal relation to it. To illustrate, food is called healthy only because it ***causes*** health in a body, but, properly speaking, only organisms ***are*** healthy. And God is called good because He ***causes*** goodness, not because He ***is*** good. Not so with the causal relation between God and the world; this is an intrinsic relation where both God and creatures possess the perfections properly, only each according to its own mode of being. God must ***be*** good because He ***causes*** goodness; He must ***be*** Existence because He ***causes*** things to exist, and so on. There is an intrinsic causal connection and, therefore, analogy between the Cause and its effects (Aquinas, ***ST***, 1.13.5; ***SCG***, 1.29–30).

(2) ***Analogy is based on efficient causality.*** God is the producing Cause of all that exists, not merely the purposing (final) Cause of neoplatonic philosophy. For Aquinas, God brought the world into being from nothing. The world did not come about by a creation flowing from it. The theistic God is the Cause of the world's ***being***, not merely of its ***form.*** God created the world; He did not simply make it out of matter that was already there. In brief, creation is ex nihilo, not ex materia. God is the efficient cause of the very ***being*** of the world, for, wrote Aquinas,

> Everything that, in any way whatever *is*, must needs be from that to which nothing else is the cause of being.... Therefore, from Him is everything that in any way whatever *is*. (*ST*, 2.15.2.)

Elsewhere he wrote,

It belongs to a thing to have an efficient cause according as it has being … the

reason why an efficient cause is required is not merely because the effect cannot be, but because the effect would not be if the cause were not. (***ST***, 1.44.1, 2, and 3.)

(3) ***Analogy is based on essential causality.*** It is clear from the foregoing that God is the essential (*per se*) Cause of creation and not merely an accidental (*per accidens*) cause of it; that is, God causes the very ***being*** of the world and not merely its ***becoming.*** Further, essential causes generate their own kind. For instance, musicians give birth to non-musicians (*per accidens*), but humans generate only humans (*per se*). Hence, when beings are created, it is by virtue of an essential causal relationship with their Creator. Only Being gives rise to being. Aquinas wrote,

> Some likeness must be found between them [i.e., between effects and their cause], since it belongs to the nature of action that an agent produces its like, since each thing acts according as it is in act. The form of the effect, therefore, is certainly found in some measure in a transcending cause, but according to another mode and in another way. (*SCG*, 1.29.2.)

Only that which exists can communicate existence to another. ***Nothing*** cannot cause ***something***, and since all caused existence is communicated to it by its cause, there must be some essential similarity in existence between this existing effect and its cause.

(4) ***Analogy is based on principal, not instrumental, causality.*** Effects resemble their primary causes but not necessarily their instrumental causes. To illustrate, the pen is the instrumental cause of the exam, and the student is the principal cause of it. Only the student's mind resembles the exam; the pen does not. The exam does reflect the thoughts of the student, even though it is not like the pen. In like manner, the perfections of the world resemble their principal Cause (God) but not necessarily their instrumental causes.

In summation, the analogy between creature and Creator, based on causality, is secured only because God is the principal, intrinsic, essential, efficient Cause of the being and perfections of the world. In any other kind of causal relationship an analogical similarity would not necessarily follow, but in an analogy of being similarity must follow, for Being communicates only being, and perfections or kinds of being do not arise from an imperfect being. Existence produces only after its kind, namely, other existences.

ANALOGOUS LANGUAGE IN GOD'S REVELATION

Evangelical theology affirms that God has two great revelations: special revelation in the Bible and general revelation in nature. Both involve an analogous understanding of God.

Analogous Language and Special Revelation (Scripture)

The Bible is emphatic about two things in this connection. ***First***, God is beyond our thoughts and concepts, even the best of them (cf. Rom. 11:33). God is infinite and our concepts are finite, and no finite concept can capture the infinite. It is also clear in Scripture that God goes infinitely beyond the puny ability of human concepts to convey His ineffable essence. Paul said, "Now we see as in a mirror, dimly" (1 Cor. 13:12 NKJV). John said of mortal man in this life, "No one has seen God at any time" (John 1:18 NKJV).

Second, human language is adequate for expressing the attributes of God, for in spite of the infinite difference between God and creatures, there is not a total lack of similarity, since the effect always resembles its efficient Cause in some way.

But if God is both adequately expressed in and yet infinitely more than human language—even inspired language—can express, then at best the language of Scripture is only analogous; i.e., no term taken from human experience—and that is where all biblical terms come from—can do any more than tell us what God is like. None of them can express comprehensively what God really is. Religious language at best can make valid predications of God's essence, but it can never express His essence fully.

Analogous Language and General Revelation (Nature)

There are two basic reasons that statements made about God on the basis of general revelation are merely analogous. ***First***, we return to the matter of causality already mentioned. The arguments for God's existence are arguments from effect to the efficient Cause of their being (Aquinas, ***ST***, la.2.3). Since the

effects get their actuality from God (who is Pure Actuality), they must be similar to Him, for Act communicates act; Actuality produces actualities (see Mondin, ***PAPCT***, all).

Second, Pure Act (God) cannot create another Pure Act. Pure Act is uncreated, and it is impossible to create an uncreated Being. But if uncreated Act cannot create another Pure Actuality, then it must create an actuality with potentiality (Aquinas, ***OBE***, all). Thus, every created being must be composed of actuality and potentiality. All created beings have actuality because they actually exist, and they have potentiality because they have the potential not to exist. Anything that comes into existence can pass out of existence. But if all created beings have a potential that limits their existence, then they are limited kinds of existences, and their uncreated Cause is an unlimited kind of existence. Thus, there must be a difference between creatures and their Creator. They have limitations (potency), and He does not. It follows, then, that when making statements about God based on what He has revealed of Himself in His creation, there is one big proviso—God is not like His creation in its potentialities but only in its actuality. This is called the way of negation (via negativa). All adequate God-talk must have this negative element in it, a conclusion that emerges from the very nature of the proofs for His existence.

First, it was demonstrated that He is a Cause. This is the positive element of similarity in the analogy between God and creatures. Whatever actuality (not potentiality) there is in the creatures, is actually like the Actuality that gave it to them.

Second, it was concluded that He was an uncaused kind of Cause (the negative element in the analogy). Uncaused means not-caused; it is a negative term. The same is true of the other attributes of God that emerged from the argument for His existence, for, as Aquinas said, "No creature, being finite, can be adequate to the first agent which is infinite" (***SCG***, 7.7).

God is the infinite cause of all finite existence. But in-finite means not-finite; it too is a negation. God is the eternal, that is, the not-terminal or not-temporal Cause. Some of the negations are not immediately obvious from the etymology of the term, but they are negative nonetheless. God is the simple Source of all complex being; simple here really means non-complex.

The same is true of the attribute of necessity. We know creatures are contingent, but by "necessary" we simply mean that God is not contingent. We have no positive concepts in our experience that can express the transcendent dimension of God's unlimited metaphysical characteristics. Therefore, the analogy with

which we speak of God will always contain an element of negation. The creature is like God because Act communicates act, but it is unlike God because it has a limiting potentiality that God does not have; He is Pure Actuality.

A RESPONSE TO OBJECTIONS AGAINST ANALOGOUS GOD-TALK

Now that we have expounded analogy more completely, we can respond to those objections that are relevant here. Most of these are listed in the works of David Burrell (see ***APL***) and Frederick Ferre (see "A" in Edwards, ***EP***).

(1) ***Why select some but not all qualities drawn from the world and apply only these to God?*** Because only some things flow from God's efficient, essential, principal, and intrinsic causality. As noted above, only these are the perfections found in finite creation that do not necessarily denote what is finite. Hence, since only these concepts do not necessitate a limited application of their meaning, they alone may be appropriately applied to an unlimited Being.

(2) ***Words divorced from their finite mode or conditions are vacuous or devoid of meaning.*** This critique ignores the distinction between a concept and its predication. The univocal concept of the words remains the same; only the way in which they are predicated changes. And even in the predication there is a similarity based on the efficient causal relation to God: The meanings of the words ***goodness, being***, and ***beauty*** are not ***emptied*** when applied to God; the words are merely ***extended without limits.*** That is, the perfection indicated by an analogous predication is not negated; rather, it is released from any limiting mode of signification and applied essentially to God. Since the perfection denoted by some terms does not necessarily imply any limitations, there is no reason why perfection cannot be predicated of an unlimited Being.

(3) ***Analogy rests on the assumption that causality provides a similarity.*** This is true, but the assumption is justifiable in terms of intrinsic, essential, principal, efficient causality, ***not*** in terms of just any kind of causality. Mondin, whose work was not mentioned in Ferre's criticism of analogy, successfully defends analogy against this charge. Being communicates only being. The Cause of existence cannot produce perfections that it does not "possess." If God causes goodness, then He must be good. If He causes existence, then He must exist. Otherwise the absurd consequence ensues that God gives what He does not have

to give.

Of course, God causes finitude, contingency, and potency, which He does not have. However, these are not perfections, but only the limited conditions under which a creature receives these perfections. After all, an infinite, necessary Being of Pure Actuality cannot make another such Being. Hence, the only kind of beings He can make are finite, contingent beings with potency, and all the actuality and perfections they have, they received from God's hand—He cannot give any perfection He does not have to give. Hence, there is a solid ontological basis for the similarity between God and creatures in the principle of causality.

(4) ***Any analogous predication of God as a First Cause involves an infinite regress of meaning to identify the univocal element.*** This objection holds true for non-univocal concepts, but it is not true of univocal concepts that have analogical predication. It is true that one must have a univocal understanding of what is being predicated of the First Cause, but it does not follow from this that how it is predicated of different kinds of beings must be identical (i.e., univocal). Indeed, if it is known that one Being is infinite and another being is finite, then how a quality is predicated must differ from what is being predicated, for to predicate a perfection in the same way of an infinite Being as it is predicated of a finite being (viz., finitely) is really to predicate it equivocally, since an infinite Being does not have qualities in a finite way. The only way to avoid equivocation when predicating the same perfection of both finite beings and infinite Being is to predicate it differently (i.e., analogously) according to the mode of being that each is.

(5) ***Even accepting the challengeable metaphysical assumption that there is a similarity among beings, this ontology is not univocally expressible. First***, this is not a mere assumption for a theist; it is the only alternative to monism. If there are many beings, there must be an analogical similarity among beings; were this not so, there could be only one being in the universe, for if being means entirely the same thing wherever it is found (univocity), there can be only one being. And if being means something entirely different (equivocality), then once one being is identified, everything else must be totally different, which is nonbeing. Only if beings are similar but neither totally identical nor totally different, can there be more than one being in the universe. But God is, and I am (and you are); we are all different beings. Hence, there must be an analogy of being that permits all of us to exist (the similarity) and yet allows each of us to exist differently; each of us has being (existence) but each is a different kind of being (essence). In God, existence and essence are identical. Hence, creatures, like

God, exist, but the existence of creatures is only analogous to that of God, for God exists essentially, and all else exists dependently.

Second, being is univocally conceived, but it is analogically predicated of God and finite beings. The concept is understood to mean the same thing, namely, being is "that which is or exists." God exists and a man exists—this they have in common—but God exists infinitely and independently, whereas a man exists only finitely and dependently—this they have in difference. In short, ***that*** they both exist is ***univocally conceived; how*** they each exist is ***analogically predicated***, for God exists necessarily and creatures exist only contingently; there is a distinct difference in the mode of existence, even though the fact of their existence is the same (i.e., they both exist).

(6) ***Since Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951), the distinction between univocal and equivocal is obsolete, and consequently the notion of analogy is obsolete.*** To understand this objection we need to remind ourselves of Wittgenstein's proposal for understanding language. Expressions receive their meaning from their use in the context of language games, wherein the chosen rules are used to judge consistency. Each language game is autonomous insofar as there are no universal criteria for meaning. Words that carry over from game to game or words with similar meanings bear family resemblances, but they have no essence, and we can never isolate a core meaning they must share. Thus the rigid designations of language, being univocal or equivocal, break down before this dynamic understanding based on usage.

David Burrell responds to this idea by insisting on equivalence between language in ordinary use on the one hand and univocal language on the other. There may not be any obligatory standard for univocal language, but this fact is irrelevant, since all we mean by "univocal meaning" is language in its ordinary context of meaning. Burrell says, "We can, then, speak of an ordinary or univocal usage so long as we neither insist on its fixity nor count on it as our final norm" (***APL***, 221). He observes that in this sense even terms such as "disc jockey" or "Girl Friday" may take on a univocal role. Thus the distinction between univocal and equivocal still holds, and analogy is still called for.

(7) ***A general theory of analogy does not work.*** Even though Burrell defends a theory of analogy, he is wary of making it too rigid. In particular, he objects to the theory of analogy of proper proportionality as expounded by noted thomistic scholar Cardinal Cajetan (1468–1534). Burrell contends that it simply does not work, no matter how hard we try to fill in all of our parameters. Any formula we try to set up will still leave us with ambiguity and equivocation (ibid., 9–20).

The same problem applies to other theories of analogy as well.

First, in response to Burrell, we need to note that the present account does not provide a specific formula for univocal language meaning. Critics of analogy, including Frederick Ferre, usually bring their criticisms down to the conclusion that models of analogy do not ultimately yield only univocal meaning for language as applied to God. Burrell recognizes the nonsense of this, for if correct, there would be no need for analogy at all. Still he faults traditional understandings of analogy for getting involved in complicated systems that do not resolve equivocation.

Second, we can point out that the present account gives no formula for meaning at all. We have stayed away from picking one or more of Cajetan's categories and locking ourselves into it. One could conceivably argue that what we have in our understanding of Aquinas is the analogy of intrinsic attribution combined with proper proportionality.[4] But these are not Aquinas's categories, and it is well not to be tied to one formal understanding of language mechanisms. Instead, we have presented a primarily metaphysical scheme into which language fits, and this scheme is rooted in reality. As long as analogy is tied to the metaphysics of intrinsic causality, it must work, even if a theoretical language formula does not do the trick. This response should not be far from Burrell's intentions, either.

The objections to analogous God-talk based on existential causality appear insufficient. Analogy seems to be the only adequate answer to the question of religious language.

All negative God-talk implies some positive knowledge of God. But positive affirmations of God are possible only if there are some univocally understood concepts that can be applied to both creatures and Creator (as Scotus argues). Conversely, since God is infinitely perfect, and creatures are only finitely perfect, no perfection found in the finite world can be applied univocally to both God and creatures (as Aquinas argues). But to apply them equivocally would leave us in skepticism. Hence, whatever perfections found in creation that can be applied to God without limits are predicated analogically. This perfection is understood univocally (in the same manner), but it is predicated analogously (in a similar manner), because to affirm it univocally in a finite way of an infinite Being would not truly be descriptive of the way He is, and to affirm it equivocally in an infinite way would not be descriptive of Him at all. Therefore, a univocal concept drawn from the finite world can be predicated of God only

analogically.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The linguistic precondition of evangelical theology is that we do have some positive knowledge of God. Human language, however limited, is capable of making true statements about God and His relation to the world. However, as we have seen, these predications cannot be univocal, since all human concepts (even if univocally understood) cannot apply to an infinite Being without qualification. With the help of the via negativa, all limitations must be stripped before they are applied to God. Hence, they are affirmed of God in a different (though similar) way from which they are of finite things. John Duns Scotus was right in insisting on univocal ***concepts***, but Thomas Aquinas was correct in insisting that these univocally defined terms must be ***applied*** to the transcendent God in an analogical way. In this manner, univocally understood concepts, and their finite connotations, can be applied to (predicated of) God analogically and yield a positive knowledge of God.

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CHAPTER TEN

INTERPRETATION: THE HERMENEUTICAL PRECONDITION

Another important precondition to evangelical theology is the belief that it is possible to obtain an objective interpretation of God's revelation in both Scripture and nature. Since these two revelations are the bases of all that we know about God, it is necessary that we understand them correctly, for if an objective understanding of the truth God has revealed through them is not possible, then discourse about God is not possible, let alone a comprehensive discourse about God (which is known as systematic theology).[1]

SUBJECTIVITY IN HERMENEUTICS

The primary challenge to the hermeneutical precondition of systematic theology is the subjective interpretation of God. According to this view, it is not possible to have an objective understanding of a disclosure from God for several reasons.

Subjectivity in Meaning (Conventionalism)

First of all, it is argued that there is no such thing as objective meaning in a text. The prevailing view in modern linguistics is conventionalism, which insists that all meaning is culturally relative. This model springs from such modern writers as Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913), Gottlob Frege (1848–1925), and Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951).

This argument was examined earlier (in chapter 6) and found wanting for many reasons. For one thing, it is self-defeating to claim, "All meaning is culturally relative"; this very proposition is offered as a nonrelative, meaningful statement. One cannot claim to have an objective view that all meaning is subjective—not without self-contradiction. In order to make a meaningful statement about all meaning, one must take an objective stance ***outside*** the culture. But if all statements are culturally dependent, then this is not possible. Thus, the first pillar of subjectivism crumbles under close scrutiny.

Subjectivity in the Mode of Communication

Another argument offered in favor of subjectivism in interpretation is that no objective grounds exist for communicating a revelation from God to us. Since God is an infinite Mind, while human beings have finite minds, and since there is an infinite difference between an infinite and a finite, no common ground of meaning is possible between the two.

This objection was handled in two earlier chapters (6 and 7) in which it was demonstrated that there are undeniable principles of rational thought that are common to both God and man. Since logic is based in the very rational nature of God, it is neither arbitrary nor relative. God is subject to the law of noncontradiction just as we are. He is a self-consistent rational being, and as such He cannot hold logically opposite propositions to be true.

Likewise, the infinite difference between God and man does not mean there is a total lack of similarity, for the Creator must resemble its creature. A cause cannot give what it does not have to give; God cannot produce what He does not possess. He who brought other things into existence must exist Himself, and He

who gave goodness must be good. The principle of analogy between God and creatures is firmly rooted in the intrinsic relation between an efficient cause and its effect. Thus, another premise of subjectivism is unsuccessful.

SUBJECTIVITY IN INTERPRETATION

So far it has been shown that there is objective meaning, and that it can be objectively expressed, even by an infinite, rational God to finite, rational beings. The remaining question is whether or not finite beings are capable of deriving the objective meaning that is objectively expressed in a divine revelation. Many modern and contemporary scholars have argued that this is not possible. A few crucial names will illustrate the point.

Heidegger's Existentialism

Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) developed an existential hermeneutic that denied objective meaning was possible. He was influenced by the phenomenological method[2] of Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), the nihilistic concerns of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), the historical approach of G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831), the personal subjectivity of Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855), and the mystical metaphysics of Plotinus (205–270 A.D.).

The earlier and later Heidegger are a study in contrasting emphases:

Early Period	Late Period
ANTHROPOLOGICAL	Hermeneutical
HEAVY STYLE	Freer and Lighter
(***BEING AND TIME***)	(***Intro to Metaphysics***)
DREAD	JOY
Phenomenological	Mystical

The later Heidegger gave rise to a subjective hermeneutic, but the groundwork

of this was laid in his earlier existentialism of ***Being and Time.*** In this work he stressed man's inauthentic everyday existence, which has three fundamental aspects:

(1) ***Facticity***, in which man finds himself cast into a world not of his own willing;
(2) ***Existentiality***, which is the act of appropriating or making my world mine. Through this, man, by self-projection and self-transcendence, understands the world and becomes himself;
(3) ***Forfeiture***, meaning that unfortunately we not only shape our world but we also forfeit to it. We forget "Being" in our quest for particular beings. So man is determined (put here), yet man is free to make of the world what he will. But the all essential "I" is hidden throughout most of life by daily routines in the tension of the historical (e.g., the call of my situation, family, country).

Nonetheless, against this scattering inauthenticity, Heidegger singles out an authentic being, called Dasein,[3] and develops his concept of existential time, which involves three things.

The first is ***dread***, which is a momentary state of mind in which we turn back in the flight from ourselves with honesty. Dread is an objectless fear, a sense of nothingness that grasps me when I face the whole of it as ending in death. Hence, I dread my life as a whole, because it is bounded and grounded in death (nothingness). Dread, then, reveals that we are a "being-unto-death." This sets us free from the illusion of the "they."[4]

The second is ***conscience***, which is the voice that expresses itself through dread. It is the voice of the self to itself, calling it from forgetfulness to the responsibility of being itself. It is the call from inauthenticity. We must recognize that we are "thrown" into the world not of our own choosing, and yet it is precisely this condition that I must choose.

The third is ***destiny***, which is found in death. Existential time is my time, namely, from birth to death. Only by choosing my time and the role into which I have been cast am I properly "historical," that is, in possession of a destiny.

In brief, ***Being and Time*** pictures the lonely will, driven by dread, to face the prospect of its own nothingness and in retrospect its own guilt, and yet also to

realize in this the terror of its own freedom.

Building on this existential basis, the later Heidegger turns his attention to hermeneutics (in ***Introduction to Metaphysics***). Here four emphases are found. The first emphasis is ***history***, in which the intellectual history of the West is found. Being, as distinct from particular things, is almost nothing—a haze, as Nietzsche said. We have "fallen out of Being" and betrayed our true vocation by running foolishly after this thing and that. So it is the history of our being that we should be forgetful about Being.

The second emphasis is ***the darkening of the world***, a world in which we live in our forgetfulness of Being. We are more concerned with ***beings***, from genes to spaceships, than with our true calling, which is to be shepherds and watchers of ***Being.*** Inventiveness, not understanding, has been our occupation. We are more concerned with proliferation of technical skills than with metaphysical unity. So we have lost Being; it has become haze, an error—nothing.

The third emphasis is ***Greek philosophy***, the key to overcoming this forgetfulness of Being. In fact, according to Heidegger, philosophy can only be done properly in Greek and German; the Latinization of Greek philosophy has been the source of error. Between Parmenides (b. 515 B.C.) and Aristotle (384–322 B.C.), the error began by making a dichotomy between Being and Thought. For Parmenides these were one, but by the time of Aristotle, Being had broken loose from its first great anchorage and floated out in that tide of nihilism on which we are still adrift. Thus, we have lost the presocratic ***aletheia*** (Gr: "truth"), the unhiddenness of being, and truth has become a characteristic of propositions (a mere "correspondence" with "facts"). It is this loosening of truth from Being that has lead to nihilism.

The fourth emphasis is ***poetry and language***, the means through which Heidegger wishes to recall humankind from nihilism to Being. It is by language that man stands open to Being, and unlike the pseudo-terminology of science, which has lost its hold on Being, the true origin of language is in poetry. Poetry is the primal language of a historical people in which it founds Being; hence, the great poets are the ones who can restore language to its essential power—as a revealer of Being. Thus language is the foundation and house of being, especially the poetic language of Friedrich Hölderlin (1770–1843) (who had a keen tie with classical antiquity). Through him we may hope to get some "mittances"[5] of truth, some illumination of Being, some relevation of the Holy. We are, as it were, "waiting for god" (cf. ***Waiting for Godot***)—a god remote

from theology or piety, a god who presides over the long-lost Being of which we are in quest.

In his later works, Heidegger discarded Kierkegaard as a mere religious writer, refuted Jean-Paul Sartre's (1905–1980) humanistic existentialism, and opted more for Nietzsche, Holderlin, and Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926, "pathological poetry"). In his early work, Heidegger affirmed that man speaks through language; in his later work, he affirmed that Being speaks through language. Since the presocratics let Being speak through language, etymology of Greek works is the key to the true meaning of words. This became the basis of Kittels's massive ***Theological Dictionary of the New Testament***, which traces the origin and history of Greek words in a quest to find their real meaning.

An Evaluation of Heidegger's Existential Hermeneutic

Heidegger is commendable in displaying a quest for being, expressing an openness to being, seeing language as a key to reality, preserving the evocative value of poetry and metaphor, and even asking the right question: "Why is there something rather than nothing at all?"

Nonetheless, there are serious flaws in his subjective existential hermeneutic. A few can be briefly spelled out.

First, Heidegger's subjective existential hermeneutic involves the unfounded assumption that Being is unintelligible in itself. But how could Heidegger know this about Being unless Being were intelligible?

Second, it is self-defeating to attempt to express the inexpressible. If Being is beyond description, how is it that Heidegger succeeds in describing it for us?

Third, language does not establish being but expresses it. It does not found Being but reveals it to us, that is, if it is truly descriptive of it.

Fourth, Heidegger's assertion against a correspondence view of truth is self-destructive, for he assumes that his denial of a correspondence view of truth corresponds with reality. But correspondence with reality is precisely what is meant by a correspondence view of truth.

Fifth, he purports an openness to Being but rejects God, who ***is*** Being—Pure Actuality (see volume 2, part 1). Every contingent being (which Heidegger admits man is) needs a Necessary Being to ground its existence.

Sixth, Heidegger neglects the analogical ability of language to speak

meaningfully of God (see chapter 9), and he rejects the descriptive ability of language for its evocative dimension.

Seventh, Heidegger asks the right question but rules out an adequate answer. He responds to "Why something, not nothing?" by saying it can be asked about God too. But it cannot—at least not meaningfully. God is an Uncaused Being, and of such a Being it is not meaningful to ask what caused the Uncaused. One may as well ask, "Who is the bachelor's wife?"

Eighth, Heidegger expects all readers of his books to use the standard hermeneutic of searching for the author's meaning. But this is directly contrary to the subjective hermeneutic he taught to be used on other writings.

Ninth, etymology is not the key to the meaning of a term. This position was thoroughly critiqued by a noted liberal scholar, James Barr, in his ***Biblical Semantics.*** The fact that the word ***board*** originally meant a wooden plank is not helpful in determining its meaning in the term "Chairman of the Board."

Tenth, Heidegger's hermeneutic reduces to an unverifiable mysticism. How does one know that the "mittances" of light obtained through the "pathological" poets are not from the angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14)?

In spite of the defects in his view, Heidegger had a significant influence on the work of others, including the metaphysics of Paul Tillich (1886–1965), the *sitz-im-leben* (real-life situation) ground for demythology of Rudolf (Karl) Bultmann (1884–1976), the unprotectedness (or openness to Being's voice) of Karl Barth (1886–1968), and the "new hermeneutic" of Gerhard Ebeling and Hans Gadimer.

Derrida's Deconstructionism

Like most thinkers, even innovators, Jacque Derrida (b. 1930) stands on the shoulders of great minds who have gone before him. From Plato he received his negationism—the idea that all determination is by negation. From Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) he learned his agnosticism, and Søren Kierkegaard taught him fideism. From G. W. F. Hegel he borrowed his progressivism (see definition on page 167), albeit applied to hermeneutics; Friedrich Nietzsche taught him atheism, and Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) modeled psychologism for him. Ludwig Wittgenstein is the source of his linguistical solipsism, and Ferdinand de Saussure instructed him in conventionalism. Edmund Husserl is his model for perspectivalism, or relativity in truth (see chapter 7); William James (1842–

1910) taught him pragmatism and the will to believe, while Martin Heidegger is the one whose existentialism he emulates.

Derrida is responsible for writing many influential books, among which are ***Speech and Phenomena*** (1973); ***Of Grammatology*** (1976); ***Writing and Differance*** (1978); ***Positions*** (1981); ***Ear of the Other*** (1985); ***Limited, Inc.*** (1988); ***Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*** (1989); and ***Spectors of Marx*** (1994).

Derrida was an atheist regarding the existence of God and an agnostic concerning the possibility of knowing absolute truth. He was also anti-metaphysical, claiming that no metaphysics is possible. He believed we are locked in our own linguistic bubble, yet he recognized that using language to deny metaphysics is a form of metaphysics itself. This incoherence points to the need for archi-writing (a new poetic protest against metaphysics).

Derrida realized that archi-writing may be a use of signs without signification, that is, a writing that risks meaning nothing—it may be words facing the infinity of a white page. Nonetheless, he pressed his deconstructional objection.

What Deconstructionism Is Not

Deconstructionism, at least for Derrida, is not a destruction of a text but a reconstruction of it. As such, it is not negation but criticism; it is not a dismantling of a text but a remodeling of it. Deconstructionism does not annihilate, but rather recreates the text; it is not against analysis but against all fixed analyses, and accordingly it claims not to be angry with the text but in love with it. It is not opposed to reading the text but opposed to not rereading it constantly for new meanings.

What Deconstructionism Is

Deconstructionism involves many beliefs that challenge an evangelical understanding. Some of the more important ones are the following:

Conventionalism. Following Saussure, Frege, and Wittgenstein, Derrida was a conventionalist, holding that all meaning is relative. There is no objective or absolute meaning, at least not for finite minds (and he rejected an infinite Mind —God).

Nonreferentialism. Derrida believed that there is no perfect reference—all one-

to-one correspondence is impossible. My concepts are uniquely mine; hence, meaning is never perfectly transferable.

Contextualism. Further, Derrida held a form of contextualism, which means that all texts have different context, and the meaning of a text is determined by the context in which it is read. We can constantly change a given context, but we cannot escape having a limited context—we cannot know from an infinite perspective.

Differentialism. According to Derrida, "difference" or the unknown in a text is the most important part of it. All rational structures leave something out, and, therefore, we must bring everything under suspicion.

Linguistical Solipsism. Derrida embraced a form of linguistical solipsism, namely, that we cannot escape the limits of language. We can broaden our linguistic concepts, but we cannot transcend linguistic boundaries.

Semantical Progressivism. Derrida also held to semantic progressivism—that possible meanings never end. Thus, philosophy never ends, for we never exhaust all possible meanings of a text; the text can always be further deconstructed.

Fideism. Derrida has also insisted that faith is always necessary. Since absolute meaning is impossible, indecision is inescapable. We are always between absolute certainty and absolute doubt, between skepticism and dogmatism. As a result, faith is always essential.

An Evaluation of Deconstructionism

First, deconstructionism is a form of linguisticalism, which affirms that all meaning is limited by language. However, this very statement—that all meaning is limited by language—places itself outside the limits of language.

Second, deconstructionism also embraces conventionalism, contending that all meaning is relative to our situation. But once again, how can it make these nonconventional statements? If "All meaning is culturally relative," then so is that statement. If the statement is not culturally relative, then it destroys itself.

Third, deconstructionism believes that the laws of logic are dependent on language, which is culturally relative. But the reverse is true: Language is based on logic. Without logic language would not be possible; indeed, the laws of logic are undeniable (see chapter 5).

Fourth, deconstructionism's linguisticalism is self-defeating, for if there were no

meaning prior to language, then language could not be learned. One must have the rational ability to understand language in order to learn a language.

Fifth, deconstructionism is also a form of perspectivalism—holding that all truth is conditioned by one's perspective. But if "all truth is perspectival," what about that statement? It is a nonperspectival statement, and it claims that there can be no such statements.

Sixth, there is the self-defeating nature of Derrida's hermeneutic. He expects his texts to be interpreted according to what he meant by them, which is directly contrary to how he says texts should be interpreted.

Seventh, recall the self-defeating nature of agnosticism about truth and meaning. Derrida's view amounts to saying that "it is an ultimate truth that there is no ultimate truth." Or, "No meaning is fixed, even the meaning of this statement." Or, "All truth is perspectival, including this truth." Or, "Meaning is never perfectly transferable, including the meaning of this sentence."

Eighth, Derrida's implicit defense of fideism is self-defeating. It is tantamount to making a case for not making a case.

Ninth, as Derrida seems at least partially aware, it is self-defeating to attempt to deny metaphysics without making metaphysical statements. His effort to resist it (by poetic language) is futile, for he knows he cannot avoid the use of metaphysical language to deny metaphysics. Such an absurdity does not point to the need for poetic language; it shows the self-destructive nature of denying metaphysics.

Tenth, it is fruitless to turn to poetry to avoid metaphysics. Metaphysical questions still exist, and they cannot be answered in anything but metaphysical language. Any so-called poetical protest is nothing more than an exercise in ventilating one's tonsils.

Eleventh, Derrida's view is a form of reader imperialism. The birth of the reader spells the death of the author; the author's meaning dies once a reader takes over. But no deconstructionist really wants his books read in this manner; clearly he expects the reader to understand his (the author's) meaning and not to read his (the reader's) own meaning into it.

Twelfth, there is the failure to see that the lack of one-to-one correspondence does not eliminate all true correspondence. True correspondence can be one to many, i.e., one and the same meaning can be expressed in many ways.

Thirteenth, in deconstructionism there is a subtle dogmatism of attempting to eliminate the dogmatic. Nothing is more dogmatic than the dogmatic claim that nothing can be known for sure. There is nothing of which we should be more

suspicious than the view that demands that we be suspicious of everything else. Deconstructionists do not blush to ask us to accept as a fixed meaning the claim that no meaning can be fixed.

Bultmann's Demythology

Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976) applied Heidegger's existentialism to the New Testament by his demythological subjectivism.

Bultmann's Argument for Demythological Naturalism

Rudolf Bultmann built his case on several lines of thought. At the basis of it is his concept of a three-storied universe with the earth in the center, the heaven above (where God and angels are), and the underworld beneath. Supernatural forces intervene in the course of nature and in all that we think and will and do (Bultmann, ***KM***, 1).

> We need to strip the New Testament documents of this mythological structure. For all this is the language of mythology and is incredible to modern man, for he is convinced that the mythical view of the world is obsolete. For all our thinking today is shaped by modern science. So "a blind acceptance of the New Testament would involve a sacrifice of the intellect. It would mean accepting a view of the world in our faith and religion, which we should deny in our everyday life" (ibid., 3–4).

Bultmann pronounces the biblical picture of miracles as impossible to modern man, for "man's knowledge and mastery of the world have advanced to such an extent through science and technology that it is no longer possible for anyone seriously to hold the New Testament view of the world—in fact, there is hardly anyone who does." Therefore, the only honest way of reciting the creeds is to strip the mythological framework from the truth they enshrine. Bultmann concludes confidently that the Resurrection is not an event of history, "for an historical fact which involves a resurrection from the dead is utterly inconceivable" (ibid., 38–39).

Bultmann offers several reasons for this antisupernatural conclusion. ***First***, there is the incredibility of a mythical event like the resuscitation of a corpse. ***Second***, there is the difficulty of establishing the objective historicity of the Resurrection no matter how many witnesses are cited. ***Third***, the Resurrection is an article of faith, which, as such, cannot be a miraculous proof. ***Fourth***, there are other like events known to mythology (ibid., 39–40).

Therefore, according to Bultmann, since the Resurrection is not an event of

objective, space-time history, it is an event of subjective history; that is, it is an event of faith in the hearts of the early disciples. Consequently, it is not subject to objective historical verification or falsification, for it is not really an event in the space-time world. Christ did not rise from Joseph's tomb; He arose only by faith in the disciples' hearts.
Bultmann's argument can be summarized like this:

(1) Myths are by nature more than objective truths; they are transcendent truths of faith.
(2) But what is not objective cannot be part of a verifiable space-time world.
(3) Therefore, miracles (myths) are not part of the objective space-time world.

An Evaluation of Bultmann's Argument That the New Testament Contains Myths

Several objections have been offered to Bultmann's mythological naturalism.
First, it is built on at least two unproven assumptions:

(1) Miracles are less than historical because they are more than historical.
(2) Miracles cannot occur in the world without being of the world.

Both of these assumptions are wrong. Miracles can be more than historical without being less than historical, and miracles can originate from beyond the world and still be acts within the world (see chapter 3).
Second, Bultmann's view is without foundation, having no evidential basis. Mythological events are unverifiable; that is, they have no evidential value.
Third, Bultmann's view is unbiblical, being contrary to the overwhelming evidence for the authenticity of the New Testament documents and the reliability of the witnesses. Indeed, it is contrary to the New Testament claim for itself not to be "cunningly devised fables" (2 Peter 1:16 NKJV) but an eyewitness account (cf. John 21:24; 1 John 1:1–3).
Fourth, the New Testament is not the literary genre of mythology. One great Oxford scholar, himself a writer of myths (fairy tales), keenly noted, "Dr. Bultmann never wrote a gospel." He asks, therefore, "Has the experience of his learned … life really given him any power of seeing into the minds of those long dead [who ***have*** written one]?" As a living author of myth, C. S. Lewis (1898–1963) found the critics usually wrong when they attempted to read his mind

rather than his words. However, he adds, “the ‘assured results of modern scholarship,’ as to the way in which an old book was written, are ‘assured,’ we may conclude, only because the men who knew the facts are dead and can’t blow the gaff.” In brief, Bultmannian biblical critiques are unfalsifiable because, as Lewis wryly remarks, “St. Mark is dead. When they meet St. Peter, there will be more pressing matters to discuss” (Lewis, ***CR***, 161–63).

Finally, the claim that the New Testament miracles are myths, not history, is refuted by numerous lines of evidence (see part 2, chapter 26).[6]

OBJECTIVITY IN HERMENEUTICS

There are, of course, many other forms of subjectivism in hermeneutics. They too fail, since all involve self-defeating statements, and any attempt to deny an objective interpretation implies that one is possible, namely, the one by which the subjectivist’s view is expected to be understood. That is, every subjectivist expects that readers can and should come to an objective understanding of his subjectivistic views.

The Basis of an Objective Hermeneutic

The foundation for objectivism in hermeneutics is not simply found in the self-destructive nature of subjectivism; it is based also in the solid arguments in favor of all the major elements necessary to have an objective interpretation of a revelation. These include:

(1) the existence of an absolute Mind (God);

(2) the absolute nature of meaning;

(3) the analogy between infinite understanding and finite understanding; and

(4) the ability of finite minds (made in God’s image) to understand truths revealed by God.

The Existence of an Absolute Mind

The existence of an absolute Mind was established earlier (in chapter 2). To refresh:

(1) At least one finite mind exists (me), for without thinking I cannot deny I think. And I am limited in my thought, or I would not doubt or discover new thoughts, which I do.

(2) The principle of causality demands that every finite thing needs a cause (see chapter 2).

(3) Hence, it follows that there must be an infinite Mind that caused my finite mind. This is true for two reasons: One, a cause can't give what it doesn't have (analogy—see chapter 9). Two, the effect cannot be greater than its cause; water cannot rise higher than its source. So, if the effect is intelligent, the Cause must be intelligent. An infinite Mind must exist.

Absolute Meaning

If there is an absolute Mind, then there can be absolute meaning. The objective basis for meaning is found in the Mind of God. Whatever an infinite Mind means by something is what it means objectively, infinitely, and absolutely. Therefore, the existence of objective and absolute meaning is grounded in the existence of an absolute Meaner (God).

Analogy and Meaning

Not only is the theistic God (see chapter 2) of Christianity infinitely knowledgeable (omniscient), but He is also omnipotent (infinitely powerful). An infinitely powerful God can do whatever is not contradictory, and it is not contradictory for an infinite Mind to convey meaning to finite creatures, since

there is a common ground between them in both the undeniable laws of thought (see chapter 5) and in the similarity (analogy) between Creator and creature (see chapter 9).

To be sure, an infinite Mind knows things in a much higher way than finite minds do. But while ***how*** God knows things is different than how man knows, nevertheless, ***what*** He knows is the same as what He reveals to humankind. That is, the ***thing signified*** is the same, but the ***mode of signification*** is different for God and for us.

The Image of God in Man

If an absolute Meaner exists, then there can be absolute meaning. An all-powerful God can do whatever is not impossible to do. It is not impossible for an infinite Mind to communicate with finite minds, since there is common (analogous) ground between them.

However, there remains one question: Can a finite mind ***discover*** the objective truth that has been objectively ***disclosed*** to it? It's one thing for an author to disclose his thoughts in a book, and quite another for a reader to ***understand*** what he has ***revealed.***

The answer to this question is in two parts. ***First***, it is ***possible*** to know, since all the necessary conditions for knowing the objective meaning expressed by God have been met. ***Second***, whether one will ***actually*** know the objective meaning that has been objectively expressed will depend on meeting the necessary conditions for understanding this objective meaning.

THE PRINCIPLES OF OBJECTIVE HERMENEUTICS

The Principles of Understanding God's Special Revelation Objectively

Since God has given revelation, and since it is possible for us to understand its

meaning, we need to understand what guidelines to use in the process of interpreting it. The following are the principles we must bring with us as we approach God's special revelation, Scripture.

Look for the Author's Meaning, Not the Reader's

The objective meaning of a text is the one given to it by the author, not the one attributed to it by the reader. Readers should ask what was meant by the author, not what it means to the reader. Once a reader discovers what the author meant by the text, he has obtained its ***objective*** meaning. Thus, asking, "What does it mean to ***me?***" is the wrong question, and it will almost certainly lead to a subjective interpretation. Asking of the author, "What did ***he*** mean?" will almost certainly lead the reader in the right direction, that is, toward the objective meaning.

Look for the Author's Meaning (What), Not His Purpose (Why)

Another road to hermeneutical subjectivity leads to the author's purpose rather than to his meaning. Meaning is found in what the author has affirmed, not in why he affirmed it. Purpose does not determine meaning. One can know ***what*** the author said without knowing ***why*** he said it. Two examples will suffice to elucidate this point.

First, if one says, "Come over to my house tonight," there is no difficulty in understanding what is meant, even though the purpose for the invitation is not known. ***What*** is understood apart from ***why.*** The meaning is apprehended, even though the purpose is not known.

Of course, if the purpose is known, then the statement may take on a whole new ***significance.*** But meaning and significance are not the same. Meaning deals with ***what?*** and significance deals with ***so what?*** For example, if the purpose of the invitation is to inform you that you lost a loved one, as opposed to that you won ten million dollars, then the significance is quite variant. However, the meaning of the statement, "Come over to my house," is identical in either case.

Second, to offer a biblical illustration, Exodus 23:19 commanded the Israelites: "Do not cook a young goat in its mother's milk." The meaning of this sentence is very clear, and every Israelite knew exactly what they were not supposed to do. However, the purpose of this command is not clear at all. A survey of a few

commentators yields a variety of different hypotheses as to the purpose of this command:

(1) It profaned the Feast of Ingathering.
(2) It would cause indigestion.
(3) It was cruel to cook a goat in the milk that nourished it.
(4) It was a form of idolatry.
(5) It violated the parent/child relationship.

In other words, nobody seems to know for sure what the purpose was. Yet everyone knows for sure what the meaning is. If purpose determined meaning, then no one would know what the meaning is. Thankfully, it doesn't. What is said is clear apart from why it was said.

Look for Meaning in the Text, Not Beyond It

The meaning is not found ***beyond*** the text (in God's mind), ***beneath*** the text (in the mystic's mind), or ***behind*** the text (in the author's unexpressed intention); it is found ***in*** the text (in the author's expressed meaning). For instance, the beauty of a sculpture is not found behind, beneath, or beyond the sculpture. Rather, it is expressed in the sculpture.

All textual meaning is in the text. The sentences (in the context of their paragraphs in the context of the whole piece of literature) are the formal cause of meaning. They are the form that gives meaning to all the parts (words, punctuation, etc.).

Applying the six causes to meaning will help explain the point. Following Aristotle, scholastic philosophers distinguished six different causes:

(1) efficient cause—that ***by which*** something comes to be;
(2) final cause—that ***for which*** something comes to be;
(3) formal cause—that ***of which*** something comes to be;
(4) material cause—that ***out of which*** something comes to be;
(5) exemplar cause—that ***after which*** something comes to be;
(6) instrumental cause—that ***through which*** something comes to be.

Remember the example of the chair? A wooden chair has a carpenter as its efficient cause, to provide something to sit on as its final cause, its structure as a chair as its formal cause, wood as its material cause, the blueprint as its exemplar cause, and the carpenter's tools as its instrumental cause.
As we have seen, applying these six causes to meaning yields the following analysis:

(1) The writer is the efficient cause of the meaning of a text.
(2) The writer's purpose is the final cause of its meaning.
(3) The writing is the formal cause of its meaning.
(4) The words are the material cause of its meaning.
(5) The writer's ideas are the exemplar cause of its meaning.
(6) The laws of thought are the instrumental cause of its meaning.

The meaning of the writing is not found in the meaner; he is the efficient cause of the meaning. ***The formal cause of meaning is in the writing itself;*** what is signified is found in the signs that signify it. Verbal meaning is found in the very structure and grammar of the sentences themselves. Meaning is found ***in*** the literary text itself—not in its author (efficient cause) or purpose (final cause), but in its literary form (formal cause). Again, meaning is not in individual words (which are the material cause).[7]

Look for Meaning in Affirmation, Not Implication

Another guideline in discovering the objective meaning of a text is to look for its affirmation, not its implication. Ask what the test affirms (or denies), not what it implies. This is not to say that implications are not possible or important, but only that the basic meaning is not found there. ***Meaning*** is in what the text affirms, not in how it can be applied.
There is only ***one meaning*** in a text, but there are ***many implications and applications.*** In terms of meaning, the *sensus unum* (one sense) view is correct; however, there is a *sensus plenum* (full sense) in terms of implication.[8]

The Principles of Understanding God's General Revelation Objectively

God has not only revealed Himself in Scripture (special revelation) but in nature (general revelation) as well. And, like Scripture, general revelation must be interpreted—there are right and wrong ways to do so. In the same way, there are good and bad guidelines for interpreting general revelation.

The Biblical Basis for the Intelligibility of General Revelation

General revelation is found both in creation (Ps. 19:1f) and in conscience (Rom. 2:12–15). The latter, called natural law, is described in the Bible as that which human beings "do by nature" (Rom. 2:14). It is the law "written on the hearts" of all men (ibid.). Those who disobey it go "contrary to nature" (Rom. 1:27).

The general revelation in nature is objectively clear and evident to all men, even in their fallen state. Psalm 19:1–4 affirms,

> The heavens *declare* the glory of God; the skies *proclaim* the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth *speech;* night after night they *display knowledge.* There is no *speech or language* where their *voice* is not *heard.* Their voice goes out into *all the earth*, their *words* to *the ends of the world.* (emphasis added)

The use of terms like "declare," "proclaim," "speech," "knowledge," "words," and "voice" demonstrate that it is an intelligible, objective revelation of God. Phrases like "all the earth," and "to the ends of the world," and the fact that it covers all language groups, show beyond question that this natural revelation is universal.

In Acts 14, where Paul is speaking to the heathen at Lystra, he appeals to a common "nature" (v. 15 NKJV) and that "He [God] did not leave Himself without witness" (v. 17 NKJV) as the grounds for their believing that there was a "living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them" (v. 15 NKJV). Unless this natural revelation to pagans was intelligible, such an appeal would be meaningless.

Likewise, while speaking to the Greek philosophers on Mars Hill, the apostle appealed to natural revelation as the basis for belief that there is a "God, who

made the world and everything in it" (Acts 17:24). Indeed, he even argues from the nature of human beings as "the offspring of God" (v. 29 NKJV) to the spiritual essence of the "Divine Nature."

Using this same reasoning in Romans 1, Paul declared that "since the creation of the world His [God's] invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made" (Rom. 1:20 NKJV). Noteworthy here is the assertion that this natural revelation is absolutely clear to all human beings, even those without the aid of special revelation. The use of the words "clearly seen" (Rom. 1:20), "manifest in them" (v. 19), "is revealed" (v. 17–18), and "God has shown it to them" (v. 19) demonstrate unquestionably that this objective revelation is not only knowable (v. 19), but it is actually known by unbelievers. Indeed, it is so clear that "they are without excuse" and condemned to their eternal destiny because they "repress" (v. 18) this truth they possess.

The same is true of God's natural revelation in the human heart. In Romans 2:12–15 (NIV) Paul affirms,

> All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law [of Moses], and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law.... (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do *by nature* things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law [of Moses], since they show that the requirements of the law are *written on their hearts*, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.) (Emphasis added)

In fact, Paul deems the natural revelation so clearly "written on their hearts" that even the heathen, who do not have special revelation, will "perish." In brief, Scripture teaches that God's objective revelation in nature is intelligible and all human beings are accountable before God in view of it.

Objections to the Intelligibility of General Revelation

Many arguments have been offered against the objectivity of general revelation. However, all of them fall short of the mark. For detailed responses to these objections see chapter 4.

Hermeneutical Principles for Interpreting Natural (General) Revelation

Once natural revelation has been located, it remains to be seen how it should be interpreted. Like the correct principles of understanding God's special revelation in Scriptures, the truth expressed in nature and the law "written on our hearts" can be readily understood as well.

As we have seen, according to Scripture, God's revelation expressed in nature is clear and evident to all rational beings (Rom. 1:19–20). Why, then, is the validity of God's natural revelation so hotly disputed?

The Principle of Causality

Famous atheist Friedrich Nietzsche revealed the reason when he said, "We receive, but we do not ask where it came from." In short, he rejected one of the principles of human reason that would lead naturally to God if he had applied it. ***It is natural to conclude that the gifts of life come from the Giver of life***—unless, of course, one rejects the fundamental guideline of reason that every gift (effect) has a giver (cause). In short, the ***principle of causality*** is an essential hermeneutical principle in interpreting natural revelation.

In his BBC debate with Frederick Copleston, renowned agnostic Bertrand Russell (1872–1970) gave the same maneuver as Nietzsche. When asked what caused the universe, Russell responded that it did not need a cause: "I should say that the universe is just there, and that's all" (cited in John Hick, ***EG***, 175). But every other thing that could not be—yet is—needs a cause, so why does the universe not need one? As Richard Taylor showed long ago, if all would agree that a small glass ball found in the woods needs a cause, then making it bigger does not eliminate the need for a cause—even if one makes it as big as the whole universe (Taylor, ***M***, 87–88). The fact is, the reason non-theists do not come to the reasonable conclusion that the world needs a cause is that they fail to apply consistently a fundamental principle of reason—that ***every*** finite thing needs a cause. In other words, they are not using the correct hermeneutical approach to natural revelation. This is evident also in the failure to interpret properly God's revelation in human nature.

The Principle of Consistency

Another fundamental principle of interpreting the law written on our own nature can be called the ***principle of consistency***, which is a practical application of the law of noncontradiction. Being selfish creatures, we do not always desire to do what is right. However inconsistently, we do, nonetheless, desire that it be done to us. So by ***reason*** we conclude that consistency demands that we should also do the same to others; this is why Jesus summarized the moral law by declaring, "In everything do to others what you would have them do to you" (Matt. 7:12). Confucius (551–479 B.C.) recognized the same basic truth by general revelation when he said, "Never do to others what you would not like them to do to you" (Confucius, ***AC*** 25.23; cf. 12:2). Human reason, then, is necessary to determine the proper means to the good end that we intuitively know is right.

The Principle of Uniformity

While we intuitively know that we should do no harm to another, nevertheless we must use our reason to tell us that shooting a gun at someone will do them harm. This we know because of the ***principle of uniformity.*** All past experience tells us that a gun can kill someone (which is severe harm). Just like the ***principle of causality*** is needed to understand God's natural revelation in nature, the law of uniformity is necessary to understand that it is wrong to intentionally take the life of another person.

The Principle of Teleology

Briefly stated, the ***principle of teleology*** says that every rational agent acts for an end. This principle is behind all rational communication, whether in special revelation or in general revelation. Purpose (design) can be seen in nature and, hence, we posit a Designer of nature. Intelligent beings act for an end, and so when we see nature act for an end, we naturally come to the conclusion that there is an intelligent Being behind nature.

The principle of teleology is also assumed in all ethical acts, for if there were no purpose (or intent) to perform an act, then a person is not responsible for the act. Personal moral responsibility implies the ability of the person to respond. Moral culpability implies intentionality. Thus to know if an act is morally wrong we must look for evidence of moral intention. Here, too, reason is necessary to interpret properly what is morally right or wrong.

Other Principles of Interpreting Natural Revelation

In addition to the four principles just mentioned as necessary for a proper hermeneutic of natural revelation—causality, consistency, uniformity, and teleology—there are also four general laws of logic:

(1) the principle of noncontradiction;
(2) the principle of identity;
(3) the principle of excluded middle; and
(4) the principle (s) of rational inference (see chapter 5).

Without these principles, valid reasoning about anything is not possible, to say nothing of reasoning about natural revelation. When these principles are applied correctly and consistently to natural revelation, the result is a valid natural theology (Rom. 1:1–20) and natural ethic (Rom. 2:12–15), the very areas in which God holds all persons responsible.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

God has two great revelations: general and special, natural and supernatural. Both are objective and clear. Both are capable of distortion by depraved human beings. There are proper and improper ways to interpret each. The correct way in each case is to follow the basic principles inherent to each. These include the basic laws of logic as well as the principles of causality, consistency, uniformity, and teleology. When these principles are applied correctly and consistently to general revelation, they will yield a proper understanding of it. But like the interpreting of special revelation, a correct understanding of natural revelation depends on using the right principles and using them consistently. In the final analysis, the natural law is not hard to understand; like God’s supernatural law, it is simply hard to practice.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

HISTORIOGRAPHY: THE HISTORICAL PRECONDITION

Unlike some religions, historical Christianity is inseparably tied to historical events, including the lives of Adam, Abraham, Moses, David, and Jesus. These events, especially those of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, are crucial to the truth of evangelical Christianity (cf. 1 Cor. 15:12–19); without them, it would cease to exist. Thus, the existence and knowability of certain historical events are essential to maintaining biblical Christianity.

The knowability of history is important not only theologically but also apologetically, for the overall argument in defense of Christianity is based on the historicity of the New Testament documents (see chapter 26). Hence, since the objective knowability of history is strongly challenged by many contemporary historians, it is necessary to counter this claim in order to secure the defense of Christianity.

OBJECTIONS TO THE OBJECTIVITY OF HISTORY

Many arguments have been advanced against the position that history is objectively knowable (see Craig, ***NH***),[1] and several will now be examined (see Beard, "TND" in Stern, ***VH***, 323–25). If these disputations are valid, they make the essential historical basis of Christianity both unknowable and unverifiable. These arguments fall into six broad categories: epistemological, axiological, methodological, metaphysical, psychological, and hermeneutical.

The Epistemological Objections

Epistemology deals with how one ***knows***, and relativists believe that objective truth is unknowable. Since this position has earlier been examined and found wanting (see chapter 7), the focus here will be on the historical relativists, who contend that the very conditions by which one knows history are so subjective that one cannot have an objective knowledge of it. Three main challenges are offered.

The Unobservability of History

Historical subjectivists argue that history, unlike science, is not directly observable; in other words, that the historian does not deal with past events but with statements about past events. This enables the historian to deal with facts in an imaginative way, attempting to reconstruct events he did not observe as they occurred. Historical facts, they insist, exist only within the creative mind of the historian, and historical documents do not contain facts, but are without the historian's understanding mere ink lines on the paper. Further, once the event is over it can never be fully recreated. Hence, the historian must impose meaning on his fragmentary and second-hand record (see Becker, "DWH," in Snyder, ***DWH***, 131).

There are two reasons offered as to why the historian has only indirect access to the past. ***First***, it is claimed that, unlike a scientist, the historian's world is composed of records and not events. This is why the historian must contribute a "reconstructed picture" of the past, and in this sense the past is really a product of the present.

Second, historical relativists assert that the scientist can test his view, whereas the historian cannot—experimentation is not possible with historical events. The scientist has the advantage of repeatability; he may subject his views to falsification. However, the unobservable historical event is no longer verifiable; it is part of the forever departed past. Therefore, what one believes about the past is no more than a reflection of his own imagination, a subjective construction in the minds of present historians that cannot hope to be an objective representation of what really happened.

The Fragmentary Nature of Historical Accounts

The second objection to the objectivity of history relates to its fragmentary nature. At best historians can hope for completeness of documentation, but completeness of the events themselves is never possible. Optimally, documents cover only a small fraction of the events themselves (Beard, "TND" in Stern, ***VH***, 323), and from only fragmentary documents one cannot validly draw full and final conclusions.

Furthermore, the documents do not present the events, but only an interpretation of the events mediated through the one who recorded them. The best-case scenario, then, is that we have only a fragmentary record of what someone else thought happened: "What really happened would still have to be reconstructed in the mind of the historian" (Carr, ***WIH***, 20). Because the documents are so fragmentary and the events so distant, objectivity becomes a will-o'-the-wisp for the historian. He not only has too few pieces of the puzzle, but the partial pictures on the few pieces he does have were merely painted from the mind of the one who passed the pieces down to us.

The Historical Conditioning of the Historian

Historical relativists insist that the historian is a product of his time, and as such he is subject to the unconscious programming of his era. It is impossible, allegedly, for the historian to stand back and view history objectively because he too is part of the historical process. Hence, historical synthesis depends on the personality of the writer as well as the social and religious milieu in which he lives (Pirenne, "WAHTD" in Meyerhoff, ***P***, 97). In this sense one must study the historian before one can understand his history.

Since the historian is part of the historical process, objectivity, it is said, can never be attained. The history of one generation will be rewritten by the next, and so on; no historian can transcend his historical relativity and view the world process from the outside (Collingwood, ***IH***, 248). At best there can be successive but less than final historical interpretations, each viewing history from the vantage point of its own generation of historians. Therefore, there is no such person as a neutral historian; each remains a child of his own day.

The Axiological (Value) Objection

The historian cannot avoid making value judgments. This, argue historical relativists, renders objectivity unobtainable, for even in the selection and arrangement of materials, value judgments are made. Titles of chapters and sections are not without implied value judgments, and such judgments are relative to the one making them.

As one historian put it, the very subject matter of history is "value-charged" (Dray, ***PH***, 23). The facts of history consist of murders, oppression, and so forth, and these cannot be described in morally neutral words. By his use of ordinary language, then, the historian is forced to make value judgments.

Further, by the very fact that history deals with flesh-and-blood human beings with motives and purposes, an analysis of history must of necessity comment on these. Whether, for instance, one is called a "dictator" or a "benevolent ruler" is a statement of value; how can one describe Josef Stalin without making such statements? And if one were to attempt a kind of scientifically neutral description of past events without any stated or implied interpretation of human purposes, it would not be history but mere raw-boned chronicle without historical meaning.

Once the historian admits what he cannot avoid, namely, that he must make some value judgments about past events, then his history has lost objectivity. In short, so the objection goes, there is no way for the historian to keep himself out of his history.

The Methodological Objections

Methodological objections relate to the procedure by which history is done. There are several methodological objections to the belief in objective history necessary to establish the truth of Christianity.

The Selective Nature of Historical Methodology

As was suggested by the epistemological objections, the historian does not have direct access to the events of the past, but merely to fragmentary interpretations of those events contained in historical documents. Now, what makes objectivity even more hopeless is the fact that the historian makes a selection from these fragmentary reports and builds his interpretation of the past events on a select number of partial reports of the past events. There are volumes in archives that most historians do not even touch (Beard, "TND" in Stern, ***VH***, 324).

The actual selection among the fragmentary accounts, so the argument goes, is influenced by many subjective and relative factors, including personal prejudice, availability of materials, knowledge of the languages, personal beliefs, social conditions, and so on. Hence, the historian himself is inextricably involved with the history he writes, and what is included versus what is excluded in his interpretation will always be a matter of subjective choice. No matter how objective an historian may attempt to be, it is practically impossible for him to present what really happened. His "history" is no more than his own interpretation based on his own subjective selection of fragmentary interpretations of past and unrepeatable events.

It is argued, consequently, that the facts of history do not speak for themselves: "The facts speak only when the historian calls on them; it is he who decides to which facts to give the floor, and in what order or context" (Carr, ***WIH***, 32). To summarize, when the "facts" speak, it is not the original events that are speaking but later fragmentary opinions about those events. The original facts or events have long since perished, and so, according to historical relativism, by the very nature of the endeavor the historian can never hope for objectivity.

The Need to Select and Arrange Historical Materials

Once the historian takes his fragmentary documents that he must view indirectly

through the interpretation of the original source, and once he takes his selected amount of material from the available archives and begins to provide an interpretive structure to it, by the use of his own value-laden language, and within the overall worldview that he presupposes, he not only understands it from the relative vantage point of his own generation but he also must select and arrange the topic of history in accordance with his own subjective preferences. In short, the dice are loaded against objectivity before he picks up his pen. That is, in the actual writing of the fragmentary, secondhand accounts from his philosophical and personal point of view, there is a further subjective choice of arrangement of the material (Collingwood, ***IH***, 285–90).

The selection and arrangement of material will be determined by personal and social factors already discussed. The final written product will be prejudiced by what is included in and what is excluded from the material. It will lack objectivity by how it is arranged and by the emphasis given to it in the overall presentation. The selection made in terms of the framework will either be narrow or broad, clear or confused. Whatever its nature, the framework is necessarily reflective of the mind of the historian (Beard, "TND" in Stern, ***VH***, 150–51), and this moves one still further away from objectively knowing what really happened. It is concluded by the subjectivists, then, that the hopes of objectivity are finally dashed.

The Metaphysical (Worldview) Objections

Several metaphysical objections have been leveled against the belief in objective history. Each one is predicated, either theoretically or practically, on the premise that one's worldview colors the study of history.

The Need to Structure the Facts of History

This objection is stated along these lines: Partial knowledge of the past makes it necessary for the historian to "fill in" gaping holes out of his own imagination. As a child draws the lines between the dots on a picture, so the historian supplies the connections between events. Without the historian the dots are not numbered, nor are they arranged in an obvious manner. The historian must use his

imagination in order to provide continuity to the disconnected and fragmentary facts provided him.

Furthermore, the historian is not content to tell us simply ***what*** happened; he feels compelled to explain ***why*** it happened (Walsh, ***PH***, 32). In this way history is made fully coherent and intelligible—good history has both theme and unity, which are provided by the historian. Facts alone do not make history any more than disconnected dots make a picture, and herein, according to the subjectivist, lies the difference between chronicle and history: The former is merely the unrefined material used by the historian to construct history. Without the structure provided by the historian, the mere "stuff" of history would be meaningless.

In addition, the study of history is a study of causes. The historian wants to know ***why;*** he wishes to weave a web of interconnected events into a unified whole. Because of this he cannot avoid interjecting his own subjectivity into history; hence, even if there is some semblance of objectivity in chronicle, nonetheless there is no hope for objectivity in history. History is in principle nonobjective, since the very thing that makes it history (as opposed to mere chronicle) is the interpretive structure or framework given to it from the subjective vantage point of the historian. Therefore, it is concluded that the necessity of structure inevitably makes historical objectivity impossible.

The Unavoidability of Worldviews

Every historian interprets the past within the overall framework of his own *Weltanschauung*, that is, his world-and-life-view. Basically, there are three different philosophies of history within which historians operate: the chaotic, the cyclical, and the linear views of history (Beard, "TND" in Stern, ***VH***, 151). Which one of these the historian adopts will be a matter of faith or philosophy and not a matter of mere fact.

Unless one view or another is presupposed, no overall interpretation is possible; the *Weltanschauung* will determine whether the historian sees the events of the world as a meaningless maze (chaotic), as a series of endless repetitions (cyclical), or as moving in a purposeful way toward a goal (linear). These worldviews inevitably are both necessary and value-oriented. So, it is argued by the subjectivists, without one of these worldviews, the historian cannot interpret the events of the past. However, through a worldview objectivity becomes

impossible.
Further, subjectivists insist that a worldview is not generated from the facts; facts do not speak for themselves, but gain their meaning only within the overall context of the worldview. Without the ***structure*** of the worldview framework, the stuff of history has no meaning. Augustine (354–430), for example, viewed history as a great theodicy,[2] but Hegel (1770–1831) saw it as an unfolding of the divine. Supposedly, then, it is not any archaeological or factual find but the religious or philosophical presuppositions that prompted each man to develop his view. Eastern philosophies of history are even more diverse, as they involve a cyclical rather than a linear pattern.
Once one admits the relativity or perspectivity of his worldview as opposed to another, the historical relativists insist that he has thereby given up all right to claim objectivity. If there are several different ways to interpret the same facts, depending on the overall perspective one takes, then there is no single objective interpretation of history.

Miracles Are by Nature Superhistorical

Even if one grants that secular history could be known objectively, there still remains the problem of the subjectivity of religious history. Some writers make a strong distinction between *Historie* and *Geschichte* (Kahler, ***SCHJ***, 63): The former is empirical and objectively knowable to some degree, but the latter is spiritual and unknowable, historically speaking—as spiritual or superhistorical, there is no objective way to verify it.
Spiritual history, allegedly, has no necessary connection with the spatiotemporal continuum of empirical events. It is a myth with subjective religious significance to the believer but with no objective grounding. Like the story of George Washington and the cherry tree, *Geschichte* is a story made up of events that probably never happened, but that inspire men to some moral or religious good. If this distinction is applied to the New Testament, then even if the life and central teachings of Jesus of Nazareth could be objectively established, there is no historical way to confirm the New Testament's miraculous dimension. Miracles do not happen as part of *Historie* and, therefore, are not subject to objective analysis; they are *Geschichte* events and as such cannot be analyzed by historical methodology.
Many theologians have accepted this distinction. Paul Tillich (1886–1965) claimed that it is "a disastrous distortion of the meaning of faith to identify it with the belief in the historical validity of the biblical stories" (***DF***, 87). He

believed, with Søren Kierkegaard, that the important thing is whether or not it evokes an appropriate religious response. With this Rudolf Bultmann and Schubert Ogden would also concur, along with much of recent theological thought.

Even those like Karl Jaspers (1883–1969), who opposed Bultmann's more radical demythologization view, accepted, nevertheless, the distinction between the spiritual and empirical dimensions of miracles (Jaspers, ***MC***, 16–17). On the more conservative end of those maintaining this distinction is Ian Ramsey (d. 1972), who insisted, "It is not enough to think of the facts of the Bible as 'brute historical facts' to which the evangelists give distinctive 'interpretation.' " For Ramsey, the Bible is historical only if " 'history' refers to situations as odd as those which are referred to by that paradigm of the Fourth Gospel: 'the Word became flesh.' " Ramsey concludes, "No attempt to make the language of the Bible conform to a precise, straightforward public language—whether that language be scientific of historical—has ever succeeded" (***RL***, 118–19). According to the historical subjectivists, there is always something "more" than the empirical in every religious or miraculous situation. The purely empirical situation is "odd" and thereby evocative of a discernment that calls for a commitment of religious significance (Ramsey, ***RL***, chapter 1).

Miracles Are in Principle Historically Unknowable

On the basis of Ernst Troeltsch's principle of analogy (see quotation below), some historians have come to object to the possibility of ever establishing a miracle based on testimony about the past. Troeltsch (1865–1923) stated the problem this way:

> On the analogy of the events known to us we seek by conjecture and sympathetic understanding to explain and reconstruct the past.... [And] since we discern the same process of phenomena in operation in the past as in the present, we see, there as here, the various historical cycles of human life influencing and intersecting one another. (Troeltsch, "H" in Hastings, *ERE.*)

Without uniformity, so the argument goes, we could know nothing about the past, for without an analogy from the present we could know nothing about what happened previously. In accord with this principle, some have insisted, "No amount of testimony is ever permitted to establish as past reality a thing that cannot be found in present reality.… In every other case the witness may have a perfect character—all that goes for nothing" (Becker, "DWH" in Snyder, ***DWH***, 12–13). In other words, unless one can identify miracles in the present, he has no

experience on which to base his understanding of alleged miracles in the past. The historian, like the scientist, must adopt a methodological skepticism toward alleged events in the past for which he has no parallel in the present—the present is the foundation of our knowledge of the past. As F. H. Bradley put it:

> We have seen that history rests in the last resort upon an inference from our experience, a judgment based upon our own present state of things.... [So] when we are asked to affirm the existence in past time of events, the effects of causes which confessedly are without analogy in the world in which we live, and which we know—we are at a loss for any answer but this, that ... we are asked to build a house without a foundation.... How can we attempt this without contradicting ourselves? (Bradley, *PCH*, 100.)

The Psychological Objection

It is argued, especially by those opposed to the New Testament, that history recorded by persons with religious motives cannot be trusted—their religious passion is said to obscure their historical objectivity, and thus they tend to reinterpret history in the light of their religious beliefs.

A similar criticism is at the basis of traditional form and redactional criticism, by which the New Testament writers are said to be ***creating*** or ***recreating*** the words of Jesus rather than strictly ***reporting*** them (see part 2, chapters 19 and 26). That is, the Gospels as we now have them more reflect the religious experience of the subsequent Christian church than they do the pure words of Jesus.

The Hermeneutical Objection

Perhaps the most radical form of historical relativism is deconstructionism, which treats history as literature. One of the foremost proponents of this view is Hayden White, who claims in his book ***Metahistory*** that history is poetry. White insists that no history can be written without bringing the material into a "coordinated whole" under some "unifying concept" (***M***, 89), and he believes these concepts are chosen from poetry: "I have identified four different archetypal plot structures by which historians can figure historical processes in their narratives as stories of a particular kind: Romance, Tragedy, Comedy, and

Satire" (***M***, 41). No one of these is better than the others or correct as opposed to incorrect; they are simply different. This has "permitted me to view the various debates over how history ought to be written … as essentially matters of stylistic variation within a single universe of discourse" (***M***, 42).

A RESPONSE TO HISTORICAL RELATIVISM

Despite these many strong objections to the possibility of historical objectivity, the case is by no means closed, for there are many flaws in the historical relativists' position. First, a direct response will be offered to each objection. Then, some overall arguments against historical subjectivism will be given. The direct responses given are in the order of the above objections.

A Response to the Epistemological Objections

Response to the Problem of the Unobservability of Historical Events

The first and most fundamental response to the historical subjectivists is to point out that whatever is meant by the "objective" knowledge of history they deny, it must be possible, since in their very denial they imply that they have it. How could they know that everyone's knowledge of history was not objective unless they had an objective knowledge of it by which they could determine that these other views were not objective? One cannot know ***not that*** unless he knows ***that.*** Further, if by "objective" the subjectivists mean absolute knowledge, then of course no human historian can be objective. On the other hand, if "objective" means an ***accurate and adequate***[3] presentation that reasonable people should accept, then the door is open to the possibility of objectivity.

Assuming this latter sense, it should be argued that history can be just as objective as some sciences (Block, ***HC***, 50). For example, paleontology (historical geology) is considered to be an objective science, and it deals with physical facts and processes of the past. However, the events represented by the fossil finds are no more directly accessible or ***repeatable*** to the scientists than

are historical events to the historian.

True, there are some differences. The fossil is a mechanically accurate imprint of the original event, and the eyewitness of history may be less precise in his report. But the historian may rejoin by pointing out that the natural processes that mar the fossil imprint parallel the potential personal filtering of events through the testimony of the eyewitness. At least it may be argued that if one can determine the integrity and reliability of the eyewitness, one cannot slam the door on the possibility of objectivity in history any more than on objectivity in geology.

The scientist might contend that he can repeat the processes of the past by present experimentation, whereas the historian cannot. But even here the situations are similar, for in this sense history too can be "repeated." Similar patterns of events, by which comparisons can be made, recur today as they occurred in the past. Limited social experiments can be performed to see if human history repeats itself, so to speak, and widespread experiments can be observed naturally in the differing conditions throughout the ongoing history of the world. In short, the historian, no less than the scientist, has the tools for determining what really happened in the past. The lack of direct access to the original facts or events does not hinder the one more than the other.

Some have suggested that there is yet a crucial difference between history and science of past events. They insist that scientific facts "speak for themselves," while historical facts do not. However, even here the analogy is close for several reasons.

If "fact" means the original event, then neither geology nor history is in possession of any facts. "Fact" must be taken by both to mean information about the original event, and in this latter sense facts do not exist merely subjectively in the mind of the historian. Facts are objective data whether anyone reads them or not.

What one does with data, that is, what meaning or interpretation he gives to them, can in no way eliminate the data. There remains for both science and history a solid core of objective facts, and the door is thereby left open for objectivity in both fields. In this way one may draw a valid distinction between propaganda and history: the former lacks sufficient basis in objective fact, but the latter does not. Indeed, without objective facts, no protest can be raised either against poor history ***or*** propaganda.

If history is entirely in the mind of the beholder, there is no reason one cannot decide to behold it any way he desires. In this case there would be no difference between good history and trashy propaganda. But historians, even historical

subjectivists, recognize the difference. Hence, even they assume an objective knowledge of history.

Response to the Problem of Fragmentary Accounts

The fact that accounts of history are fragmentary does not destroy historical objectivity any more than the existence of only a limited amount of fossils destroys the objectivity of geology. The fossil remains represent only a very tiny percentage of the living beings of the past; this does not hinder scientists from attempting to reconstruct an objective picture of what really happened in geological history. Scientists sometimes reconstruct a whole man on the basis of only partial skeletal remains—even a single jawbone. While this procedure is perhaps rightly suspect, nonetheless one does not need every bone in order to fill in the probable picture of the whole animal. Like a puzzle, as long as one has the key pieces he can reconstruct the rest with a measurable degree of probability. For example, by the principle of bilateral similarity one can assume that the left side of a partial skull would look like the right side that was found.

Of course, the finite reconstruction of both science and history is subject to revision. Subsequent finds may provide new facts that call for new interpretations. But at least there is an objective basis in fact for the meaning attributed to the find. Interpretations can neither create the facts nor ignore them if they wish to approach objectivity. We may conclude, then, that history need be no less objective than geology for depending on fragmentary accounts. The history of human beings is transmitted to us by partial record; scientific knowledge is also partial, and it depends on assumptions and an overall framework that may prove to be partially inadequate upon the discovery of more facts.

Whatever difficulty there may be from a strictly scientific point of view in filling in the gaps between the facts, once one has assumed a philosophical stance toward the world, the problem of objectivity in general is resolved. If there is a God, and good evidence says there is (see chapter 2), then the overall picture is already drawn; the facts of history will merely fill in the details of its meaning. If this is a theistic universe, then the artist’s sketch is already known in advance; the detail and coloring will come only as all the facts of history are fit into the overall sketch known to be true from the theistic framework. In this sense, historical objectivity is most certainly possible within a given framework—such

as a theistic worldview. Objectivity resides in the view that best fits all the facts into the overall system, that is, into systematic consistency.

A Response to the Axiological (Value) Objection

One may grant the point that ordinary language is value-laden and that value judgments are inevitable. This by no means makes historical objectivity impossible (Butterfield, "MJH" in Meyerhoff, ***P***, 244). Objectivity means to be fair in dealing with the facts; it means to present what happened as accurately as possible.

Further, objectivity means that when one interprets why these events occurred, the language of the historian should ascribe to these events the value they really had in their original context. If this is accomplished, then an objective account of history is achieved. In this way objectivity is seen to be ***demanding*** value judgments rather than ***avoiding*** them.

The question is not whether value language can be objective but rather whether value statements objectively portray the events the way they really were. Once the worldview has been determined, value judgments are not undesirable or merely subjective; they are, in fact, essential and objectively required. If this is a theistic world, then it is not objective to place anything but a proper theistic value on the facts of history.

A Response to the Methodological Objections

Every historian employs a methodology—this in itself does not demonstrate the inadequacy of his history. ***The question is whether his methodology is good or bad.*** In response to this objection, several dimensions of the problem need discussion.

Response to the Problem of Historical Conditioning

It is true that every historian is a product of his time; each person does occupy a

relative place in the changing events of the spatio-temporal world. However, it does not follow that because the historian is a product of his time, his history is also purely a product of the time. That a person cannot avoid a relative place in history does not mean his perspective cannot attain a meaningful degree of objectivity. This criticism confuses the content of knowledge and the process of attaining it (Mandelbaum, ***PHK***, 94), as well as incorrectly joining the formation of a view with its verification. Where one derives a hypothesis is not essentially related to how its truth can be established.

Further, if relativity is unavoidable, then the position of the historical relativists is self-refuting, for either their view is historically conditioned and therefore unobjective, or else it is not relative but objective. If the latter, it thereby admits that it is possible to be objective in viewing history.

On the contrary, if the position of historical relativism is itself relative, then it cannot be taken as objectively true—it is simply a subjective opinion that has no immovable basis. In short, if it is a subjective opinion it cannot eliminate the possibility that history is objectively knowable, and if it is an objective fact about history, then objective facts can be known about history. In the first case objectivity is not eliminated, and in the second relativity is self-defeated; in either case, objectivity is possible.

Finally, the constant rewriting of history is based on the assumption that objectivity is possible: Why strive for accuracy unless it is believed that the revision is more objectively true than the previous view? Why critically analyze unless improvement toward a more accurate view is the assumed goal? Perfect objectivity may be practically unattainable within the limited resources of the historian on most if not all topics, but be this as it may, the inability to attain 100 percent objectivity is a long way from relativity. Reaching a degree of objectivity that is subject to criticism and revision is a more realistic conclusion than the relativist's arguments. There is no reason to eliminate the possibility of a sufficient degree of historical objectivity.

Response to the Problem of the Selectivity of Materials

That the historian must select his materials does not automatically make history purely subjective. Jurors make judgments "beyond reasonable doubt" without having ***all*** the evidence. If the historian has the relevant and crucial evidence, it will be sufficient to attain objectivity; one need not know everything in order to

know something. No scientist knows all the facts, and yet objectivity is claimed for his discipline. As long as no important fact is overlooked, there is no reason to eliminate the possibility of objectivity in history any more than in science. The selection of facts can be objective to the degree that the facts are selected and reconstructed in the context in which the events represented actually occurred. Since it is impossible for any historian to pack into his account everything available on a subject, it is important for him to select the points representative of the period of which he writes (Collingwood, ***IH***, 100). Condensation need not imply distortion; the minimum can be an objective summary of the maximum.

What is more, the evidence for the historicity of the New Testament, from which Christian apologetics draws its primary evidence, is greater than for that of any other document from the ancient world (see part 2, chapter 26). Thus, if the events behind it cannot be known objectively, then it is impossible to know anything else from that time period.

A Response to the Metaphysical (Worldview) Objections

Admittedly, each historian has a worldview, and the events are interpreted through this grid. But this in itself does not make objectivity impossible, since there are objective ways to treat the question of worldviews.

Response to the Problem of Arranging Materials

There is no reason why the historian cannot arrange materials without distorting the past (Nagel, "LHA" in Meyerhoff, ***P***, 208). Since the original construction of events is available to neither the historian nor the geologist, it is necessary to reconstruct the past on the basis of the available evidence. Yet ***reconstruction*** does not necessitate ***revision;*** selecting material may occur without neglecting significant matters. Every historian must arrange his material. The important thing is whether or not it is arranged or rearranged in accordance with the original arrangement of events as they really occurred. As long as the historian incorporated consistently and comprehensively all the significant events in accordance with the way things really were, he was being objective. It is

neglecting or twisting important facts that distorts objectivity.
The historian may desire to be selective in the compass of his study; he may wish to study only the political, economic, or religious dimensions of a specific period. But such specialization does not demand total subjectivity, for one can be particular without losing the overall context in which he operates. It is one thing to focus on specifics within an overall field and quite another to totally ignore or deliberately distort the big picture in which the intensified interest is occurring. As long as the specialist stays in touch with reality rather than reflecting the pure subjectivity of his own fancy, there is no reason why a measurable degree of objectivity cannot be maintained.

Response to the Problem of the Structuring of the Materials

Those who argue against the objectivity of history apart from an overall worldview must be granted the point, for without a worldview it makes no sense to talk about objective meaning (Popper, ***PH***, 150f). Meaning is system-dependent within a given meaning, but within another system it may have a very different meaning. Without a context meaning cannot be determined, and the context is provided by the worldview and not by the bare facts themselves. Assuming the correctness of this criticism, as we do, does not eliminate the possibility of an objective understanding of history. Rather, it points to the necessity of establishing a worldview in order to attain objectivity. This has already been done earlier (chapter 2) in establishing the evidence for a theistic worldview. Once this is clear, the metaphysical framework for an objective view of history is in place.
Without such a metaphysical structure, one is simply arguing in a circle with regard to the assumed causal connection and the attributed importance of events. To affirm that facts have “internal arrangement” begs the question; the real question is, “How does one know the correct arrangement?” Since the facts are arrangeable in at least three different ways (chaotic, cyclical, and linear), it is logically fallacious to assume that one of these is the way the facts were actually arranged. The same set of dots can have the lines drawn in many ways.
The assumption that the historian is simply discovering (and not drawing) the lines is gratuitous. The fact is that the lines are not known to be there apart from an interpretive framework through which one views them. Therefore, the problem of the objective meaning of history cannot be resolved apart from

appeal to worldview. Once the skeletal sketch is known, then one can know the objective placing (meaning) of the facts. However, apart from a structure the mere grist of history means nothing.

Without a metaphysical framework there is no way to know which events in history are the most significant and, hence, there is no way to know the true significance of these and other events in their overall context. The argument that importance is determined by which events influence the most people is inadequate for several reasons. This is a form of historical utilitarianism, and as such it is subject to the same criticisms as any utilitarian test for truth (see chapter 7). The most does not determine the best; all that is proved by great influence is great influence, not great importance or great value. Even after most people have been influenced, one can still ask the question as to the truth or value of the event that influenced them. Significance is not determined by ultimate outcome but by overall framework. Of course, if one assumes as an overall framework that the events that influence the most people in the long run are most significant, then that utilitarian framework will indeed determine the significance of an event. But what right does one have to assume a utilitarian framework any more than a non-utilitarian one? Here again, it is a matter of justifying one's overall framework or worldview.

The argument advanced by some objectivists is that past events must be structured or they are unknowable and faulty. However, all this argument proves is that it is necessary to understand facts through some structure, otherwise it makes no sense to speak of facts. The question of which structure is correct must be determined on some basis other than the mere facts themselves. Further, even if there were an objectivity of bare facts, it would provide at best only the mere ***what*** of history. But objective meaning deals with the ***why*** of these events; this is impossible apart from a structure of meaning in which the facts may find their placement of significance. Objective meaning apart from a worldview is impossible.

Nevertheless, granted that there is justification for adopting a theistic worldview, the objective meaning of history becomes possible, for within the theistic context each fact of history becomes a theistic fact. Given the factual order of events and the known causal connection of events, the possibility of objective meaning surfaces. The chaotic and the cyclical frameworks are eliminated in favor of the linear, and within the linear view of events causal connections emerge as the result of their context in a theistic universe. Theism provides the sketch on which history paints the complete picture. The pigments of mere fact take on real

meaning as they are blended together on the theistic sketch. In this context, objectivity means systematic consistency; that is, the most meaningful way all of the facts of history can be blended together into the whole theistic sketch is what really happened—historical facts.

Response to the Alleged Unknowability of Miracles

Even if the objectivity of history is accepted, many historians object to any history that contains miracles, which poses a further metaphysical problem for Christianity. This secular rejection of miracle-history is often based on Troeltsch's principle of analogy, and this argument turns out to be similar to Hume's objection to miracles built on the uniformity of nature (see chapter 3). David Hume argued that no testimony about alleged miracles should be accepted if it contradicts the uniform testimony of nature; in like manner, Troeltsch would reject any particular event in the past for which there is no analogue in the uniform experience of the present.

Now, there are at least two reasons for rejecting Troeltsch's argument from analogy. ***First***, as C. S. Lewis insightfully commented,

> If we admit God, must we admit Miracles? Indeed, indeed, you have no security against it. That is the bargain. Theology says to you in effect, "Admit God and with Him the risk of a few miracles, and I in return will ratify your faith in uniformity as regards the overwhelming majority of events" (Lewis, *M*, 109).

A miracle is a special act of God. If God exists, then acts of God are possible; hence, any alleged historical procedure that eliminates miracles is bogus.

Second, Troeltsch's principle begs the question in favor of a naturalistic interpretation of all historical events (see chapter 3)—it is a methodological exclusion of the possibility of accepting the miraculous in history. The testimony for regularity in general is in no way a testimony against an unusual event in particular; the cases are different and should not be evaluated in the same way. As we demonstrated, empirical generalizations (e.g., "Men do not rise from the dead") should not be used as counter-testimony to good eyewitness accounts that in a particular case someone ***did*** rise from the dead. The historical evidence for any particular historical event must be assessed on its own merits, completely

aside from generalizations about other events.

There is another objection to the Troeltsch analogy-type argument: It proves too much. Again, as Richard Whateley (1787–1863) convincingly argued, on this uniformitarian assumption not only would miracles be excluded but so would many unusual events of the past, including those surrounding Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821) (Whateley, ***HDCENB***, all).

No one can deny that the probability against Napoleon's successes was great. His prodigious army was destroyed in Russia, and a few months later he led a different army in Germany that likewise was ruined at Leipzig. However, the French supplied him with yet another army sufficient to make a formidable stand in France—this was repeated five times until at last he was confined to an island. Without question, the particular events of his career were highly improbable, but there is no reason on these grounds that we should doubt the historicity of the Napoleonic adventures. History, contrary to scientific hypothesis, does not depend on the universal and repeatable; rather, it stands on the sufficiency of good testimony for particular and unrepeatable events. Were this not so, nothing could be learned from history.

It is clearly a mistake to import uniformitarian methods from scientific experimentation into historical research. Repeatability and generality are needed to establish scientific laws or general patterns (of which miracles would be particular exceptions), but what is needed to establish historical events is credible testimony that these particular events did indeed occur (see part 2, chapter 26). So it is with miracles—it is an unjustifiable mistake in historical methodology to assume that no unusual and particular event can be believed no matter how great the evidence for it. Troeltsch's principle of analogy would destroy genuine historical thinking. The honest historian must be open to the possibility of unique and particular events of the past, whether they are miraculous or not. He must not exclude a priori the possibility of establishing events like the resurrection of Christ without a careful examination of the testimony and evidence concerning them.

It is incorrect to assume that the same principles by which ***empirical*** science works can be used in ***forensic*** science. Since the latter deals with unrepeated and unobserved events in the past, it operates on the principles of ***origin science***, not on those of ***operation science*** (see Geisler, "O, S" in ***BECA***, 567f.). These principles do not eliminate, but establish, the possibility of objective knowledge of the past—whether in science or history.

Observations on the Nature of Miracles and History

In response to these analyses of the historical objectivity of miracles, it is important to make several observations.

First, surely the Christian apologist does not want to contend that miracles are a mere product of the historical process. The supernatural occurs ***in*** the historical but it is not a product ***of*** the natural process. What makes it miraculous is the fact that the natural process alone does not account for it; there must be an injection from the realm of the supernatural into the natural, or else there is no miracle. This is especially true of a New Testament miracle (see chapter 3), where the means by which God performed the miracle is unknown.

Second, in accordance with the objectivity of history just discussed, there is no good reason why the Christian should yield to the radical existential theologians on the question of the objective and historical dimensions of a miracle. Again, miracles are not of the natural historical process, but they do occur in it. Even Karl Barth (1886–1968) made a similar distinction when he wrote,

> The resurrection of Christ, or his second coming … is not a historical event; the historians may reassure themselves … that our concern here is with the event which, though it is the only real happening in, is not a real happening of, history. (*WGWM*, 90.)

But unlike many existential theologians, we must also preserve the historical context in which a miracle occurs, for without it there is no way to verify the objectivity of the miraculous. Miracles do have a historical dimension without which no objectivity of religious history is possible, and, as was argued above, historical methodology can identify this objectivity (just as surely as scientific objectivity can be established) within an accepted framework of a theistic world. In short, miracles may be more than historical but they cannot be less than historical. It is only if miracles do have historical dimensions that they are both objectively meaningful and apologetically valuable.

Third, a miracle can be identified within an empirical or historical context both directly and indirectly, both objectively and subjectively. A miracle is both scientifically unusual as well as theologically and morally relevant. The first characteristic is knowable in a directly empirical way; the second is knowable only indirectly through the empirical in that it is "odd" and evocative of something more than the mere empirical data of the event. For example, a virgin birth is scientifically odd, but in the case of Christ it is represented as a sign that was used to draw attention to Him as something more than human. ***The***

theological and moral characteristics of a miracle are not empirically objective, in this sense they are experienced subjectively.
This does not mean, however, that there is no objective basis for the moral dimensions of a miracle. Since this is a theistic universe (see chapter 2), morality is objectively grounded in God. Therefore, the nature and will of God are the objective grounds by which one can test whether or not the event is subjectively evocative of what is objectively in accord with what is already known of God; if not, one shouldn't believe the event is a miracle. It is axiomatic that acts of a theistic God would not be used to confirm what is not the truth of God.
To sum up, miracles happen ***in*** history but are not completely ***of*** history. Miracles, nonetheless, are historically grounded—they are more than historical but are not less than historical. There are both empirical and super-empirical dimensions to supernatural events. The former are knowable in an objective way, and the latter have a subjective appeal to the believer. But even here there is an objective ground in the known truth and goodness of God by which the believer can judge whether or not the empirically odd situations that appeal to him for a response are really acts of this true and good God.

A Response to the Psychological Objection

Another charge that is often heard is that the religious purposes of the Gospel writers, which are evident to all, negate their ability to present an objective historical report. Both A. N. Sherwin-White and Michael Grant have responded to this complaint.[4] Indeed, a form of this criticism is implied in both form criticism and redactional criticism, by which the Gospel writers are said to be ***creating*** the words of Jesus in terms of their own religious setting rather than strictly ***reporting*** them. This objection is without grounds for several reasons.[5]
First, there is no logical connection between one's purpose and the accuracy of the history he writes. People with no religious motives can write bad history, and people with religious motives can write good history.
Second, other important writers from the ancient world wrote with motives similar to the Gospel authors. Plutarch (b. A.D. 46), for example, declared, "My

design was not to write histories, but lives."[6]

Third, complete religious propaganda literature, such as some critics see the New Testament, was actually unknown in the ancient world. Sherwin-White declared, "We are not acquainted with this type of writing in ancient historiography" (***RSRLNT***, 189).

Fourth, unlike other early accounts, the Gospels were written, at a maximum, only decades after the events. Many other secular writings, such as those of Livy (59/64 B.C.—A.D. 17) and Plutarch, were recorded centuries after the events.

Fifth, as shown above, the historical confirmation of New Testament writings is overwhelming (see part 2, chapter 23). So the argument that their religious purpose destroyed their ability to write good history is simply contrary to the facts.

Sixth, the New Testament writers take great care to distinguish their words from the words of Jesus, as any red-letter edition of the Bible clearly indicates (see also John 2:20–22; 1 Cor. 7:10, 12; 11:24–25; Acts 20:35). This act of distinguishing reveals their honest attempt to separate what Jesus actually said from their own thoughts and feelings on the matter.

Seventh, in spite of the religious purpose of Luke's gospel (Luke 1:4; cf. Acts 1:1), he states a clear interest for historical accuracy, which has been overwhelmingly corroborated by archaeology (see part 2, chapter 26). In his own words,

> Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as *they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses* and servants of the word. [Therefore,] *since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.* (Luke 1:1–4, emphasis mine)

Eighth, the existence of religious bias is no guarantee of historical inaccuracy. A writer can recognize his own bias and avoid its crippling effects. If this were not so, then even people with nonreligious (or anti-religious) biases could not write accurate history either. Yet many claim to be able to do so.

Ninth, the New Testament is confirmed to be historical by the same criteria applied to other ancient writings. Thus, this criticism either misses the mark or else it destroys all ancient histories.

Tenth, if the historicity of an event must be denied because of the strong motivation of the person giving it, then virtually all eyewitness testimony from survivors of the holocaust must be discounted. But this is absurd, since these

people provide the best evidence of all. Likewise, a physician's passion to save his patient's life does not negate his ability to make an objective diagnosis of his disease, nor do an author's religious motives nullify his ability to record accurate history.

A Response to the Hermeneutical Objection

The hermeneutical objection utterly fails to show that all history is relativistic. There are several basic reasons sufficient to demonstrate why the possibility of objectivity in history has not—and cannot—be systematically eliminated.

The Relativity Argument Presupposes Some Objective Knowledge

A careful look at the arguments of the relativists reveals that they presuppose objective knowledge about history, and this is seen in at least two ways. ***First***, they speak of the need to select and arrange the "facts" of history. But if they are really "facts," then they, as facts, represent some objective knowledge in themselves. After all, it is one thing to argue about the ***interpretation*** of the facts, but quite another to deny that there are any facts of history to argue about. For example, it is understandable that one's worldview will color how he understands the fact that Christ died on a cross in the early first century; it is quite another to deny that this is an historical reality (see chapter 26).
Second, the very fact that relativists believe one's worldview can distort how one views history implies that there is a correct way to view it. Otherwise, how would one know that some views are distorted? That some views are incorrect (not correct) implies that there is a correct view. This leads to the next criticism.

Total Historical Relativity Is Self-Defeating

As a matter of fact, total relativity (whether historical, philosophical, or moral) is self-defeating. How could one know that history was completely unknowable unless he knew something about it? How could he know all historical knowledge was subjective unless he had some objective knowledge of it? In truth, the total relativist must stand on the pinnacle of his own absolutism in order to relativize everything else. The claim that all history is subjective turns out to be an objective claim about history. Total historical relativism cuts its own throat. Ironically, one of history's most noted relativists later gave one of the best critiques of it. Charles Beard (1874–1948) wrote,

> Contemporary criticism shows that the apostle of relativity is destined to be destroyed by the child of his own brain. [For] if all historical conceptions are merely relative to passing events ... then the conception of relativity is itself relative.... [In short,] *the apostle of relativity will surely be executed by his own logic.* (In Meyerhoff, ed., *PH*, 138, emphasis added.)

Of course, some might claim that historical knowledge is not totally but only partially relative. To this, objectivists note two things. ***First***, it is an admission that history, at least some history, is objectively knowable, and thus it cannot claim to have eliminated in principle the possibility that the Christian claims are historically knowable.

Second, since the historical evidence for the central truths of Christianity is more amply supported by historical evidence than for almost any other event from the ancient world, it is also clear that a partial relativity view does not eliminate the historical verifiability of Christianity. In brief, total historical relativism is self-defeating, and partial historical relativism admits historically verifiable truths.

Historical Relativists Attempt Objective History Themselves

Another inconsistency in historical relativism is that the heralders of this view sometimes attempt to write objective history themselves. For example, while Beard was the apostle of historical relativism, he nevertheless attempted to write his own "scientific work" on the "essence of history" (see Meyerhoff, ***PH***, 200–01). Beard believed his own understanding of the Constitution "was objective and factual" (ibid., 190–96; 200–01).

Ability to Recognize Bad History Implies Objective Knowledge

Another overlooked point is that the ability to detect bad history is itself a tacit admission that objectivity is possible. Ernest Nagel (1901–1985) pointed out that "the very fact that biased thinking may be detected and its sources investigated shows that the case of objective explanations in history is not necessarily hopeless" (in Meyerhoff, ibid., 213). In other words, the very fact that one can know that some histories are better than others reveals that there must be some objective understanding of the events by which this judgment is made.

Historians Employ Normal Objective Standards

Like science, history employs normal inductive measures that render the facts knowable. As W. H. Walsh observed, "Historical conclusions must be backed by evidence just as scientific conclusions must" (in Gardiner, ***TH***, 301). Thus, Beard adds, "The historian … sees the doctrine of relativity crumble in the cold light of historical knowledge" (in Meyerhoff, ***PH***, 148). Even Karl Manheim, whom Patrick Gardiner called "the most forthright proponent of historical

relativism in recent times," observes, "The presence of subjective concerns does not imply renunciation of the postulate of objectivity and the possibility of arriving at decisions in factual disputes" (see Habermas, "PHHRHE" in Bauman, ***EA***, 105).

SOME GENERAL REMARKS CONCERNING THE OBJECTIVITY OF HISTORY

There are several general conclusions to be drawn from the foregoing analysis of the subjectivity/objectivity controversy. ***First***, absolute objectivity is possible only for an infinite Mind. Finite minds must be content with systematic consistency, that is, fair but revisable attempts to reconstruct the past based on an established framework of reference that comprehensively and consistently incorporates all the facts into the overall sketch provided by the worldview. Of course, if there is good reason to believe this infinite Mind exists (and there is—see chapter 2), and if this infinite Mind (God) has revealed Himself (see chapter 4), then an interpretation of history from an absolute perspective is available (see part 2) in His Word (the Bible).

Second, even without this absolute perspective, an adequately objective, finite interpretation of history is possible, for, as was shown above, the historian can be as objective as the scientist. Neither geologists nor historians have direct access to complete data on repeatable events. Further, both must use value judgments in selecting and structuring the partial material available to them.

Third, in reality, neither the scientist nor the historian can attain objective meaning without the use of some worldview by which he understands the facts. Bare facts cannot even be known apart from some interpretive framework; hence, the need for structure or a meaning-framework is crucial to the question of objectivity. Unless one can settle the question as to whether this is a theistic or non-theistic world on grounds independent of the mere facts themselves, there is no way to determine the objective meaning of history. If, on the other hand, there are good reasons to believe that this is a theistic universe, then objectivity in history is a possibility, for Once the overall viewpoint is established, it is simply a matter of finding the view of history that is most consistent with that overall system. That is, systematic consistency is the test for objectivity in matters

historical as well as scientific.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Some historians contend that there is no objective basis for determining the past, and that even if there were an objective basis, miracles are not a part of objective history. These arguments, however, fail. History can be as objective as science. Once again, the geologist likewise has only secondhand, fragmentary, and unrepeatable evidence viewed from his own vantage point and in terms of his own values and interpretive framework. Although it is true that interpretive frameworks are necessary for objectivity, it is not true that every worldview must be totally relative and subjective. Indeed, this argument is self-defeating, for it assumes that it is an objective statement about history that all statements about history are necessarily not objective.

As to the objection that miracle-history is not objectively verifiable, two points are important. ***First***, miracles can occur ***in*** the historical process without being ***of*** that natural process (see chapter 3). ***Second***, the moral and theological dimensions of miracles are not totally subjective. They call for a subjective response, but there are objective standards of truth and goodness (in accordance with the theistic God) by which the miracle can be objectively assessed. It can be concluded, then, that the door for the objectivity of history and thus the objective historicity for miracles is open. No mere question-begging uniformitarian principle of analogy can slam the door a priori. Evidence that supports the general nature of scientific law may not be legitimately used to rule out good historical evidence for unusual but particular events of history. This kind of argument is not only invincibly naturalistic in its bias but if applied consistently it would rule out much of known and accepted secular history. The only truly honest approach is to examine carefully the evidence for an alleged event in order to determine its authenticity (see part 2, chapter 26).

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CHAPTER TWELVE

METHOD: THE METHODOLOGICAL PRECONDITION

Like other theological topics, the method of doing theology is widely debated. Nonetheless, methodology is of vital importance, because in a very real sense methodology determines theology. That is to say, ***how*** theology is done will determine ***what*** the theological conclusion will be. For example, if theology is done with a naturalistic method, inevitably the conclusions will be naturalistic. Likewise, if one begins with a theistic God (see chapter 2) and a method open to the supernatural (see chapter 3), the conclusions will not be unfavorable to the supernatural.

THE NATURE AND KINDS OF METHODS

There are many kinds of methods, the most widely known being the scientific method as set forth by Francis Bacon (see page 207 on the inductive method). This, of course, was the inductive and experimental logic (method) of modern science, as opposed to the deductive logic formulated by Aristotle (see page 206 on the deductive method).

In actual practice there are many methods that have been employed in the discipline of theology, including the inductive, deductive, abductive, retroductive, systematic, and pragmatic methods, as well as several others. First, each method will be defined; then, the question will be asked whether and how it is applicable to the construction of a systematic theology. One particular doctrine —the doctrine of Scripture—will be used as an example. This will serve as an introduction to part 2.

VARIOUS KINDS OF THEOLOGICAL METHODS

Since theological methods have been borrowed from other disciplines, it will be helpful to survey the major methods of discovering truth from the earliest times to the present. While not all these methods will make a positive contribution to the theological enterprise, still they are illuminating.

The Reductio Absurdum Method

The presocratic philosopher Zeno (c. 495–c. 430 B.C.) was a disciple of Parmenides (b. 515 B.C.), the monist who argued that nothing existed except one solitary Being (see chapter 2). In order to demonstrate this thesis, Zeno, the disciple, would reduce the opposing view to the absurd by showing how it ended in paradox. For example, assume that time, space, or motion is composed of real parts (as pluralism does); Zeno insisted that consequently we would end up in hopeless contradictions. Nothing, he argued, could move from point A to point B, since there are an infinite number of points between them, and it is impossible to traverse the infinite. Therefore, by reducing pluralism of being to the absurd, he believed he had proven monism (that all is one).

Even though Zeno's application of the *Reductio Absurdum* argument is rejected by theists (see chapter 2), nonetheless, the method itself does not necessitate any view contrary to Christian belief. Indeed, it is simply an application of a valid disjunctive syllogism later developed by Aristotle (see chapter 5).

The Socratic Method

This method, named after its fourth century B.C. founder, could better be called the dialogical method or the method of interrogation, for it is based on the simple technique of discovering truth by asking the right questions. Socrates (c. 470–399 B.C.) illustrates this method in his dialogue, ***Meno*** (recorded by Plato), a text about an untutored slave boy who is taught geometry by Socrates' thoughtful, logical, and systematic questioning of him.
Of course, in the socratic context the method was based on the belief in reincarnation, where allegedly Meno had known these geometric truths in their pure form in a previous life. However, others have abstracted this methodology from the belief in reincarnation and used it to lead a mind down the path of truth by asking the right questions.

The Deductive Method

Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) is credited with being the first to record the canons of deductive logic (***Prior Analytics***), whereby a person can validly infer one truth from other truths. These deductions are done by way of logical syllogisms, which take on either a categorical, hypothetical, or disjunctive form (see chapter 5). An illustration of each will suffice to sketch the method.
A categorical (unconditional) deduction (syllogism) is as follows:

(1) If the whole Bible is true, then so is John 14:6.
(2) The whole Bible is true.
(3) Consequently, John 14:6 is true—Jesus is the only way to God.

If the first two premises are true, then the conclusion must be true, since it follows necessarily from them. The seven rules of the categorical syllogism and all valid forms resulting from them are spelled out elsewhere (see chapter 5).

A hypothetical (conditional) deduction (syllogism) is:

(1) If all men are sinners, then John is a sinner.
(2) John is a man.
(3) Hence, John is a sinner.

In this case the second premise has met the condition stated in the first premise, and thus if the conditional is correct, the conclusion must be true. In this logical form the conclusion follows validly only if the second premise either affirms the antecedent (the "if" part of the first premise) or else denies the consequent (the "then" part of the first premise).

A disjunctive syllogism is an either/or reasoning process. For example:

(1) Either a person is saved or else he is lost (not saved).
(2) John is not lost.
(3) Therefore, John is saved.

A conclusion follows logically from a disjunctive syllogism only if one of the two disjuncts (statements on either side of the "or") is negated.

Although Aristotle also spoke of inductions, his deductive method of logic dominated major philosophies of the ancient, medieval, and even more recent times.

The Inductive Method

The monopolistic spell of deductive logic was broken when Francis Bacon (1561–1626) published his new logic, *The Novum Organum* ("The New Organ"). In it he developed inductive logic and experimental logic, known popularly as the scientific method. Later, John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) put these into their current form.

There are two broad categories of induction: imperfect and perfect. Most

inductions fall into the former, since it is practically impossible to examine every particular thing in its class to see if they all have the same characteristics that the observed ones have. For high probability, it is sufficient to examine a large number of them.
On the other hand, a perfect induction is where every one of the particulars in that class can be and has been examined. For instance, I can easily examine every object in the bag and affirm with certainty that (for instance) all are apples. Perfect inductions are also possible with regard to biblical teaching, since the Bible contains a finite and manageable amount of material. Hence, a high degree of certainty is obtainable in a perfect induction.

The Cartesian Method

The French philosopher René Descartes (1596–1650) developed a method for discovering truth that began in systematic and methodical doubt. Its steps include the following:

(1) I doubt, therefore, I think.
(2) I think, therefore, I am.
(3) I am, therefore, God is (because I am an imperfect being—namely, a doubter), and the imperfect implies the Perfect (God) by which I know that
(4) God is, and therefore the world is (for a perfect God would not deceive me about the strong, steady impression I am getting of an external world outside myself).
(5) Consequently, I exist, God exists, and the world exists (see Descartes, ***M***).

If there is doubt about any of these conclusions, Descartes outlined a method by which one could obtain certainty. The steps are as follows:

(1) The rule of certainty: Only indubitably clear and distinct ideas should be accepted as true.
(2) The rule of division: All problems should be reduced to their simplest parts.
(3) The rule of order: All reasoning should proceed from simple to complex.

(4) The rule of enumeration: One should review and recheck each step of the argument (see Descartes, ***DM***).

In this way Descartes believed we could not only arrive at truth but that we could know it with certainty. While we need not accept all of Descartes' conclusions, his method of using self-refuting statements and his rules for being more certain are helpful to the theologian.

The Euclidian Method

Euclid (fl. 300 B.C.) developed a system of geometry that began with certain basic definitions and axioms held to be self-evident (e.g., parallel lines never meet). From these all other postulates and theorems were deduced logically and systematically; for example, the Pythagorean theorem—the square of the hypotenuse of a right triangle is equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides ($A^2+B^2=C^2$). This can be deduced by noting that an example of a right triangle, having two sides of 3 and 4 inches and a third side (hypotenuse) of five inches, would yield $3\times3=9 + 4\times4=16$ (which added together equals 25) and a hypotenuse of $5\times5=25$. This ability to deduce such things not only provided certainty but also invaluable knowledge for architecture and engineering.
This Euclidian deductive method was used in modern times by the great rationalist and philosopher Benedict Spinoza. Spinoza developed an entire philosophical system, including proofs for God as well as descriptions of the creation and nature of human beings, free will, and ethics (see Spinoza, ***E***). From deductive rationalism Spinoza also deduced the impossibility of miracles, and he began the first systematic effort at negative higher criticism of the Bible (***TPT***). This method applied to Scripture dramatically illustrates that not all methods can be fruitfully utilized in evangelical theology, particularly those with antisupernatural implications (see chapter 3). Nonetheless, once one has universal premises from either general or special revelation (see chapter 4), deductive logic is helpful in coming to other conclusions.

The Transcendental Method

The agnostic philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) is credited with the development of a transcendental method (Kant, ***CPR***). A transcendental argument is neither deductive nor inductive; it is more reductive, arguing back to the necessary preconditions of something being the case. The transcendental method seeks for necessary conditions of a given state of affairs, not an actual cause of them.

Evangelical thinkers have used this methodology in both minimal and maximal ways. In the maximal category, it has been utilized by Cornelius Van Til and his followers as an apologetic method (***IDF***, 100–101). As such they affirm that in order to make sense out of the world, it is necessary to postulate the existence of the triune God as revealed in the Bible as the necessary (though not sufficient) condition to make sense out of our world.[1]

Some Christian apologists have also made minimal usage of a transcendental argument. John Carnell, for example, used it to defend the principle of noncontradiction, insisting that one had to posit it as an absolute condition for all thought, otherwise, no thought would be possible (Carnell, ***ICA***, 159).

The Abductive Method

Charles Sanders Pierce (1839–1914) is credited with developing the abductive method (see ***PSM***). It is neither deductive (which argues from general to particular) nor inductive (which argues from particular to general). Rather, an abduction is more like an insight or intuitive flash that provides one with a model for doing science or theology, as the case may be.

Sometimes this abduction comes as an intelligent guess and other times in a dream or vision. The father of modern rational philosophy, René Descartes, received his insight from dreams of a man selling watermelons. The scientist Nikola Tesla (1856–1943) got his idea for the internal workings of an alternating current motor from a vision he had while reading the poet Goethe. Friedrich August Kekulé (1829–1896) received the idea for the scientific model of the benzine molecule while having a vision of a snake biting its tail. Often, an

abduction comes from applying the model derived from one discipline of study to another (see Ramsey, ***MM***). Sometimes the model is abduced from concentrating on the particular problem at hand.
Whatever the source of the model, it is neither deduced from prior premises nor induced from previous data; it is simply intelligent insight into the situation. Theology, like other disciplines, fruitfully uses abductions to derive models by which Scripture can be correctly interpreted.

The Retroductive Method

The retroductive method is the method of enrichment. As a snowball gathers more snow on each turn downhill, so a retroduction in theology is where additional insight is gained from further knowledge. In this way, the more one knows, the more one knows what he knows better. For example, each time one reads through the Bible, it enables him to understand more clearly what he already knew about the Bible. Likewise, the more one learns, the better one comprehends what he already comprehends, no matter what the subject. Sometimes this movement is described as a circle. But it is considered a benign circle, not a vicious circle;[2] in the discipline of interpretation it is called "the hermeneutical circle." This is the process by which one understands the whole in the light of the parts and the parts in the light of the whole. Of course, each time one goes through the parts, he experiences a retroductive increase in his knowledge of the whole.

The Analogical Method

Joseph Butler (1692–1752) is best known for his famous ***Analogy of Religion*** (c. 1736), in which he defends Christianity against deism, particularly that of Anthony Ashley Cooper (1671–1713), third Earl of Shaftesbury, who wrote ***Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*** (1711), and Matthew Tindal (c. 1655–1733), who penned ***Christianity As Old As the Creation*** (1730).

Butler was influenced by an older contemporary, Samuel Clarke (1675–1729), who was a disciple of Sir Isaac Newton (1642–1727) and a defender of the Christian faith. Butler's famous ***Analogy of Religion*** is a presentation of the plausibility of Christianity in terms of the analogy between revealed and natural religion.

The Use of Probability

In accordance with the empirical basis of our knowledge and the limited nature of science, Butler argued that our knowledge of nature is only probable. From this he concluded two things in the defense of Christianity. ***First***, since this is the case, "one is always in the position of a potential learner, and so one never can posit what one knows of nature as ***the standard*** to judge what is natural" (Rurak, "BA" in the ***ATR***). ***Second***, probability, which is the guide to life, supports the belief in a supernatural revelation from God in the Bible and the miracles of Christ.

The Objection to Deism

Butler directed his attack against the deist Tindal, who argued, "There's a religion of nature and reason written in the hearts of every one of us from the first creation by which mankind must judge the truth of any instituted religion whatever …" that may come after it (***AR***, 50).

For deists who reject Scripture as a supernatural revelation because of its difficulties, Butler responds,

> He who believes the Scriptures to have proceeded from him who is the Author of nature, may well expect to find the same sort of difficulties in it as are found in the constitution of nature. [Hence,] he who denies Scripture to have been from God, upon account of these difficulties, may for the very same reason deny the world to have been formed by him. (*AR*, 9–10.)

Since deists admit the latter, they should not deny the former. As James Rurak notes, "Both natural and revealed religion will be assessed by the same standard, the constitution and course of nature. Natural religion cannot be used as a standard to judge revelation" ("BA" in ***ATR***, 367). There is analogy between them.

A Religion Should Be Judged As a Whole

Another result of Butler's analogous argument is that a system of religion must be judged as a whole, not simply from attacks leveled against specific parts, as the deists were prone to do. When this standard was applied to Christianity, Butler believed it revealed that there is an "Intelligent Author and Governor of nature, [and] mankind is appointed to live in a future state; that everyone shall be rewarded or punished" (***AR***, 16–17).

The Relation of Natural and Supernatural Revelation

With the deists Butler agrees that God is the Author of nature and that Christianity contains a republication of this original revelation in creation. However, Christianity, while being a supernatural revelation, is also ***more.*** Butler explains,

> [T]he essence of natural religion may be said to consist in the religious regards to "God the Father Almighty": and the essence of revealed religion, as distinguished from natural, to consist in religious regard to "the Son," and to "the Holy Ghost."

The Defense of Miracles

Butler devoted his second chapter to the subject "of the supposed Presumption against a Revelation, considered as miraculous." In his own summary of the argument (in the margin) he insists that there is

> I. No presumption, from analogy, against the general Christian Scheme; for (1) although undiscoverable by reason or experience, we only know a small part of a vast whole; (2) even if it be unlike the known course of nature, (a) the unknown may not *everywhere* resemble the known; (b) we observe unlikeness sometimes in nature; (c) the alleged unlikeness is not complete. Thus no presumption lies against the general Christian scheme, whether we call it miraculous or not.

Further,

> II. [There is] no presumption against a primitive revelation, for (1) *miracle* is relative to a *course* of nature. (2) Revelation may well have followed Creation, which is an admitted fact. (3) The further miracle [is] no additional difficulty. (4) Tradition declares that religion was revealed at the first. III. [There is] no presumption from analogy against miracles in historical times, for (1) we have no parallel case of a second fallen world; (2) in particular, (a) there is a presumption against all alleged facts before testimony, not after testimony. [And] (b) reasons for miraculous intervention may have arisen in 5,000 years.

> (c) Man's need of supernatural guidance is such a reason. (d) Miracles [are] comparable to *extraordinary* events, against which some presumption always lies. Thus (i) miracles [are] not incredible. [In fact,] (ii) in some cases, [they are] *a priori* probable. (iii) In no case is there a peculiar presumption against them. (*AR*, 155–61.)

Butler adds,

> Upon all this I conclude; that there certainly is no such presumption against miracles, as to render them in any way incredible; that on the contrary, our being able to discern reasons for them, gives a positive credibility to the history of them, in cases where those reasons hold; and that is by no means certain, that there is any peculiar presumption at all, from analogy, even in the lowest degree, against miracles, as distinguished from other extraordinary [natural] phenomena. (*AR*)

In short, by analogy with nature, miracles are both credible and even a priori probable.

An Evaluation of Butler's View of Miracles

Space does not permit a complete evaluation of Butler's apologetic; however, a few things call for comment.

On the positive side, given the context, Butler made a significant defense of Christianity against deism. Arguing from deistic premises of natural revelation, he showed that there was no probable presumption against Christianity. Further, by reducing the test for truth from absolute certainty to reasonable probability, he made the apologetic task easier. Regardless of how one evaluates his results, Butler should be commended for his rational attempt to defend Christianity against the attacks of its naturalistic critics.

On the negative side, Butler has been criticized from both the left and the right. From the standpoint of a classical apologist, Butler unnecessarily weakened the stronger cosmological argument (see chapter 2) in favor of a weaker probability argument from analogy.

Further, some naturalists insist that Butler's argument for miracles is based on a false analogy for two reasons. ***First***, "The presumption against miracles is not merely a presumption against a specific event, but against that ***kind*** of event

taking place." ***Second***, the comparison with extraordinary events in nature is said not to be valid, "for in the case of these forces, given the same physical antecedents, the same consequents will always follow; and the truth of this can be verified by experiment" (Mossner, ***BBAR***, 161–162).

While this critique appears sound for some of the illustrations that Butler provides (e.g., electricity and magnetism), it does not work with all singularities in nature. In particular, it would not apply to the Big Bang theory (see chapter 2) held by many naturalistic scientists, since the antecedent conditions (conditions before the Big Bang) were nothing or nonbeing, from which no prediction can be made or be verified by further experiment. Further, Butler appears to be correct in the negative side of his argument that there is no a priori probability against miracles; indeed, he makes a prima facie case ***for*** their a priori probability (in chapter 3).

Finally, it should be noted that some who have used an analogical method (like John Stuart Mill) concluded that God must be finite (***TER***). This is directly contrary to the evangelical claim that God is infinite in power and perfection (see volume 2, part 1). So analogical have been used to conclude opposing systems, and, hence, as helpful as it may be as a defense or illustration of truth, analogy does not appear to be a definitive method as a sole test for the truth of a worldview. Even so, analogies are helpful supportive arguments that assist in illustrating truths grounded elsewhere.

The Dialectical Method

The dialectical method was developed by Karl Marx (1818–1883) out of what was believed to be the dialectic of his professor G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831); as noted previously, it was actually that of Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814), Hegel's contemporary (see Meuller, "HLTAS" in ***JHI***, 19). The dialectical method consists in opposing a thesis with an antithesis and making a synthesis of them. For example, Marx held that the thesis of capitalism is opposed by the antithesis of socialism and will eventually emerge into the Utopian synthesis of communism.

Following Hegel's time, there was an attempt to use a version of this method on Christianity by F. C. Baur (1792–1860) and his Tubingen school, which claimed that the first century's supposed tension between Peter's Judaistic form of

Christianity (thesis) and Paul's anti-Judaistic form of Christianity (antithesis) found its reconciliation (synthesis) in John's second-century gospel. The tragedy has been that this dialectic tended to determine the facts rather than discover them, and it has led to an overlooking if not rejecting of the evidence that points to a much earlier date for John (see part 2).

Others, like Karl Barth (1886–1968), have employed a dialectical method in their theology. In Barth's case it was the thesis of orthodoxy opposed by the antithesis of liberalism that he synthesized into neo-orthodoxy. Here again the dialectical method had significantly less than biblical and evangelical results, for while Barth accepted an orthodox view of the Virgin Birth, Trinity, and Resurrection (bodily), he retained a liberal view of universalism and a denial of the infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture.

The Pragmatic Method

Although Charles Sanders Pierce used the term "pragmatic" for the clarification of ideas, William James (1842–1910) is credited with developing a pragmatic methodology for discovering truth. James said,

> Truth *happens* to an idea. It *becomes* true, is *made* true by events.... *"The true," to put it very briefly, is only the expedient in the way of our thinking, just as "the right" is only the expedient in the way of our believing.* (*P,* 201–202.)

In brief, according to pragmatism, we know what is true by whether or not it works.

Although few acknowledge the pragmatic method to be their test for theological truth, on a popular level it is widely used. The same is true of the next method, that of experimentation.

The Experimental Method

Along with James, the "instrumentalism" of John Dewey (1859–1952), more popularly known as experimentalism, is an American contribution to the discipline of methodology. From Dewey's perspective one discovers the truth by

doing, and the final vote is cast by whether or not our experimentation produces progress. In this sense it is a melioristic methodology in that progress determines whether or not our beliefs are true, that is, whether they have heuristic value in prompting further achievement (***LTI***).
Stated in popular language, Dewey was asking us to "try before you buy"—something that can have devastating effects in one's life (as manifested in our culture's subsequent sexual and chemical experimentation). The result can be no less devastating when applied to theology, as Dewey's humanistic and antisupernatural religiosity showed (***CF***).

THE LIMITATION AND NEGATION OF CERTAIN METHODOLOGIES

It has become apparent from even the brief survey of various methods of discovering truth that not all of them are compatible with evangelical theology. A few related observations are in order.

Methodological Category Mistakes:

One of the greatest books ever written on philosophical methodology, much of which applies to theological method, is ***The Unity of Philosophical Experience*** by Étienne Gilson (1884–1978). In it he demonstrates with penetrating insight the fruitless cul-de-sacs caused in the history of philosophy by thinkers taking a methodology appropriate to one discipline and mistakenly applying it to another. This is a classic methodological category mistake.
Perhaps the most pervasive of all such errors in our time is that of evolutionism. Now, it's well established that microevolution occurs—survival of the fittest is a fact. Specific types of animals can and do adapt to their changing environment in order to survive—these small (micro) changes are observable in nature. However, all naturalistic evolutionists and many others take a big leap from there to macroevolution—the hypothesis of common ancestry. That evolution works on a small scale within specific kinds of animals does not mean that this method can be imposed on large-scale changes between different kinds of

animals.[3]
What's worse is taking the evolutionary method, which is based on small-scale biological changes, and imposing this method of understanding on entirely different disciplines, such as ethics and religion. Sir James George Frazer's flawed but widely touted ***The Golden Bough*** is an example of this serious methodological error. Frazer (1854–1941) assumed that religions evolved from animism through polytheism and henotheism to monotheism. This assumption, however, has careless disregard for the evidence that monotheism is earlier than these other forms (see Mbiti, ***ARP;*** Schmidt, ***HGNA***).

Antisupernaturalistic Methods

Clearly, any method that necessitates a naturalistic conclusion should not be used in evangelical theology. Benedict Spinoza is a classic example. His form of deductive rationalism entailed naturalism (see chapter 3), but evangelical theology is based on theism (see chapter 2), and it goes without saying that if natural law is defined as unbreakable, and a miracle as what breaks a natural law, then miracles are impossible.
However, since theism entails supernaturalism, and since the theistic belief in the creation of the universe from nothing is the biggest supernatural event of all, then miracles are automatically possible.
Some forms of antisupernaturalism are more subtle than Spinoza's question-begging definition of natural law as unbreakable. Ernst Troeltsch's historiography is a case in point (see chapter 11); his principle of analogy is a much more hidden and implicit form of naturalism. As we saw previously, he argued,

(1) The past can only be reconstructed based on the analogy of events known to us in the present.
(2) Present historical events do not provide us with any miraculous events.
(3) Hence, miraculous events cannot be part of any reconstruction (history) of past events.

In response, it need only be pointed out that Troeltsch's understanding of the principle of historical analogy is a form of historical uniformitarianism. It assumes that all history must be understood without miraculous events. Further, since it admittedly is not an argument against the possibility of miracles (but only against their being part of legitimate reconstruction of the past we call "history"), it entails a counterintuitive claim. Like David Hume, historical uniformitarianism assumes that we should disbelieve in miracles even if they occur. But it's clearly absurd to lay down a method that refuses to believe in an event even if it occurs (see chapter 3). Such methods must be soundly rejected by a biblically based theology.

Incompatible Methods

Other methodologies, while not being antisupernatural, are still incompatible with evangelical beliefs. For example, pragmatism and experimentalism are incompatible with belief in absolute truth; according to pragmatism and experimentalism, one and the same thing can work for one person but not for another. If so, then truth would be relative, but truth is not relative. Whatever is true is true for all persons, at all times, and in all places, which is what is meant by absolute truth (see chapter 7). Any pragmatic-type method that implies the relativity of truth should not be employed in evangelical theology.
This does not mean, of course, that theological truth is not practical and does not apply to one's life; it simply means that the pragmatic method is not a legitimate means of obtaining truth. If something is true, it will be practical, but simply that it is practical (workable) does not make it true.

Inappropriate Methods

Other methods must be rejected because they are inappropriate to the subject at hand, even if they are not antisupernatual or incompatible with evangelical belief. This point is made evident by Gilson's analysis (***UPE***). Taking, for example, a mathematical method and trying to do metaphysics with it (as

Spinoza did), is clearly wrongheaded. Math is perfectly capable of dealing with abstract entities but not necessarily with all concrete ones.

For example, mathematically there are an infinite number of abstract points between the two ends of my bookshelf. However, I cannot get an infinite number of books on it, no matter how small they are. Nor can one get an infinite number of sheets of paper between them, no matter how thinly the paper is sliced. A mathematical series of points (that are abstract and dimensionless) does not equate with actual, concrete objects.

Traditional logic is another case in point (see chapter 5)—it is a perfectly appropriate tool for discovering truth when dealing with known truths from which it can derive others. But as a method of discovering truth on its own, it is useless. It is not geared to inform us about reality; it can deal with only the reality that is provided to it. Failing to recognize this is the basic flaw of the ontological argument (see chapter 2). No reality, not even divine reality, can be proven by logic alone. To make the argument work one must start with something that exists; then it is no longer an ontological argument but a form of the cosmological argument (see chapter 2). A triangle is a good example: Logically, a triangle must have three sides, three angles, and they must total 180°. However, mere logic does not demand that any triangular thing actually exists. Only if an actual triangular shaped object exists does logic inform us that it must have three sides, etc.

Likewise, modern symbolic logic is not designed to handle ***what*** questions but only ***how*** questions; unlike traditional logic, it cannot deal with substances but only relationships (see Veath, ***TL***).

TOWARD DEVELOPING AN APPROPRIATE THEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

Two things should be apparent from the foregoing discussion:

(1) The method should fit its object.

(2) The method should not be contrary to the results it is supposed to produce.

A third can be added:

(3) No one method can suffice for the many steps involved in developing an evangelical theology. (This will become obvious from the following discussion.)

Step 1: An Inductive Basis in Scripture

Evangelical theology is based on a belief that the Bible and the Bible alone is the only written, infallible and inerrant revelation from God (general revelation is not written); as a result, any adequate methodology must be based on a sound exposition of Scripture. Broadly speaking, an inductive approach to understanding the text must be taken; that is, all the particular parts of the text of Scripture must be examined carefully in context before one can safely assume he has the proper interpretation (see chapter 10). Each part must be seen as a part of the whole. Likewise, the whole must be viewed as what makes sense of each part.

The ***socratic method*** of interrogation can be used effectively in discovering the meaning of the text, for one of the best ways to derive the meaning from a piece of literature is to ask questions like:

(1) Who wrote it?
(2) When did he write it?
(3) Where were they located?
(4) To whom was he speaking?
(5) What was said (or done) according to the text?[4]

By asking these crucial inductive questions, one may more effectively assess the author's expressed meaning in the text.

This broadly ***inductive*** method involves an ***abductive***, step, for once all the parts are studied, one may receive intuitive insight into how they all fit together to make up that whole. This is true whether we speak of a sentence (the smallest

unit of meaning), a paragraph, a whole book, or even the Bible as a whole (since evangelicals believe there is one Mind behind all of Scripture).
Of course, there is more to systematic theology than exegesis of the biblical text. For one thing, the teaching of each text must be correlated with that of every other teaching in the Bible. For another thing, all the teachings of Scripture must be correlated with all the teachings of God's other revelation (general revelation), with all this entails, including the systematic correlation of all human knowledge (see step 7 on page 223). This is not only a massive but also a progressive and always less-than-perfect process. Nonetheless, it is the task systematic theology has staked out for itself and to which the four volumes of this work are dedicated.

Step 2: A Deduction of Truths From Scripture

One thing systematic theology does that isn't done by exegesis alone is to draw certain logical conclusions from the premises provided by a biblical analysis. For example, the Bible teaches,

(1) God is one.
(2) There are three Persons who are God—the Father, the Son (Jesus), and the Holy Spirit.

From this it follows by logical deduction that

(3) There are three persons in the one God (God is a Tri-unity or Trinity) (see volume 2).

Also, the Bible teaches,

(1) God cannot err (Heb. 6:18).
(2) The Bible is the Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16–17; John 10:34–35).

From this we can deduce:

(3) Therefore, the Bible cannot err.

Many other teachings of Scripture can also be derived by logical deduction.

Step 3: The Use of Analogies

In addition to an induction of the biblical text and also deductions from it, the method of analogy can be used to derive and refine an understanding of God's revealed truth. Since God has revealed Himself in both special and general revelation, systematic theology can make use of analogies from either to help explain and expound truth.

One good analogy can be used to explain how the Bible can be both the Word of God and yet the words of men. A parallel theological truth is found in the two natures of Christ found in one Person, called the hypostatic union (see volume 2, part 1). Jesus had both a divine and a human nature in one person who was without sin (Heb. 4:15). Likewise, the Bible has both a divine and human nature in one book, yet without error (Matt. 22:39; John 17:17; John 10:35). In other words, the Bible is a theanthropic book just as Christ is a theanthropic person.[5]

Of course, no analogy is perfect, and there are differences here too. For instance, Christ, the theanthropic person, can be worshiped, since He is God. However, even though the Bible is a theanthropic book, it is not God and should not be worshiped.

Sometimes analogies can come from nature. Jesus and other biblical writers used them, and theology can avail itself of them as well. Read again these words from Joseph Butler:

> He who believes the Scriptures to have proceeded from him who is the Author of nature, may well expect to find the same sort of difficulties in it as are found in the constitution of nature. [Hence,] he who denies Scripture to have been from God, upon account of these difficulties, may for the very same reason deny the world to have been formed by him. (*AR*, 9–10.)

Analogies for other doctrines are also helpful. For instance, there are tri-unities in nature that are illustrative of the Tri-unity in God. Love has a "threeness" within its oneness, for love involves a Lover (the Father), a loved One (the Son), and a Spirit of love between them (the Holy Spirit). Likewise, our mind, our ideas, and our words are one, yet all three are distinctly different. Even though these are not perfect illustrations, the two illustrations of the Trinity (love and mind) are three and one at the same time.

Of course, not all analogies from nature are helpful, even if they involve a distinction involving three and one. For example, water has three states: liquid, solid, and gas. But normally these three states do not exist in the same water at the same time. Thus, the illustration lends to a heresy about God called modalism.[6]

It should be remembered that analogies do not ***prove*** a doctrine. Doctrine must be taught scripturally and only ***illustrated*** or ***supported*** by good analogies.

Step 4: The Use of General Revelation

Another important step in the overall theological method is the use of general revelation. God has revealed Himself in all of nature (Ps. 19:1; Acts 14:17), including human nature (Rom. 2:12–15). Indeed, every perfection in creation, wherever it is found, is similar (analogous) to God, since He cannot produce what He does not possess; He cannot give to creation what He does not have to give (see chapters 4, and 9).

Now, there are many things known from general revelation that are not found in Scripture, but that do cast light on what is found in Scripture. For example, as we have noted, the Bible speaks of the "four corners of the earth" (Rev. 7:1; Rev. 20:8), which, were it not for His general revelation that the earth is round, could lead one to conclude that Scripture teaches that the earth is square. Thus, the clear teaching of general revelation can be used to correct any possible misinterpretation in special revelation. Another example, though disputable, is whether the earth moves around the sun or the sun around the earth. As we stated earlier, without the knowledge gained by modern astronomy since the work of Nicolaus Copernicus (1473–1543), it wasn't difficult to interpret Joshua 10:13 ("the sun stood still") as supporting a geocentric (earth-centered) solar system.

Since that time, however, it seems wiser to take Joshua's reference as an observational comment no different than "the sunrise" (cf. Josh. 1:15), that is, as a statement made from the biblical writer's geographical perspective. Sometimes the reverse is true. A widely held scientific misinterpretation of general revelation says that macroevolution is true. However, the clear teaching of special revelation affirms that God supernaturally created certain specific kinds of life that did not evolve from each other by natural processes (Gen. 1:1–27). Thus, the plain meaning of special revelation can be used to correct a misinterpretation of general revelation. Included in "general revelation" are also facts yielded by observation and the various sciences. These would include archaeological, chronological, historical, and other factual materials. For instance, with regard to the doctrine of Scripture it is relevant to know:

(1) We do not possess the original manuscripts of Scripture.
(2) There are some errors in the manuscript copies.
(3) We must include as a part of the facts known from outside the Bible the so-called data (or phenomena) of Scripture.

The above list of things known from outside of what the Bible teaches is important because any nuanced and sophisticated doctrine of Scripture must take these concepts into consideration, as will be done in our next step, retroduction. It is also worth noting that the information derived from general revelation comes via the normal scientific method, which broadly includes induction (see above). Of course, science can also involve experimentation, intuition, and even deductions.

Step 5: The Retroductive Method

The next step in an adequate theological method involves the use of all the information gained in step 4 in order to help refine, nuance, and fill out our understanding of what is meant in the teachings of steps 1 through 3. To be specific, let's use the doctrine of Scripture as the illustration. Here is what we learn about the full theological doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture in each

step:

1. The Inductive Basis:

(a) God cannot err.

(b) The Bible is God's Word.

2. The Deductive Conclusion:

(c) The Bible cannot err.

3. The Use of Analogies:

(d) Just as Christ was divine and human yet without sin, even so the Bible is divine and human yet without error.

(e) Just as nature (God's general revelation) presents difficulties with possessing errors, so does the Bible (God's special revelation).

4. The Use of General Revelation:

(f) The earth is not square.

(g) The sun does not move around the earth.

5. The Retroductive Method:

(h) The biblical teaching is fleshed out in view of facts known from general revelation and the data (phenomena) of Scripture.

(i) There are errors in the manuscript copies.

(j) The Bible uses figures of speech and other literary devices, round numbers, everyday (nontechnical) language, paraphrases, etc.

(k) The deductive conclusion (point c) is understood in the light of the retroductive enhancement. For example:

(1) The Bible is without error only in the original text, not in all the copies.

(2) Round numbers, observational language, figures of speech, and paraphrased citations are not errors.

Step 6: Systematic Correlation (of all information into a fully orbed doctrine through use of the laws of logic that insist all truth must be noncontradictory)

The Bible is the infallible and inerrant Word of God in the original text (not in all copies). In accord with a good analogy, it is like Christ (the Word of God) in that both have a divine and human dimension, yet without error. However, the Bible should be understood in terms of the literary forms in which it is expressed, its own phenomena (data), and in accord with other revelation from God in nature.

It is important to point out that when step 2 affirms, "The Bible cannot err," we have the logically deduced and formal doctrine of inerrancy, but only in step 5 do we know specifically what this means—what the Bible ***says*** (steps 1 and 2) in the light of what it ***shows.*** The ***doctrine*** of Scripture must be understood in view of the ***data*** of Scripture.

Step 7: Each Doctrine Is Correlated With All Other Doctrines

The word ***systematic*** in systematic theology implies that all the teachings of both general and special revelation are comprehensive and consistent. This entails the use of another methodology—logic. Remember, the fundamental law of all thought is the law of noncontradiction, which affirms that A is not non-A. No two or more truths can be contradictory, which is why all biblical and extrabiblical truth can and must be brought into a consistent whole.

Consistency must be both internal and external. Internally, each biblical teaching must be logically consistent with every other biblical teaching. Externally, no teaching of Scripture can be inconsistent with any truth from general revelation. God is the author of both revelations, and He cannot contradict Himself. Hence, all contradictions must be between our ***interpretation*** of one revelation or the other. In principle, all conflicts between the two are resolvable, and the systematic theologian must attempt to harmonize them.

Step 8: Each Doctrine Is Expressed in View of the Orthodox Teachings of the Church Fathers.

Systematic theology is a fallible discipline; only the Bible is an infallible guide for faith and practice. However, theology should not be done in a vacuum—just as we can see farther spatially if we stand on the shoulders of giants, we likewise can see further theologically if we stand on the shoulders of the church fathers. One ignores the works of these great teachers at his own peril. As with other disciplines, he who ignores the past is condemned to repeat its errors. Considering seriously the enduring teachings of the orthodox Fathers of the past is essential in constructing a viable evangelical systematic theology for the present. The church has struggled long and hard with understanding God's revelations to us, and as a result the historic orthodox expressions of Christian truth have stood the test of time. To summarize, an adequate evangelical theology must be molded in the context of the ecumenical truth of the historic orthodox Christian church.

While not everything that every orthodox Father said on every theological topic is binding on contemporary evangelical theology, nonetheless, no one has any right to claim orthodoxy for any teaching that has been condemned by any of the ecumenical creeds, confessions, or councils of the church. Likewise, any teaching not addressed in the ecumenical creeds and councils that is contrary to the universal consent of the Fathers should be considered highly suspect. The burden of proof rests on anyone who wishes to hold to any such precepts; he must have overwhelmingly clear and convincing evidence from infallible Scripture.

These tests for orthodoxy can be summarized as follows: (1) What is contrary to ecumenical creeds, councils, and confessions is certainly unorthodox; (2) What is not addressed in the ecumenical creeds, councils, and confessions but is contrary to the universal consent of the Fathers is almost certainly unorthodox; and (3) What is contrary to the general consent of the Fathers is highly suspect. It is within these parameters that we employ the use of the teachings of the great theologians of the historic Christian church.

Step 9: Livability Is the Final Test for Systematic Theology

True Christianity is not merely metaphysics; it is also ethics. It is not simply theoretical; it is practical. Its goal is not only to satisfy the mind but also to shape the life. Therefore, it must be livable; its truths must be effective in a pragmatic way. Of course, not all that works is true, but what is true will work. Systematic theology must lead to practical theology; as it does, a proper view of God and the relation of His creation to Him will change one's life (see volume 2).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Methodology is crucial to theology. An unorthodox method leads logically to unorthodox conclusions. An inadequate methodology will lead to an inadequate theology. Many of the methods developed to study other disciplines are not suited for theology—at least not an evangelical theology. Those that are adaptable must be stripped of their antisupernatural and unorthodox presuppositions.

An adequate method for evangelical theology includes many steps that employ various parts of other methodologies. This is not an eclectic method; rather, it is a comprehensive methodology consistent with the corpus of evangelical theology. Used as individual methods they are inadequate, but employed as part of a total methodology, they serve an important function. For example, assuming that all truth comes from the inductive method is fruitless; nevertheless, induction (step 1) is an important element in discovering the truth of God's revelation both in nature and in Scripture.

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Section 1 – Biblical

PART TWO

BIBLE

(BIBLIOLOGY)

SECTION ONE

BIBLICAL

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE ORIGIN AND INSPIRATION OF THE BIBLE

THE NATURE OF BIBLICAL INSPIRATION

The Bible claims to be a book from God, a message with divine authority. Indeed, the biblical writers say they were moved by the Holy Spirit to utter His very words—that their message came by revelation so that what they wrote was breathed out (inspired) by God Himself.

Two Basic Texts on Revelation and Inspiration

A summary of what the Bible claims about itself is found in two crucial texts. Peter said the writers were moved by the Holy Spirit, and Paul claimed their writings were breathed out by God. Hence the Bible's claim that Spirit-moved writers uttered God-breathed writings.
2 Peter 1:20–21 declares:

> Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

In short, the prophetic Scriptures (of the Old Testament) did not originate with man but with God moving on men called prophets of God (see next page).

2 Timothy 3:16, the other classic New Testament text, reads:

> All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

While Peter speaks of the message originating with God, Paul says it becomes the written Word of God. God is the ultimate Cause, and the Scriptures are the authoritative result.

There are numerous passages in the Bible supporting the claim that the message of the Bible came from God through men of God and was inscripturated in the Word of God. Let's first examine those passages that speak of the inspiration of the Old Testament, and then we'll look at those pertaining to the New Testament.

Descriptions About the Inspiration of the Old Testament

In Deuteronomy 18:18 God said to Moses: "I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him." On his deathbed David testified, "***The Spirit of the LORD spoke through me; his word was on my tongue***" (2 Sam. 23:2).[1] God spoke to Isaiah of "***my words that I have put in your mouth***" (Isa. 59:21). Second Chronicles 34:14 tells of "***the Book of the Law of the LORD that had been given through Moses.***" The prophet Zechariah wrote of "***the words*** that ***the LORD Almighty had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets***" (Zech. 7:12).

Likewise, in Matthew 22:43 Jesus questioned, "How is it then that ***David, speaking by the Spirit***, calls Him 'Lord'?" (Ps. 110:1). Peter referred to "***God …***

who spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David …" (Acts 4:24–25). The writer of Hebrews adds, "***He [God] … spoke through David as was said before***" (Heb. 4:7).

Descriptions About the Inspiration of the New Testament

The New Testament writers considered their writings to be inspired Scripture. Peter, speaking of Paul's epistles, said they too were "Scripture" (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16) just as the Old Testament was. He wrote,

> Our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way *in all his letters*, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the *other Scriptures*, to their own destruction. (
>
> 2 Peter 3:15–16

Paul cites the gospel of Matthew as Scripture along with the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy, asserting, "***For the Scripture says*** [in Deut. 25:4], 'Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain,' and, [in Matt. 10:10] 'The worker deserves his wages' " (1 Tim. 5:18).

Paul declared in 1 Corinthians that his "***words***" are "***taught by the Spirit***" (2:13), for "***God has revealed it to us by his Spirit***" (5:10). The apostle concludes his exhortation by saying, "If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that ***the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord***" (1 Cor. 14:37). He also begins his epistle to the Galatians by reminding them that what he preached came from God: "***I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ***" (Gal. 1:12).

John the apostle opens the book of Revelation with "***The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him***" (Rev. 1:1), and he concludes the book with the declaration that he is a prophet (alongside the Old Testament prophets): "I [the angel speaking to John] am a fellow servant, with you and with ***your brothers the prophets*** and of all who keep the words of this book" (Rev. 22:9).

The Nature of a Prophet

The biblical authors were prophets and apostles of God. There are many designations of a prophet that are informative about his role in producing Scripture. A prophet is called

(1) a man of God (1 Kings 12:22), meaning that he was ***chosen*** by God;
(2) a servant of the Lord (1 Kings 14:18), indicating that he was ***faithful*** to God;
(3) a messenger of the Lord (Isa. 42:19), showing that he was ***sent*** by God;
(4) a seer (***Ro'eh***) or beholder (***Hozeh***) (Isa. 30:9–10), revealing that his ***insight*** was from God;
(5) a man of the Spirit (Hos. 9:7 RSV; cf. Mic. 3:8), telling that he spoke by the ***Spirit of the Lord;***
(6) a watchman (Ezek. 3:17), reflecting his ***alertness*** for God; and
(7) a prophet (by which he is most commonly called), marking him as a ***spokesperson*** for God.[2]

The prophets received their messages from God in various ways. Some got it by dreams (Gen. 37); others by visions (Dan. 7); some by an audible voice (1 Sam. 3) or an inner voice (Hos. 1; Joel 1). Others received revelations from angels (Gen. 19), and some by miracles (Ex. 3, Judg. 6) or the lot (Prov. 16:33). The high priest used jewels known as the Urim and Thummim (Ex. 28:30). God spoke to still others as they meditated on His revelation in nature (Ps. 19). Whatever the means, as Hebrews puts it, "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways" (Heb. 1:1). The nature of a biblical prophet is described in these vivid terms: 'The Sovereign LORD has spoken—who can but prophesy?" (Amos 3:8). He is one who speaks "everything the LORD had said" (Ex. 4:30). Again, God said, "I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him" (Deut. 18:18). He added, "Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it" (Deut. 4:2). Jeremiah was commanded: "This is what the LORD says: Stand in the courtyard of the Lord's house and speak to all the people.… Tell them everything I command you; do not omit a word" (Jer. 26:2). In brief, a prophet was someone who said what God told him to say, no more and no less.
As a mouthpiece for God bound neither to add to nor take away from His words,

the very nature of a prophet guarantees that a prophetic writing is exactly what God wants to say to humankind. Since the Bible is presented as a prophetic writing from beginning to end (Matt. 5:17–18; 2 Peter 1:20–21; Rev. 22:9), it follows that the written record of the prophets was considered inspired of God. This is what the prophet Zechariah meant when he wrote,

They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law or to the words that the

Lord

Almighty had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets. So the

Lord

Almighty was very angry. (

Zech. 7:12

)

To be sure, not all prophets were known by that name. Some were kings, like David; yet he was also a mouthpiece of God, nonetheless—he is even called a "prophet" (in Acts 2:29–39). Others were lawgivers, like Moses; but he too was a prophet or spokesman for God (Deut. 18:18). Some biblical writers even disclaimed the term "prophet" (Amos 7:14), meaning they were not a professional prophet, like Samuel and his "group of prophets" (1 Sam. 19:20). Nonetheless, even if Amos was not a prophet by office, he was certainly a prophet by gift (cf. Amos 7:15), for he was being used as a mouthpiece of God. Nor did all who were prophets always speak in the first-person style of an explicit "Thus ***saith*** the LORD." Those who wrote historical books—like the prophet Jeremiah, who wrote Kings—spoke in an implied "Thus ***did*** the Lord." Theirs, in such instances, was a message more about the ***acts*** of God on behalf of His people than the words of God ***to*** His people. Nonetheless, all the biblical writers were channels through which God conveyed His message to humankind.

What the Bible Says, God Says

Another way the Bible claims to be the Word of God is expressed in the formula "What the Bible says, God says." This is manifested in that often an Old Testament passage will claim God said it, yet when this same text is cited in the New Testament it asserts that the Scriptures said it. Sometimes the reverse is true—in the Old Testament it is the Bible that records it, while the New Testament declares that it was God who said it.

Consider this comparison:

What God Says	The Bible Says
Genesis 12:3	Galatians 3:8
Exodus 9:16	Romans 9:17
Genesis 2:24	Matthew 19:4–5
Psalm 2:1	Acts 4:24–25
Isaiah 55:3	Acts 13:34
Psalm 16:10	Acts 13:35
Psalm 2:7	Hebrews 1:5
Psalm 97:7	Hebrews 1:6
Psalm 104:4	Hebrews 1:7
Psalm 95:7	Hebrews 3:7

A couple of passages make the point. Consider Genesis 12:1–3:

> *The*
> *Lord*
> *had said*
> to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.... I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

But when this passage is cited in Galatians 3:8, we read, "***The scripture … announced …***, 'All the nations will be blessed through you' " (emphasis added).

Likewise, in Exodus 9:13–16:

> And *the*
> *Lord*
> *said* to Moses, "Get up early in the morning, confront Pharaoh and say to him, 'Th
> is what the
> Lord
> , the God of the Hebrews, says: Let my people go, so that they may worship me
> But *I [the*

> *Lord*
> *]* have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.' "

However, when the New Testament quotes this passage it says, "For ***the Scripture*** says to Pharaoh: 'I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth' " (Rom. 9:17, emphasis added).

Again, often the order is reversed; for example, in Genesis 2:24 ***the author of the book*** says, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh." Yet when this is cited by Jesus in the New Testament, He says, "Haven't you read that at the beginning ***the Creator*** 'made them male and female,' and ***said***, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'?" (Matt. 19:4–5).

The same is true with Psalm 2:1 (NKJV), where it is David who said, "Why do the nations rage, And the people plot a vain thing?" but when this is cited in Acts 4:24–25 (NKJV) we read: "So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: 'Lord, You are ***God, who … said:*** "Why did the nations rage, and the people plot vain things?" ' "

Commenting on this scriptural phenomenon, B. B. Warfield keenly observed:

> It would be difficult to invent methods of showing profound reverence for the text of Scripture as the very Word of God, which will not be found to be characteristic of the writers of the New Testament in dealing with the Old.

Warfield spent a whole chapter dealing with the above kinds of citations, noting,

> In one of these classes of passages the Scriptures are spoken of as if they were God; in the other, God is spoken of as if He were the Scriptures. [Thus] in the two taken together, God and Scriptures are brought into such conjunction as to show that in point of directness of authority no distinction was made between them. (*IAB*, 299.)

The Biblical Writers Claim: "Thus Says the Lord"

Phrases such as “thus says the Lord” (Isa. 1:11, 18; Jer. 2:3, 5, etc.), “God said” (Gen. 1:3, 6, etc.), “the Word of the LORD came to me” (Jer. 34:1; Eze. 30:1, etc.) or the like are found hundreds of times in Scripture. These reveal beyond question that the writer is claiming to give the very Word of God. In the book of Leviticus alone there are some sixty-six occurrences of phrases like “the LORD spoke unto Moses” (cf. 1:1; 4:1; 5:14; 6:1, 8, 19; 7:22).
Countless times Ezekiel records phrases such as “I saw visions” or “the word of the LORD came to me.” In one short section (chapter 12) there are eleven such examples (vv. 8, 10, 17, 19, 21, 23, 25–26, 28 twice), and sometimes there are two in the same verse (Ezek 20:3). The same is true of Jeremiah (cf. 1:2, 4, 11, 13; 2:1, 3, 5, etc.), Isaiah (cf. 1:1, 11, 18, 24; 2:1, etc.), and other prophets. The overall impression leaves no doubt as to the confessed source of their messages.

The Bible Claims to Be the “Word of God”

Many times the Bible claims to be “the Word of God” in these very terms. Jesus told the Jews of His day, “You nullify ***the word of God*** for the sake of your tradition” (Matt. 15:6). Paul speaks of the Scriptures as ***“the oracles of God”*** (Rom. 3:2 NKJV), and Peter declares, “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through ***the living and enduring word of God***” (1 Peter 1:23). And the writer of Hebrews affirms, “For ***the word of God*** is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword” (4:12).

The Bible Claims to Have Divine Authority

There are many other words or phrases the Bible uses to describe itself that entail the claim to divine authority. Jesus said the Bible has indestructibility in that it will never pass away (Matt. 5:17–18); it is infallible or “cannot be broken” (John 10:35); it has final authority (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10); and it is sufficient for faith and practice (Luke 16:31; cf. 2 Tim. 3:16–17).
The extent of divine authority in Scripture includes:

(1) all that is written—2 Tim. 3:16;
(2) even the very words—Matt. 22:43; 1 Cor. 2:13;
(3) and tenses of verbs—Matt. 22:32; Gal. 3:16;
(4) even the smallest parts of words—Matt. 5:17–18.

That is, even though the Bible was ***not mechanically dictated*** by God to man, nonetheless, the result is just as perfect as if it had been. The biblical authors claimed that God is the source of the very words of Scripture, since He supernaturally superintended the process by which they wrote, using their own vocabulary and style message to record His message (2 Peter 1:20–21).

THE LOCUS OF BIBLICAL INSPIRATION—VERBAL

Numerous passages make it evident that the locus of revelation and inspiration is the written Word, the Scriptures (Gk: ***grapha***), not simply the idea or even the writer. Notice that in the texts just cited the reference is to revealed or divinely inspired "Scriptures" (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 3:16), "words" (1 Cor. 2:10–13), "the book" (2 Chron. 34:14), "his [God's] word" (2 Sam. 23:2), "my [God's] words" (Isa. 59:21), and "the words" (Zech. 7:12).

When referring to the Old Testament as the authoritative Word of God, the New Testament most often (over ninety times) uses the phrase "it is ***written***" (cf. Matt. 4:4, 7, 10). Jesus described this written word as that which "comes out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). So important were the exact words of God that Jeremiah was told:

This is what the

Lord

says: "Stand in the courtyard of the Lord's house and speak to all the people of the towns of Judah who come to worship in the house of the

Lord.

Tell them everything I command you; *do not omit a word*" (

26:2

).

So it wasn't simply God's message that men were free to state in their words; the very choice of words was from God. Exodus 24:4 records that "Moses then wrote down ***everything the LORD had said.*** …" Again, Deuteronomy adds, "I [God] will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put ***my words*** in his mouth, and ***he will tell them everything I command him***" (Deut. 18:18).

Sometimes we are reminded that even the tenses of verbs are stressed by God. Jesus said, "But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you, 'I ***am*** [not ***was***] the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living" (Matt. 22:31–32). Paul based his argument on a singular noun versus a plural in Galatians 3:16, insisting "The Scripture does not say 'and to ***seeds***,' meaning many people, but 'and to your ***seed***,' meaning one person, who is Christ." Even one letter ("s") can make a big difference. Recall that Jesus went so far as to declare that ***parts*** of letters are inspired: "I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished" (Matt. 5:18).[3]

THE EXTENT OF BIBLICAL INSPIRATION—PLENARY

Biblical inspiration is not only verbal (located in the words), but it is also plenary, meaning that it ***extends to every part of the words and all they teach or imply.***

What Inspiration Guarantees

Inspiration does guarantee the truth of all the Bible teaches, implies, or entails (spiritually or factually). Paul said "all," not some, Scripture is God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:16), and Peter declared that "no prophecy of Scripture" came from man but that all came from God (2 Peter 1:20–21).

Jesus told His disciples that "the Counselor, [which is] the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you ***all things*** and will remind you of ***everything*** I have said to you" (John 14:26). He added, "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into ***all truth***" (John 16:13). As a matter of fact, the church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone" (Eph. 2:20). And the early church "devoted themselves to the ***apostles' teaching***" (Acts 2:42), which was recorded for us in the pages of the New Testament and was considered "Scripture" along with the Old Testament (cf. 2 Peter 3:15–16; 1 Tim. 5:18).

The inspiration of God, then, extends to every part of Scripture, including everything God affirmed (or denied) about any topic. It is inclusive of not only what the Bible ***teaches*** but what it ***touches;*** that is to say, it includes not only what the Bible teaches explicitly but also what it teaches implicitly, covering not only spiritual matters but factual ones as well. The omniscient God cannot be wrong about anything He teaches or implies (see volume 2).

What Inspiration Does Not Guarantee

There are, however, many things that inspiration does not guarantee.

(1) It does not guarantee that ***every part*** of a parable is conveying a truth (as opposed to the truthfulness of ***the point*** the parable is illustrating—Luke 18:2);

(2) nor that everything ***recorded*** in the Bible is true (as opposed to only what is ***taught*** or implied—Gen. 3:4);

(3) nor that no exaggerations (hyperboles) can be used (Col. 1:23);

(4) nor that all statements about God and creation are purely literal (Heb. 4:13; Job 38:7);

(5) nor that all factual assertions are technically precise by modern standards (as opposed to accurate by ancient standards—2 Chron. 4:2);

(6) nor that all statements about the universe must be from a modern astronomical perspective (as opposed to a common observational standpoint—Josh. 10:12);

(7) nor that all citations of Scripture must be verbatim (as opposed to

faithful);

(8) nor that all citations of Scripture must have the same ***application*** as the original (cf. Hos. 11:1; Matt. 2:15), rather than having the same ***interpretation*** (meaning);

(9) nor that the same truth can be said in only one way (as opposed to many ways, such as in the Gospels);

(10) nor that whatever a writer personally believed (as opposed to merely what he actually affirmed in Scripture) is true (Matt. 15:26);

(11) nor that truth is exhaustively revealed or treated (as opposed to adequately presented) in the Bible (1 Cor. 13:12);

(12) nor that quotations imply the truth of everything in the source it is citing, rather than only the part cited (Titus 1:12);

(13) nor that the grammatical construction will always be the customary one (rather than an adequate one to convey the truth).

How do we know that these are not included in what inspiration covers? The answer is called "the phenomena of Scripture"; that is, what the Bible ***says*** must be understood in view of what the Bible ***shows.*** What it ***preaches*** must be read in view of what it ***practices.*** The ***doctrine*** of Scripture is to be understood in the light of the ***data*** of Scripture.

All thirteen things listed above are part of the data of Scripture. For instance, the Bible uses round numbers; thus, when the Bible claims to be true it does not mean to exclude the use of round numbers. The same is true of hyperboles, figures of speech, observational language, and literary genre (poetry, parable, etc.). In short, everything the Bible affirms is true, but what is meant by truth must be understood in the light of the phenomena or data of Scripture (see chapter 12).

THE DEGREE OF BIBLICAL INSPIRATION—EQUAL

Are there different degrees of inspiration in the Bible? That is, are some things more inspired than others? The answer to this is best understood in terms of what is meant by inspiration, namely, that whatever the Bible affirms (or implies) is true, God affirms (or implies) is true. This being the case, there can be no

degrees of inspiration any more than there can be degrees of truth: Something is either true or false. One thing is not more or less true than another any more than a woman can be more or less pregnant.
Thus, the affirmation that “Jezebel died” is as inspired as “Jesus died.” However, while everything in the Bible is equally true, not everything is equally important. The death of the perfect Christ is much more important than the death of the wicked queen. Likewise, the resurrection of Christ is more important than the raising of Lazarus (John 11). In short, there are no degrees of truth, but there are degrees of importance of one truth over another.

A BIBLICAL DEFINITION OF INSPIRATION

In view of what the Bible says and shows about itself, a definition of divine inspiration can be formulated. First, the elements of a definition will be set forth; then, the definition will be derived from them. There appear to be six basic elements stated or implied in the Bible.

The Bible Has a Divine Origin

The ultimate source of a divinely inspired Bible is God Himself, for the Scriptures are “breathed” (inspired) by Him (2 Tim. 3:16): “Every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4). Scripture did not originate from human impulse, “for prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:20–21).

The Bible Came Through Human Agency

With the exception of a few occasions, like the giving of the Ten Commandments—which were “inscribed by the finger of God” (Deut. 9:10)—the Bible did not come directly from God but only indirectly from Him through

the instrumentality of His prophets. Hebrews 1:1 declares: “In the past God spoke to our forefathers ***through the prophets*** at many times and in various ways.…” The Holy Spirit “moved” on “holy men of God” (2 Peter 1:21 NKJV). David said it well: “The Spirit of the LORD spoke ***through me;*** his word was ***on my tongue***” (2 Sam. 23:2; see also Deut. 18:18; Isa. 59:21; Zech. 7:12; Acts 4:24–25; Heb. 4:7).

Furthermore, judging by the various vocabulary, grammar, styles, figures of speech, and human interests of the various authors, God did not disregard the personality and culture of the biblical writers when He providentially guided them to be the vehicles through which He revealed His written Word to humankind. On the contrary, the Bible is a thoroughly human book in every respect, except that it is without error (see chapter 15).

Regardless of the mystery surrounding how God was able to make His word certain without destroying the freedom and personality of the authors (see chapter 15), several things are clear. The human authors of Scripture were not mere secretaries taking dictation; their freedom was not suspended or negated, and they were not automatons. What they wrote is what they desired to write in the style that they were accustomed to using. God in His providence engaged in a divine concurrence between their words and His so that what they said, He said (see above).

The Bible Is a Written Authority

Inspiration deals with the written text of Scripture; it is the ***grapha*** (writings) of the prophets that are inspired (2 Tim. 3:16). The phrase “It is written” (cf. Matt. 4:4, 7, 10) reveals that the focus of God’s authority for His people was in His written Word. Nowhere does the Bible speak of inspired ideas or of inspired persons. To be sure, God moved on the writers (2 Peter 1:20–21), but this was to insure that their writings were inspired. The repeated references to the very “words” of the prophets being from God stresses this point (cf. Ex. 24:4; Deut. 18:18; Jer. 26:2).

The Bible’s Divine Authority Is Located in the Autographic Text

This important fact of the divine inspiration of the Bible is implied from two facts. ***First***, all the biblical references to the God-given authority of Scripture are to what God gave or "breathed-out," which was the original text. ***Second***, not all ***copies*** of the original text are perfect; there are minor errors in them, and these can be seen by comparing parallel passages (cf. 2 Kings 8:26; 2 Chron. 22:2). But ***God*** cannot lie (Heb. 6:18; Titus 1:2); His law is "perfect" or flawless (Ps. 19:7). Hence, whatever errors there are in copies of the Bible could not have been in the original text. This leads to another characteristic of an inspired text—its inerrancy.

The Bible's Original Text Is Inerrant

If God cannot err, and the original text was breathed out by God, then it follows that the original text of the Bible is without error. Hence, any real errors found in biblical manuscripts or in translations of them were not in the original. Copies of the original are only inspired insofar as they are accurate copies of the original. As Augustine aptly put it,

> If we are perplexed by any apparent contradiction in Scripture, it is not allowable to say, "The author of this book is mistaken"; but either the manuscript is faulty, or the translation is wrong, or you have not understood. (*AF*, 11.5.)

The Bible Has Final Authority

When speaking of its divine authority, the Bible makes it clear that this is a final authority, the court of last appeal in everything it affirms (or implies). The psalmist said, ***"For you have exalted above all things your name and your word"*** (Ps. 138:2). He added, "***Your word, O LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens***" (Ps. 119:89).

Again, Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, ***not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law*** until everything is accomplished" (Matt. 5:18). He rebuked the

religious leaders of His day for exalting their teaching above the Word of God (Matt. 15:3–6). Again, the manner in which Jesus and the New Testament writers use the phrase “it is written” in the Scriptures manifests their belief that it was the final court of appeal in all disputes on which it speaks.

The Sixty-Six Canonical Books of the Bible Alone Have This Divine Authority[4]

One other element of the evangelical view of the inspiration of Scripture should be added here, though it is discussed elsewhere (see chapter 28). This element is one of the distinguishing factors between the evangelical and Roman Catholic views of Scripture: The sixty-six canonical books of the Protestant canon alone are invested with divine authority. No other source equals or surpasses that of Scripture; the Bible, and the Bible alone, is a supremely authoritative book in matters of faith and practice.

SUGGESTED DEFINITION OF INSPIRATION

Inspiration is the supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit, who through the different personalities and literary styles of the chosen human authors invested the very words of the original books of Holy Scripture, alone and in their entirety, as the very Word of God without error in all that they teach or imply (including history and science), and the Bible is thereby the infallible rule and final authority for faith and practice of all believers.

THE MODUS OPERANDI OF INSPIRATION

The mode of operation by which the Holy Spirit worked with the authors in order to assure an infallible and inerrant product is a matter of much speculation among theologians. The mystery remains inscrutable, but the process is intelligible and the parameters are definable.

The Parameters of the Modus Operandi

Two factors define the limits within which legitimate speculation may occur:

(1) The product is infallible and inerrant.
(2) Whatever means is used, different personalities, different styles, and the freedom of the authors manifested in their books must be accounted for.

The first point is known from the ***doctrine*** of Scripture supported above by numerous references. The second is known from the ***data*** of Scripture, clearly manifested in its human characteristics (see chapter 15).

Problematic Explanations

Like illustrations of the Trinity, no analogies of scriptural inspiration are perfect, some are better than others, and still others are misleading. Several fall into this latter category.

In particular, two illustrations should be avoided: that of a ***secretary*** and that of a ***musical instrument.*** Early church fathers were particularly known to use the latter (see chapter 17). The problem with these illustrations is that they lend to the false charge that evangelicals believe in mechanical dictation.

The ***musical instrument*** illustration is unhelpful because a musical instrument has no free will, no personality, and no literary style—it is an inanimate object, and not an efficient cause of the notes but only an instrumental cause.

The ***secretary*** illustration is not much better, because faithful secretaries take dictation. While they are not inanimate or nonfree instruments, nevertheless, by the very nature of their occupation they are not creating the material but merely recording it. The words written are not theirs, nor is their personality expressed. This is not true of biblical inspiration, which, as we have seen, employs the freedom, style, vocabulary, and personalities of the various biblical authors to convey God's Word to humankind.

In his noted ***Theopneustia***, Louis Gaussen (1790–1863) uses the illustration of

an ***orchestra conductor.*** This is somewhat better, since all members of the orchestra are freely participating and expressing their distinctive sounds while the master brings them together in unity and harmony, as does God with the Scriptures. Even here the analogy breaks down, however, since the whole sound is not really the result of each member playing his own solo. Further, instrumentalists make mistakes, while the Bible does not.

Many evangelicals have been content to rely on the ***providentially preplanned personalities*** model, whereby God preplanned the lives, styles, and vocabularies of the various biblical authors so that they would freely choose to write the correct thing in the right way at the right time, which God, by preordained divine concurrence, has determined would be their part of His Word. While this is no doubt true, even this does not account for the whole story. For one thing, it does not explain how free will fits into the picture. Were the free choices of the various authors causally predetermined? If so, were they really free? Further, how could God guarantee that the results would be infallible and inerrant if the authors were really free to do otherwise?

While some models are better than others, no matter how good the model is there always seems to be some mystery left at the very point where there is a divine/human encounter. This is true of the doctrines of predestination and free will (see volume 2) as well as the doctrines of how the two natures of Christ relate and the mode of inspiration.

Without attempting to solve the mystery, there are meaningful ways to describe it. Thomas Aquinas offered one of these in his ***teacher/student analogy***, arguing that the relationship between God and the human authors of Scripture is more like that of a teacher to his pupil. The value of this analogy is that it preserves the personality of the human authors while at the same time explaining the commonality between what the teacher conveyed and what the student expressed (see ***ST***, 2a2ae 171, 6; 172, 6).

This analogy also makes a distinction between primary (God) and secondary (man) causality, thus avoiding reducing the human authors to mere instrumental causes. A secondary cause is a cause whose power to cause comes from the primary cause, but the exercise of the power of causality rests in its own free expression. But here too there is a difference, since the secondary cause (the student) can and sometimes does deviate from the primary cause (God). Not so when God (the primary cause) worked in and through the human authors of Scripture (the secondary causes).

CONCLUSION

One final comment is in order: The ultimate process, however illustrated, retains an element of mystery. Nonetheless, it is correct to say that while the Bible was not dictated by God to secretaries, the final product is as infallible and inerrant ***as though it were dictated.***

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE DIVINE NATURE OF THE BIBLE

Since the Bible is divine in origin (see chapter 13), it is understandable that it manifests some divine characteristics. These earmarks of the divine set the Bible apart from all purely human books.

THE SANCTITY OF THE BIBLE

The Hebrew (***godesh***) and Greek (***hagios***) words for holy or sacred mean "to be set apart." As an attribute of God, holiness means to be totally and utterly set apart from all creation and from evil.

The Holiness of God

As applied to God, holiness is associated with His jealousy (Josh. 24:19), His exaltation (Ps. 99:9), His righteousness (Isa. 5:16), His almightiness (Rev. 4:8), His absolute uniqueness (Ex. 15:11), His moral purity (2 Cor. 7:1), His being

vexed by evil (Ps. 78:41), and that which should inspire a deep sense of awe (Isa. 29:23) and perpetual worship in His creatures (1 Chron. 16:29; Rev. 4:8). Consider what the Bible says of God: “Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you—majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?” (Ex. 15:11); “I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because ***I am holy.*** Do not make yourselves unclean by any creature that moves about on the ground” (Lev. 11:44); “Joshua said to the people, ‘You are not able to serve the LORD. ***He is a holy God;*** He is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins’ ” (Josh. 24:19); “***There is no one holy like the LORD;*** there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God” (1 Sam. 2:2); “***Who can stand in the presence of the LORD, this holy God?*** To whom will the ark go up from here?” (1 Sam. 6:20); “Ascribe to the LORD the glory due to his name. Bring an offering and come before him; ***worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness***” (1 Chron. 16:29); “Again and again they put God to the test; ***they vexed the Holy One of Israel***” (Ps. 78:41); “Exalt the LORD our God and worship at his footstool; ***he is holy***” (Ps. 99:5); “Exalt the LORD our God and worship at his holy mountain, for ***the LORD our God is holy***” (Ps. 99:9); “But the LORD Almighty will be exalted by his justice, and the holy ***God will show himself holy by his righteousness***” (Isa. 5:16); “When they see among them their children, the work of my hands, they will keep my name holy; ***they will acknowledge the holiness of the Holy One of Jacob, and will stand in awe of the God of Israel***” (Isa. 29:23); “For I am the LORD, your God, the ***Holy One*** of Israel, your Savior” (Isa. 43:3; cf. “Holy One” in Ps. 71:22; 78:41; Isa. 5:19; 29:23; 48:17; 54:5; 55:5; 60:9; Jer. 51:5; Hos. 11:9, 12; Hab. 1:12; 3:3; Mark 1:24; Luke 1:35; 4:34; John 6:69); “Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us ***purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God***” (2 Cor. 7:1); “Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying: ‘***Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come***’” (Rev. 4:8).

The Holiness of God’s Word

Holiness is used of God’s Word similarly to the way it is used of God, namely, to be set apart from other things, to be sacred, to be exalted. Paul told Timothy,

"From infancy you have known the ***holy*** Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15).
From the very beginning the Scriptures were considered sacred. When Moses wrote, his words were placed alongside the ark of the covenant in the most holy and sacred place in ancient Israel (Deut. 31:24–26).
God's Word is not only holy itself, but it is able to make us holy. Jesus prayed, "***Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth***" (John 17:17). Timothy was told the Holy Scriptures were "able to make you wise for salvation" (2 Tim. 3:15). The Bible is set apart above all other books in the world, since it alone is able to save (Rom. 1:16; 1 Peter 1:23) and sanctify. Paul spoke of Christ's desire to "***make her*** [the church] ***holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word***, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless" (Eph. 5:26–27).

The Divine Authority of the Bible

As the Word of God, the Bible has divine authority. This is manifested in several ways. ***First***, it is the final authority for faith and practice (2 Tim. 3:16–17).
Second, Jesus said God's Word is exalted above all human teaching (Matt. 15:3–6).
Third, because the Bible is the Word of God it speaks with the authority of God. Jesus described it in these words: "Is it not written in your ***Law***, 'I have said you are gods'? If he called them 'gods,' to whom the ***word of God came***—and the Scripture ***cannot be broken*** …" (John 10:34–35). In these two verses "Scripture" is called three things:

(1) the Torah (law) of God,
(2) the Word of God, and
(3) unbreakable.

Fourth, remember that "Scripture" is sometimes used interchangeably with God Himself, which reveals that it speaks with His authority (see chapter 13).
Fifth, Jesus spoke of the Bible as coming from God's mouth (Matt. 4:4).

Sixth, we have seen that Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, ***not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished***" (Matt. 5:18). This can be said only of that which has divine authority, such as the Bible does.

THE INFALLIBILITY OF THE BIBLE

The word ***infallible*** is not used in Scripture of itself; however, other statements are used of the Bible that imply its infallibility (unfailingness). Jesus said, "The Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). Matthew 5:17–18 also reveals that the Bible is imperishable (see above). Further, God affirmed through Isaiah, "My word that goes out from my mouth: ***It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it***" (Isa. 55:11; cf. Matt. 15:3–6; Matt. 4:4, 7, 10). Indeed, Paul speaks of God's Word as "***the oracles of God***" (Rom. 3:2 NKJV).

THE INDESTRUCTIBILITY OF THE BIBLE

As we have seen, Jesus declared that the Bible is indestructible, saying,

> Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, *not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.* (Matt. 5:17–18)

Isaiah confirmed the same when he wrote, "The grass withers and the flowers fall, but ***the word of our God stands forever***" (Isa. 40:8). The psalmist added, "***Your word, O LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens***" (Ps. 119:89).

History is a testimony to the Bible's durability. It has been banned, burned, and banished, but in spite of it all, it stands as the world's all-time bestseller.

THE INDEFATIGABILITY OF THE BIBLE

What is more, the Bible has indefatigable power—it cannot be worn out; it is tireless and inexhaustible. Hebrews declares that "***the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword***, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (4:12). God asked Jeremiah, "***Is not my word like fire … and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?***" (Jer. 23:29). Paul said, "The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, ***they have divine power to demolish strongholds***" (2 Cor. 10:4). One such weapon is the "***sword of the Spirit which is the word of God***" (Eph. 6:17).

This tireless power of Scripture comes from the infinite God whose inexhaustible power is manifest in his infallible Word. Paul reminded the Thessalonians: "When you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, ***the word of God, which is at work in you who believe***" (1 Thess. 2:13). Indeed, Peter affirmed, "For you have been born again, ***not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God***" (1 Peter 1:23).

THE INDEFEASIBILITY OF THE BIBLE

In addition, the Bible has the quality of being indefeasible; that is, it cannot be overcome, made void or ineffective—it always accomplishes its purpose. Recall that God announced through Isaiah, "So is my word that goes out from my mouth: ***It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it***" (Isa. 55:11). This is true of those who receive its message as well as those who reject it. As Paul, who preached it, said, "***For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing***" (2 Cor. 2:15–16). Those who accept it magnify God's mercy, and those who reject it manifest His wrath (cf. Rom. 9:21–22). But it ***always*** accomplishes God's purpose.

THE INERRANCY OF THE BIBLE

As the Bible is firmly rooted in the God whose Word it is, each member of the Trinity is involved in its inerrancy. Thus, three arguments can be stated, one in terms of each member of the Godhead. That the Bible is without error is clear from these three arguments.

The Argument From God the Father

The logic is simple and irrefutable:

(1) God cannot err.
(2) The Bible is the Word of God.
(3) Hence, the Bible cannot err.

Since chapter 13 has demonstrated the second premise, only the first needs support here.

Hebrews declares emphatically: "God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which ***it is impossible for God to lie***, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged" (Heb. 6:18). Paul spoke of "a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which ***God, who does not lie***, promised before the beginning of time" (Titus 1:2). Romans asserts: "***Let God be true***, and every man a liar" (3:4). Jesus said to the Father, "Sanctify them by the truth; ***your word is truth***" (John 17:17). And the psalmist declared to God: "***All your words are true***" (Ps. 119:160).
If God cannot err and the Bible is the Word of God, then it follows necessarily that the Bible cannot err.

The Argument From God the Son

The argument from the divine authority of Christ is powerful. Basically, it is this: If Jesus is the Son of God, then the Bible is the Word of God (which cannot err). Hence, to deny the Bible is the Word of God is to deny that Jesus is the Son of God (see chapter 16). The Scriptures teach that Jesus ***is*** the Son of God (Matt. 16:16–17; Mark 14:61–62; John 1:1; 8:58; Col. 2:9; Heb. 1:8). Therefore, the Bible is the Word of God, which cannot err.

The Argument From God the Holy Spirit

The third person of the Trinity is called "the Spirit of truth" (John 16:13), who cannot err (cf. 1 John 4:6).

(1) He who is the Source of truth cannot be in error.
(2) The Bible is an utterance of the Spirit of truth.
(3) Therefore, the Bible cannot be in error.

The authors of Scripture were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20–21), and they uttered God-breathed writings (2 Tim. 3:16) that are said to have come "from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). Remember what David said: "The Spirit of the LORD spoke through me; his word was on my tongue" (2 Sam. 23:2). But if this is the case, then the Bible can no more utter an untruth than can the Spirit of truth Himself.

THE OBJECTION FROM THE HUMAN NATURE OF THE BIBLE[1]

Some critics have offered a rebuttal to the above logic by noting:

(1) The Bible contains the words of humans.
(2) Humans err.

(3) Therefore, the Bible errs.

However, this does not follow, since (2a) humans do not ***always*** err.

Even without special divine aid, humans can avoid making errors—most anyone can write an inerrant book. Furthermore, the human authors of Scripture had divine aid (John 14:26; 2 Peter 1:20–21). As to how God can produce a perfect product through an imperfect instrument, we need only remember that it is possible to draw a straight line with a crooked stick.
Another form of the objection goes like this:

(1) The Bible is a human book.
(2) Humans can err.
(3) Therefore, the Bible can err.

In this form it would seem that both premises are true and that the conclusion follows logically from them. This notwithstanding, there is a flaw in the argument if it is intended to deny the inerrancy of the Bible.

At best, this argument only shows that the Bible ***can*** err, not that it actually ***does*** err. One could still affirm that the Bible does not err (a weaker sense of inerrancy), even if he could not conclude that the Bible cannot err (a stronger sense of inerrancy).
However, even the stronger sense of inerrancy can be preserved by making an important distinction brought out by the following argument:

(1) Insofar as the Bible is the Word of God, it cannot err.
(2) The Bible is the Word of God.
(3) Therefore, the Bible cannot err.

Likewise, since the Bible is also the words of men it can err (but doesn't). This is no more a contradiction than to say of Christ, insofar as He was a human being, He did not know everything (Luke 2:52; Matt. 24:36). But insofar as Christ is

God, He does know everything (Job 11:7–9; Ps. 147:5). Both Christ and Scripture have two natures, and what is true of one is not necessarily true of the other. So one and the same words of Scripture can be inerrant in the strong sense (that they ***cannot*** err) insofar as they are the Word of God, and errorless in the weaker sense (that they ***do not*** err) insofar as they are the words of human beings.

OTHER CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BIBLE

The Bible contains many powerful metaphors and figures of speech about itself that help us in visualizing one or more of the above characteristics.

The Bible Is Like a Seed That Saves Us (1 Peter 1:23)

Peter wrote: “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.”

The Bible Is Like Milk That Nourishes Us (1 Peter 2:2)

Peter adds, “Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.”

The Bible Is Like Meat (Solid Food) That Satisfies Us (Hebrews 5:14)

The author of Hebrews notes about Scripture: “But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.”

The Bible Is Like Water That Washes Us (Psalm 119:9; Ephesians 5:25–26)

The psalmist asks, “How can a young man keep his way pure?” He answered: “By living according to your word.” Paul added, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word.”

The Bible Is Like a Fire That Cleanses Us (Jeremiah 23:29)

Through the prophet Jeremiah: “ ‘Is not my word like fire,’ declares the LORD.”

The Bible Is Like a Hammer That Shatters Us (Jeremiah 23:29)

In the same passage, Jeremiah adds for God, “Is not my word … like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?”

The Bible Is Like a Sword That Cuts Deeply Into Us (Hebrews 4:13)

The writer of Hebrews affirms, “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”

The Bible Is Like Medicine to Keep Us From the Sickness of Sin (Psalm 119:11)

David asserts, “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against

you.”

The Bible Is Like a Mirror to Reflect Ourselves to Us (James 1:23–25)

James admonishes, “Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.”

The Bible Is Like a Lamp to Our Feet (Psalm 119:105)

David wrote, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.”

The Bible Is Like a Counselor That Comforts Us (Romans 15:4)

Paul assures, “For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”

The Bible Is Like a Forecaster That Never Fails Us (2 Peter 1:19)

Peter observes, “We have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.”

CONCLUSION

The internal evidence that the Bible is of divine origin is very strong. Unlike any other book in the world, the Bible bears the fingerprints of God. It has sanctity, divine authority, infallibility, indestructibility, indefatigability, indefeasibility, and inerrancy. Indeed, as we have shown, the denial of the inerrancy of the Bible is an attack on the authenticity of God the Father, the authority of God the Son, and the ministry of God the Holy Spirit. The infallibility of the Bible is as firm as the character of God, who cannot lie. The Word is like a seed that saves, milk that nourishes, meat that satisfies, water that washes, fire that cleanses, a hammer that breaks, a sword that cuts, medicine that heals, a mirror that reflects, a lamp that lights, a counselor that comforts, and a forecaster that never fails. Once again,

> The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever. (Isa. 40:8)

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE HUMAN NATURE OF THE BIBLE

The Bible is not only of divine origin (see chapters 13–14); it also has human authors, and therefore it is a human book. Indeed, it is a theanthropic book (Gk: ***theos***, "God"; ***anthropos***, "man"). Its primary Cause is God, but its secondary causes are human beings, and although the Bible is the Word of God, it is also the words of men.

AVOIDING TWO EXTREMES

Two extremes are to be avoided when describing the Bible: Either denying or diminishing its divine characteristics while affirming its human traits, or else affirming its divine properties while denying or diminishing its human elements. Most liberals do the former (see DeWolf, ***CTLP***, 58–66) and many fundamentalists fall into the latter (Rice, ***OGBBB***, 265, 285–87).[1] These two errors are the bibliological equivalents of arianism and docetism, respectively (see F. L. Cross, ***ODCC***, 87, 413).

Many on the conservative end of the theological spectrum tend to forget that it is as heretical to deny Christ's humanity as it is to deny His deity; conservatives

tend to neglect, if not deny in practice, the humanity of Scripture. Biblical docetism, however, is a serious doctrinal deviation, for the Bible is truly a human book, and to deny this is no less a doctrinal deviation than to deny the humanity of Christ.

THE HUMAN CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BIBLE

There are numerous human characteristics of the Bible, including its human writers, literary styles, perspectives, thought patterns, emotions, interests, and sources.

The Bible Has Human Authors

Every book in the Bible is the composition of a ***human writer***, nearly forty persons in all. This includes Moses, Joshua, Samuel, Ezra, Nehemiah, David, Solomon, Agur (Prov. 30), Lemuel (Prov. 31), Asaph (various psalms), the Sons of Korah (various psalms), Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, Nehemiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, James, Peter, and Jude. Other than these traditional authors, there are the unknown human authors of Job, Esther, and Hebrews. Like all other books in the world, the Bible had human composers.

The Bible Was Written in Human Languages

The languages of the Bible are ***human languages.*** Some have ventured to speak of "Holy Ghost Greek," believing God created some special language to convey His truth. However, this speculation was put to rest with the discovery of the Greek papyri manuscripts (see Deissman, ***LAE***) and a better understanding of Koine Greek, the common trade language of the first century (in which the New

Testament was written).
The Old Testament was also written in a human language known as Hebrew, with some small sections of Aramaic. Hebrew and Aramaic were common Semitic languages, and there is nothing nonhuman or superhuman about them. God simply deemed them particularly fitting to be the vehicle by which He originally conveyed His truth to humankind (see Geisler and Nix, ***GIB***, chapter 18).

The Bible Has Human Literary Styles

The Bible also utilizes different literary styles. Even readers not familiar with the original languages can detect a distinct difference in the literary ability and forms of biblical authors. Amos, a farmer from southern Israel (Judah), reflects his earthy roots in his style of speech, while Dr. Luke's use of specialized and technical terms reveals a more sophisticated training in the Greek culture (as does the wording used by the author of Hebrews).
For an exalted poetic style, the book of Isaiah stands out. By contrast, the mournful tone of Jeremiah in Lamentations is distinctive by its differences. All first-year Greek students appreciate the simple grammar and vocabulary of John the fisherman in contrast to the complex Greek of Luke. The simple fact of the matter is that not only is the Bible a human book, but it also reflects different degrees of human ability and training in the various languages in which it was written.

The Bible Uses Different Human Literary Forms

The Bible not only reflects different literary styles but it also employs various ***human literary forms of speech.*** These include ***narrative*** form, as in Samuel and Kings; ***poetry***, as in Job and Psalms; ***parables***, as in the Synoptic Gospels; some ***allegory***, as in Galatians 4; the use of ***symbols***, as in the Revelation; and ***metaphors*** and ***similes*** abound in Scripture (cf. James 1–2). Even ***satire*** (Matt. 19:24) and ***hyperbole*** are found (Col. 1:23). Like other human writings, the

Bible uses a wide range of literary forms to convey its meaning.

The Bible Reflects Different Human Perspectives

The human finitude of the Bible is seen in the variety of ***human perspectives*** it manifests. David spoke in Psalm 23 from a shepherd's view. Kings is written from a prophetic vantage point, and Chronicles from a priestly perspective. Acts manifests a historical interest (cf. Luke 1:1–4 and Acts 1:1), and 2 Timothy reflects a pastor's heart. Unlike a modern book on astronomy, biblical writers speak from an observer's perspective when they write of the sun rising or setting (Josh. 1:15; cf. 10:13), and remember that even round numbers are used (Josh. 3:4; 4:13; 2 Chron. 4:2).

The Bible Reflects Different Human Thought Patterns

The Bible reveals ***human thought patterns and processes***, including human reasoning. The book of Romans, for example, is a tightly knit logical treatise that has been used to demonstrate the principles and processes of rational thought. Acts 17:2 says, "As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he ***reasoned*** with them from the Scriptures."
Nothing is more human than forgetfulness. In 1 Corinthians Paul reveals this very trait, writing, "I am thankful that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, so no one can say that you were baptized into my name. (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else)" (1 Cor. 1:14–16).[2]

The Bible Reveals Human Emotions

The Bible does not hide the ***emotions*** of the authors. The apostle Paul, for

example, expresses great anguish over Israel, saying, “I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart” (Rom. 9:2). He also reveals great anger over the Galatian error, declaring, “You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified” (Gal. 3:1). Melancholy and loneliness are manifest in his last prison days (2 Tim. 4:9–16). Of course, joy is expressed in various passages like the following: “In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy” (Phil. 1:4).
The writers of Scripture were not passive androids; they were real human beings, and their emotion is expressed in their books.

The Bible Manifests Specific Human Interests

The human interests of the Bible are revealed in the choice of topics as well as the selections of images to convey them. Luke had a medical interest, as indicated by his use of medical terms (see Ramsay, ***LP***). Hosea had a distinctive rural interest, as did Amos, the herdsman from Tekoa (Amos 1:1). James’s many images from the natural world betray an interest in nature (cf. James 1–2). David’s years of shepherding are clear in his writing, and so on. The presentation of the material in each biblical book is colored by the experiences and interests of its author.

The Bible Expresses Human Culture

Being basically a Semitic book, the Bible is filled with expressions and practices of its Hebrew culture. The common means of greeting by “kissing” is one example: “Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss,” Paul exhorted (1 Thess. 5:26). Likewise, a woman’s veil as a sign of her respect for her husband is a manifestation of human culture, for “every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is just as though her head were shaved” (1 Cor. 11:5).
Numerous other Near-Eastern cultural practices are indicated in Scripture, including washing feet upon entering a home (cf. John 13), shaking off the dust

of one's feet as a sign of condemnation (Luke 10:11), and reclining (not sitting) at meals (John 13:23).

The Bible Utilizes Other Written Human Sources

While many elements in the Bible came by direct revelation from God, like the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20) and messages to the prophets (cf. Dan. 2:28–30), nonetheless, sometimes God revealed Himself indirectly. Since all truth is God's truth, sometimes the biblical author found God's truth embedded in ***human sources.*** The Old Testament often used non-canonical writings as sources; the Book of Jashar (Josh. 10:13) and the Book of the Wars of the LORD (Num. 21:14) are examples. "The records of Samuel the seer … Nathan the prophet … and Gad the seer" may also fit in this category (1 Chron. 29:29).
In the New Testament, Luke is believed to have referred to written sources about Christ available to him (Luke 1:1–4).[3] Paul quoted non-Christian poets three times (Acts 17:28; 1 Cor. 15:33; Titus 1:12); Jude cited material from the noncanonical sources of the Assumption of Moses and the Book of Enoch (Jude 9, 14). These citations do not guarantee the truthfulness of everything in the source but only what is cited. Of course, ultimately all truth comes from God, whatever the immediate source may be.

THE BIBLE IS WITHOUT ERROR

There is one human characteristic the Bible does not have: errors. Although a more extended discussion of the inerrancy of the Bible is found later (see chapter 27), the basic outline of its errorlessness will be stated here.

The Original Text Is Without Error

The logic of inerrancy is straightforward:

(1) God cannot err.
(2) The Bible is God's Word.
(3) Therefore, the Bible cannot err.

Since the Scriptures are breathed out by God (2 Tim. 3:16–17), and since God cannot breathe out falsehood, it follows that the Bible cannot contain any falsehood.

The Copies Are Not Without Error

Christians only claim that God breathed out everything in the original text, not everything in the copies. Divine inspiration and inerrancy, therefore, applies to the original text, not to every detail of every copy. The copies are without error only insofar as they are copied correctly, and they ***were*** copied with great care and a very high degree of accuracy.

Christians believe that God in His providence preserved the copies from all substantial error; in fact, the degree of accuracy is greater than that of any other book from the ancient world, exceeding 99 percent (see Geisler and Nix, ***GIB***, chapter 22). The reasons for this amazing accuracy are: (1) we have many more manuscripts of the Bible than for other books from the ancient world, (2) the manuscripts date more closely to the originals, and (3) they were copied accurately.

There are, however, some minor copyists' errors in the biblical manuscripts—two examples will suffice: Second Chronicles 22:2 says Ahaziah was forty-two, yet 2 Kings 8:26 asserts that Ahaziah was twenty-two. He could not have been forty-two (a copyist error), or he would have been older than his father (see NIV and NKJV). Also, 2 Chronicles 9:25 affirms that Solomon had four thousand horse stalls, but 1 Kings 4:26 says there were forty thousand horse stalls, which would have been far more than needed for the twelve thousand horsemen he had (see NIV and NKJV).

It is important to note of these copyist errors that:

(1) No original manuscript has ever been found with an error in it.
(2) Errors are relatively rare in the copies.
(3) In most cases we know which wording is wrong from the context or parallel passages.
(4) In no case does an error affect any doctrine of Scripture;
(5) Errors vouch for the accuracy of the copying process, since the scribes who copied them knew there were errors in the manuscripts but were duty-bound to copy what the text before them said.
(6) Errors don't affect the central message of the Bible.

In fact, one can get a message with errors in it, yet 100 percent of the message comes through clearly. For example, suppose you received a message from Western Union that read as follows:

Y#u have won ten million dollars!

No doubt you would gladly pick up your money. And if the telegram read in the following way, you would have no doubt at all:

Yo# have won ten million dollars!
You #ave won ten million dollars!
You h#ve won ten million dollars!

Why are we ***more*** sure if there are ***more*** errors? Because each error is in a different place, and with it we get another confirmation of every other letter in the original.

Three things are important to note. ***First***, even with one line, error and all, 100 percent of the message comes through. ***Second***, the more lines, the more errors. But the more errors, the more sure we are of what the intended message really is. ***Third***, there are hundreds of times more biblical manuscripts than there are lines in the above example. And there is a greater percentage of error in this telegram than in the collated biblical manuscripts.

Christ and the Bible: A Good Analogy

No analogy is perfect. Good ones, however, have crucial similarities. Of course, all analogies have differences, or they would not be analogies.

Some Strong Similarities

Both Christ and Scripture are theanthropic. They involve three major factors:

(1) ***Both are called the Word of God.*** Christ is the Living Word (John 1:1), and the Bible is the written Word (John 10:34–35).
(2) ***Each has two natures***, one divine and one human.
(3) ***The two natures of each are united by one medium.*** To borrow a term from Christology (see volume 2), both have a kind of "hypostatic union." The two natures of Christ are united in one ***person.*** And the two natures of the Bible are united in one set of ***propositions*** (i.e., sentences). Likewise,
(4) ***Both Christ and Scripture are without flaw.*** Christ is without sin (Heb. 4:15; 2 Cor. 5:21), and the Bible is without error (Matt. 22:29; Heb. 6:18; cf. John 17:17).

Some Significant Differences

The strong similarities between God's living and written Words notwithstanding, some significant differences must be noted lest one fall into bibliolatry. Unlike Christ who is God,

(1) ***The Bible is not God.***
(2) Hence, ***the Bible should not be worshiped.***

The difference is that the unifying medium of Christ's two natures is God, the

Second Person of the Godhead, whereas the unifying factor in the Bible is the human words. While in Scripture there is a divine and human concurrence, this is not God, and in Christ the unity is found in the one Person who is both God and man. Hence, God is to be revered (worshiped) but the Bible should only be respected, not revered.

ANSWERING SEVERAL CRITICAL OBJECTIONS

Building on the clear biblical teaching that it is a human book, critics sometimes argue that the Bible is an errant book; that is, they claim the Bible has errors.

The Objection That Human Books Err

This objection is based on the old adage “to err is human” and takes two forms, strong and weak. The first form contains a false premise, and the second form a non sequitur.

Statement of the Strong Form

Some opponents of biblical inerrancy insist that if the Bible is a human book, then it must have errors in it, since humans make errors. More formally put,

(1) The Bible is a human book.
(2) Human books always contain errors.
(3) Therefore, the Bible contains errors.

Response to the Strong Form

Put in the strong form, the minor (second) premise is false. It wrongly states, "Human books ***always*** contain errors." They don't; virtually anyone can write a book without error, and if mere humans can write errorless books, then how much more can humans do so who are under the special providential care of God to preserve them from all error, as were the writers of Holy Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16–17; 2 Peter 1:20–21)?

Statement of the Weak Form

The weaker form of the argument goes as follows:

(1) The Bible is a human book.
(2) Human books sometimes contain errors.
(3) Hence, the Bible contains errors.

Response to the Weak Form

As is plain to see, the conclusion does not follow, since the Bible could be an exception—the conclusion overdraws the premises. That books sometimes, even often, err does not mean there are errors in the Bible. Again, the fact that the Bible was penned by humans who came under the special providential care of God to preserve them from all error is sufficient to explain why it is an exception to the rule.

The Objection That Human Books Can Err

A more sophisticated criticism of inerrancy argues from the nature of human free will. This can best be understood by contrasting it with a typical statement of the logic of inerrancy, which goes like this:

(1) God cannot err.
(2) The Bible is God's Word.

(3) Therefore, the Bible cannot err.

However, it is argued by the critics, the second premise is contrary to free will, for a free act is one that could have been otherwise. Hence, the Bible could have errors in it. In logical form this objection reads:

(1) Human beings can err.
(2) The Bible is a human book.
(3) Therefore, the Bible can err.

Response to the Objection That Human Books Can Err

There are three possible responses that inerrantists can give to this objection. The first accepts this definition of free will and holds to the weak form of inerrancy; the second rejects this definition of free will and holds to the strong form of inerrancy; and the third accepts this definition of free will but retains a strong form of inerrancy by making a crucial distinction.

Response One: Accept the Weak Form of Inerrancy

This response accepts that

(1) humans can err.
(2) The Bible is a human book.
(3) Therefore, the Bible ***can*** err.

However, this response simply denies that the Bible ***does*** err.

This response restates the logic of inerrancy this way:

(1) The Bible is a human book.
(2) It is possible that humans are always telling the truth.
(3) Hence, it is possible that the Bible is always telling the truth.

Therefore, even in this weaker form one may hold to this strong view of free will and hold a weaker view of inerrancy.

Response Two: Accept the Strong Form of Inerrancy

Another possible response is to accept the strong form of inerrancy, meaning to believe that the Bible ***cannot*** err (not merely ***does not*** err) and deny this strong form of free will. Strong Calvinists (see volume 3) hold this view (Arminians hold the former view, acceptance of free will and weaker inerrancy). On this second model one need only insist that when the biblical authors wrote their books (if not at all other times) they were not free to write error, since God was moving on them in an irresistible way to preserve them from it.

Response Three: Accept Both a Strong View of Free Will and a Strong View of Inerrancy

There is one more option open to a strong inerrantist. He may hold both that

(1) the Bble cannot err, and that
(2) the human authors of Scripture were ***free*** to err when they wrote their biblical books.

This is possible by making an important distinction between the divine and human natures of Scripture. Let's apply it first to God's Living Word (who also has two natures) and then also to God's written Word.

As God, Christ could not get tired; as man, He could. As God, Christ could not

get hungry; as man, He could. As God, He could not die; as man, He could. Also, as God, Christ could not sin; as man, He could (since He was free), but He did not (Heb. 4:15; 2 Cor. 5:21). While some evangelicals (usually extreme Calvinists) deny that Christ could have sinned (see volume 2), many moderate Calvinists and all consistent Arminians hold that Christ could have sinned but did not.

How is this possible? Because Christ has two natures, and, thus, a distinction must be made between them. Hence, sin is impossible insofar as Christ is God, and it is possible insofar as He is man. Likewise, the same reasoning applies to God's written Word, which also has two natures, namely,

(1) insofar as it is the Word of God, the Bible cannot err, but
(2) insofar as it is the words of men, the Bible can err (but did not).

Since one and the same words of the Bible are both God's and man's, one must distinguish which relationship is in view. This is not a violation of the law of noncontradiction (see chapter 5), since to be a contradiction one must both affirm and deny the same thing at the same time ***in the same relationship.***[4]

Adaptation to Finitude Without Accommodation to Error

There is a mysterious theanthropic union between the two natures of Scripture, just as there is between the two natures of Christ. In both cases one must ask two questions of each, since both have two distinct natures. One cannot simply ask, "Could Christ sin?" He must ask:

(1) "Could Christ sin ***as God?***" (No) and
(2) "Could He sin ***as man?***" (Yes, but He did not)

Likewise, two questions, not one, must be asked of the Bible:

(1) “Could it err as God’s Word?” (No, God cannot err), and
(2) “Could it err as man’s word?” (Yes, but it did not.)

This is not a contradiction but a mystery—how is it possible? After all, God is infinite and man is finite. Further, God is not free to err, and man is free to err. The answer to this question lies in what orthodox theologians have often called divine “accommodations,” but which we (because of misuse of this term) prefer to label divine ***adaptation.***

Obviously, if there is to be union between God and man at any level, it is the infinite God who must adapt to finite man. This is possible because there is an analogy between the two (see chapters 4, and 9); without similarity, unity would not be possible. This is true no less in God’s Living Word than in His written Word. God had to condescend to take on humanity in the Incarnation (see volume 2), and He had to condescend to make possible a unity of His Word and man’s words in Scripture. Indeed, the concurrence between each affirmation (or denial) in Scripture is a divinely initiated one. It can be summarized in this contrast between the orthodox view of divine adaptation to finitude and the unorthodox view of divine accommodation to error (see Geisler, ***BECA***, 1–3).

Adaptation	Accommodation
• Adaptation to Finite Understanding	• Accommodation to Finite Error
• Finitude of Man	• Sinfulness of Man
• Partial Truths	• Actual Errors
• ***Disclosed*** in Human Language	• ***Disguised*** in Human Language
• Condescension of God’s Truth	• Compromise of God’s Truth
• Anthropomorphisms Necessary	• Myths Necessary
• We Can Know God’s ***Nature***	• We Can Know God’s ***Activity***

The Objection That Human Books Are Fallen

This objection, springing from the neo-orthodox theology of Karl Barth, insists that the Bible, like all human books, is a fallen book. Reasoning from a strong view of human depravity, this position can be summarized as follows:

(1) Total depravity extends to all human activity, including human language.
(2) The Bible is written in human language.
(3) Hence, human depravity extends to the Bible.

This would mean that the Bible, being the human book that it is, is a depraved book. As such, it would be infected by both error and sin.

Of course, scholars from the Barthian school hasten to add that in spite of its fallenness the Bible is both a record of divine revelation (fallible as it may be) and an instrument through which God speaks to us, just as the original voice is still heard through a broken record. So in spite of the fact that the Bible is a human, fallen, and errant book, says this view, nonetheless, it is the instrument through which God speaks to us today.

In response to this neo-orthodox presentation of Scripture, we must point out a number of crucial errors.

First, this view is contrary to what the Bible claims for itself, namely, to be an infallible revelation from God, not a mere fallible record of God's revelation (see chapters 13, and 27).

Second, this position is contrary to the virtually unanimous and continuous view of the great Fathers and teachers of the Christian church up to modern times (see chapters 17–18).

Third, this view is based on a self-defeating disjunction of fact and value that springs from Immanuel Kant (see Geisler, "K" in ***BECA***).

Fourth, this teaching is contrary to the biblical assertion that even fallen human

beings are made in the image of God (Gen. 9:6; James 3:9), which, although effaced by sin, is not erased by sin.

Fifth, this perspective is grounded in the faulty logic that God's revelation can be in acts but not in words. It affirms that even though God is not dead, He is mute. But surely a God who can create beings that can speak, can speak Himself (see chapter 9).

Sixth, Barth believed that Christ was God incarnated in human flesh. If so, then when Jesus spoke on earth He was speaking the words of God. But if Barth is right about the fallenness of all human language, then when Jesus spoke in human language His words were fallen, errant, and sinful. As the apostle Paul would say, "Perish the thought!"

Seventh, Barth's view denies the validity of general revelation (see chapter 4), which the Bible affirms (Ps. 19:1f; Rom. 1:19–20; Rom. 2:12–15; Acts 14:15–17; 17:24–27), for God's general revelation is available and "clearly" seen even by fallen human beings who refuse it only at their eternal peril (Rom. 1:20; 2:12).

CONCLUSION

The Bible is a thoroughly human book. It has human authors, is written in human languages, and shows virtually every human characteristic of any other book—except that it is without error. But its errorlessness does not make it any less human than Jesus Christ, who was completely human, yet without sin. In fact, if anything, ***it is not the lack of error and sinfulness that diminishes one's humanity; it is the presence of them.*** Adam before the Fall as well as the saints in heaven lacked sin but was not less human for it. Among all books known to humankind, the Bible is as human as people are, but without error. How is this possible? By adaptation to finitude without accommodation to error.

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

JESUS AND THE BIBLE

Jesus' view of the Bible is of particular interest to evangelicals, since He is held to be God Incarnate (see volume 2), and, hence, whatever He affirms has divine authority. Thus whatever Jesus taught about the Bible is the last word on the topic.

Granting that God exists (see chapter 2) and that miracles are possible (see chapter 3), even non-evangelicals are hard-pressed to avoid the conclusion that Jesus speaks with divine authority—at least if one accepts the authenticity of the Gospel accounts (see chapter 26). If the Gospels present accurately what Jesus taught, and if what He taught was confirmed by miracles to have divine authority (cf. John 3:2; Acts 2:22; Heb. 2:3–4), then what Jesus taught about the origin and nature of Scripture is divinely authoritative.

WHAT JESUS TAUGHT ABOUT THE OLD TESTAMENT

Since the New Testament was not yet written, Jesus' words apply directly only to the Old Testament. However, since Jesus made certain promises to the apostles about New Testament truth, and since the apostolic writings were considered on a par with the Old Testament, then what Jesus taught about the divine authority of the Old Testament applies indirectly to the New Testament as well (see

below).

Jesus Affirmed Its Divine Authority

Over and over Jesus declared, ***"It is written"*** (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10). He instructed, "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). Jesus even appealed to Scripture as the highest authority by which Satan can be rebuked: "Away from me, Satan! For ***it is written:*** Worship the Lord thy God, and serve him only" (Matt. 4:10).

Jesus Affirmed Its Imperishability

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished" (Matt. 5:17–18).

Jesus Asserted Its Unbreakability

"If he called them 'gods,' to whom the word of God came—and ***the Scripture cannot be broken …***" (John 10:35). (This is the equivalent of claiming that the Bible is infallible.)

Jesus Declared Its Ultimate Supremacy

The Bible is exalted above all human instruction. Jesus said to the Jewish leaders, "Why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?

… Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition" (Matt. 15:3, 6).

Jesus Affirmed Its Factual Inerrancy

"Jesus replied, 'You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God' " (Matt. 22:29). Again, Jesus said to the Father, "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth" (John 17:17). In brief, the Bible is wholly true, without any error.

Jesus Insisted on Its Historical Reliability

Jesus even affirmed highly disputed passages, such as the Flood of Noah's time and Jonah and the great fish, as historically true. "***For [just] as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish***, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12:40; cf. 16:4). Further, "as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark" (Matt. 24:37–38; cf. 10:15; 12:42; 19:4–6).

Jesus Affirmed Its Scientific Accuracy

Even on the highly disputed matter of the origin of the world and of humankind, Jesus insisted on the truthfulness of Scripture. He referred to the creation of the universe, saying, "Those will be days of distress un-equaled from ***the beginning, when God created the world***, until now—and never to be equaled again" (Mark 13:19).

Jesus also affirmed the creation of Adam and Eve, saying, "Haven't you read … that ***at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,'*** and said, 'For

this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'?" (Matt. 19:4–5). He added elsewhere, "I have spoken to you of ***earthly things*** and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?" (John 3:12).

The authority of the Bible is confirmed by the authority of Jesus; if He is the Son of God, then the Bible is the Word of God. Indeed, even if Jesus is only a prophet of God, the Bible is the Word of God. Only if one rejects the divine authority of Christ can he consistently reject the divine authority of the Scriptures, for if Jesus is telling the truth, then it is true that the Bible is God's Word.

JESUS AND THE NEW TESTAMENT AUTHORS AFFIRMED THE SCOPE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Jesus affirmed the authority of the whole Jewish Old Testament, which is the same as the Protestant Old Testament (of thirty-nine books), although the books are numbered and ordered differently (see chapter 28). This affirmation is evident from several truths.

Jesus Used Phrases That Encompass the Whole Old Testament

Jesus employed several terms that refer to the Old Testament as a whole; three in particular come to mind. ***First, "law and the prophets"*** or its equivalent (e.g., "Moses and all the Prophets") is employed about a dozen times in the New Testament. Jesus' use of it clearly refers to the whole Old Testament (Luke 24:27; cf. 24:44).

Second, the term "the Scriptures" is utilized by Jesus and other New Testament writers to refer to the whole Old Testament. Two cases in point are found in John (5:39; 10:35).

Third, Jesus used a phrase equivalent to our "from Genesis to Revelation" to refer to the entire Old Testament: "And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, ***from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood***

of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar" (Matt. 23:35).

Jesus Referred to Most of the Individual Books of the Old Testament

According to the Jewish numbering of the Old Testament there were twenty-two (or twenty-four) books, depending on whether Ruth was considered part of Judges and Lamentations part of Jeremiah. Of the twenty-two books, Jesus and His disciples, who wrote the New Testament, referred to eighteen (see Geisler and Nix, ***GIB***, chapter 4).

Jesus Referred to the Old Testament as a Whole

Jesus indicated that the whole Old Testament is the Word of God in phrases like "the Law and the Prophets" (the entire Old Testament canon): "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matt. 5:17). Also, "beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in ***all the Scriptures*** concerning himself" (Luke 24:27). Once He referred to all the books from Genesis to 2 Chronicles (the last book in the Jewish listing of the Old Testament): "And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah" (Matt. 23:35). This is the equivalent of our phrase, "from Genesis to Malachi."

Jesus Promised the Divine Authority of the New Testament

Not only did Jesus confirm the Old Testament to be the Word of God, He also promised the same for the New Testament, affirming that the Holy Spirit would teach the apostles "all things" and lead them into "all truth." He announced, "The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will

teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26). He added, "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13).

The Apostles Claimed This Divine Authority for Their Words

Jesus' handpicked apostles understood His claims and their role in fulfilling them, for they too claimed to speak with the authority of God, as is evident from the claims made in their books. Paul declared, "The gospel I preached is not something that man made up. ***I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ***" (Gal. 1:11–12). In 1 Corinthians he added, ***"What I am writing to you is the Lord's command"*** (1 Cor. 14:37).

John claimed, "That which was from the beginning, ***which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes***, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life" (1 John 1:1). Hence, he insisted, "***We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us;*** but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood" (1 John 4:6).

Peter insisted that what he wrote was from God, just like the Old Testament prophets: "Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, ***but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit***" (2 Peter 1:20–21). He added, "We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but ***we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.… We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain***" (2 Peter 1:16, 18).

Paul Cited the Gospels

Paul cited the words of Jesus from the Gospel of Luke (10:7; cf. Matt. 10:10),

calling them “Scripture” right alongside the Old Testament: “The Scripture says, ‘Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain,’ and ‘The worker deserves his wages’ ” (1 Tim. 5:18).

Peter Acknowledged Paul’s Letters As Scripture

Peter wrote, “Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. ***His letters*** contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the ***other Scriptures***, to their own destruction” (2 Peter 3:15–16, emphasis added).

The New Testament Is the Only Authentic Record of Apostolic Teaching

There are few other sources that even claim to record apostolic teaching not found in the New Testament, and these are apocryphal (see chapter 28), being composed by non-apostles a century or more after the time of Christ. The only historically reliable (see chapter 25) first-century record of what Jesus and His apostles taught is found in the New Testament.
So ***the New Testament too is confirmed to be the Word of God.*** Therefore, the Old Testament was directly confirmed by Jesus to have divine authority, and the New Testament was indirectly confirmed to have the same. Thus, the whole Bible, Old and New Testaments, is confirmed by Christ to be the Word of the Living God.

CHRIST AND THE CRITICS

To the everlasting embarrassment of Bible critics, at least those who claim to be followers of Christ, Jesus affirmed exactly the opposite of what much of negative “higher criticism” teaches. The following are a crucial sampling of the

topics on which there is a clash between Christ and His detractors.

Jesus Affirmed that Daniel Was a Prophet, Not a Mere Historian

Many critics insist that Daniel was a historian, not a predictive prophet, who wrote around 165 B.C.—***after*** the events he announced about Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome (Dan. 2, 7). Jesus, however, claimed that Daniel was a prophet who predicted things in advance, saying, “So when you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken of through ***the prophet Daniel***—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains” (Matt. 24:15–16). Jesus went on to give a detailed prediction about the destruction of Jerusalem almost four decades in advance.

Jesus Confirmed That God Created Adam and Eve

Most Bible critics believe that the first human being evolved from lower forms of life. But in response to a question on the relationship between a husband and a wife, Jesus established the basis for the marriage of the first couple, whom He said were created by God: “Haven’t you read … that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’?” (Matt. 19:4–5).

Jesus Affirmed That Jonah Was Swallowed by a Great Fish

Many critics deny the story of Jonah and the fish, calling it a myth. Jesus, however, took it as literally true, comparing it with His own literal death and resurrection: “For ***as Jonah was*** three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matt. 12:40).

Jesus Verified That the World Was Drowned by a Flood

Old Testament critics have long denied the historicity of the first eleven chapters of Genesis, especially that of Noah's Flood. However, Jesus affirmed it as true, comparing it with His own literal second coming: "***As it was*** in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man" (Matt. 24:37–39).

Jesus Maintained That There Was One Isaiah, Not Two

Old Testament critics have long held that there were at least two prophets named Isaiah, the first who wrote chapters 1–39 and the second who wrote chapters 40–66. One reason prompting this is the disbelief the critics have regarding miracles (see chapter 3). Since Isaiah refers to King Cyrus, who was not born until long after the first section of Isaiah was written, skeptics, on purely natural grounds, feel it necessary to postdate the second section after the time of Cyrus to account for the mention of his name.

However, Jesus quoted from both sections of Isaiah, referring them to one prophet. In Luke 4:17–20 Jesus cites Isaiah 61:1–2 and in Mark 7:6 He quotes Isaiah 29:13. What is more, one disciple whom Jesus taught cites from both sections of Isaiah in the same passage, referring both quotes to one and the same prophet named Isaiah (John 12:37–41; cf. Isa. 6:10; 53:1).

Jesus Confirmed David Wrote Psalms Ascribed to Him

Most Old Testament critics deny that David wrote the seventy-plus psalms

attributed to him, claiming that he wrote few, if any. Yet Jesus cites one of the disputed psalms (Ps. 110:1) and attributes it to King David, asking the Jewish leaders, “How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him ‘Lord’? For he says, “ ‘The Lord said to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.’ ” If then David calls him ‘Lord,’ how then can he be his son?” (Matt. 22:43–45).

Jesus and His Disciples Affirmed Many Other Old Testament Persons and Events

The most disputed sections of the Old Testament were personally validated by Christ and His disciples—whom He taught. Of these sections, some of which are mentioned above, they affirmed something in every one of the most disputed chapters in the Old Testament (Gen. 1–22):

1. Creation of the universe (Gen. 1 → John 1:3; Col. 1:16).
2. Creation of Adam and Eve (Gen. 1–2 → 1 Tim. 2:13–14).
3. Marriage of Adam and Eve (Gen. 2 → 1 Tim. 2:13).
4. Temptation of the woman (Gen. 3 → 1 Tim. 2:14).
5. Disobedience of Adam (Gen. 3 → Rom. 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:22).
6. Sacrifices of Abel and Cain (Gen. 4 → Heb. 11:4).
7. Murder of Abel by Cain (Gen. 4 → 1 John 3:12).
8. Birth of Seth (Gen. 4 → Luke 3:38).
9. Translation of Enoch (Gen. 5 → Heb. 11:5).
10. Marriage before the Flood (Gen. 6 → Luke 17:27).
11. The Flood and destruction of man (Gen. 7 → Matt. 24:39).
12. Preservation of Noah and his family (Gen. 8–9 → 2 Peter 2:5).
13. Genealogy of Shem (Gen. 10 → Luke 3:35–36).
14. Birth of Abraham (Gen. 11 → Luke 3:34).
15. Call of Abraham (Gen. 12–13 → Heb. 11:8).
16. Tithes to Melchizedek (Gen. 14 → Heb. 7:1–3).
17. Justification of Abraham (Gen. 15 → Rom. 4:3).
18. Ishmael (Gen. 16 → Gal. 4:21–26).
19. Promise of Isaac (Gen. 17 → Heb. 11:18).

20. Lot and Sodom (Gen. 18–19 → Luke 17:29).
21. Abraham's sojourn in the Land (Gen 20 → Heb. 11:9).
22. Birth of Isaac (Gen. 21 → Acts 7:8).
23. Offering of Isaac (Gen. 22 → Heb. 11:17).[1]
24. The burning bush (Ex. 3:2–6 → Luke 20:37).
25. Exodus through the Red Sea (Ex. 14:22 → 1 Cor. 10:1–2).
26. Provision of water and manna (Ex. 16:4; 17:6 → 1 Cor. 10:3–5).
27. Lifting up the serpent in the wilderness (Num. 21:9 → John 3:14).
28. Fall of Jericho (Joshua 6:12–25 → Heb. 11:30).
29. Miracles of Elijah (1 Kings 17:1, 18:1 → James 5:17–18).
30. Jonah in the great fish (Jonah 2 → Matt. 12:40).
31. Three Hebrew youths in the furnace (Dan. 3 → Heb. 11:34).
32. Daniel in the lion's den (Dan. 6 → Heb. 11:33).
33. Slaying of Zechariah (2 Chron. 24:20–22 → Matt. 23:35).

In light of the evidence, the choice is clear: Christ or the critics? What Jesus affirms, they deny. But if Jesus is the Son of God, then the Bible is the Word of God, including what it says about these authors and events. And if the Bible is not the Word of God, then Christ is not the Son of God. The two Words of God, the Living and the written, are tied together.

A RESPONSE TO THE CRITICAL THEORIES

In addition to denying the historicity of the Gospel accounts (see chapter 26), critics have proposed two basic ways to avoid the logic of the above argument. Some embrace the accommodation theory and others hold to the limitation theory.

Arguments for the Accommodation Theory

As shown above, Jesus expressed a high view of Scripture in the New Testament, including its divine authority (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10), imperishability

(Matt. 5:17–18), inspiration (Matt. 22:43), unbreakability (John 10:35), status as the Word of God (John 10:34–35), supremacy (Matt. 15:3, 6), inerrancy (Matt. 22:29; John 17:17), historical reliability (Matt. 24:37–38; Matt. 12:40), and scientific accuracy (Matt. 19:4–5).

In order to avoid the conclusion that Jesus was actually affirming all this to be true, some negative critics insist that He was merely accommodating Himself to the accepted Jewish belief of the day. Allegedly, since His primary concern was spiritual, Jesus avoided any attempt to debunk their false views; rather, He merely overlooked them and used them as a starting point to convey His own spiritual and moral message. This "accommodation theory," stemming from Johann Semler (see chapter 19), is seriously flawed for several reasons.

Accommodation to Error Is Contrary to the Pattern of Jesus' Life

Everything that is known about Jesus' life and teaching reveals that He never accommodated what He knew to be true to the false teaching of the day. Indeed, He did just the opposite.

First, Jesus rebuked those who accepted Jewish teaching that contradicted the Bible, declaring, "And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? … Thus ***you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition***" (Matt. 15:3, 6).

Second, Jesus often set His word against false views about the Bible. For instance, in His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus affirmed emphatically, "***You have heard*** that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' ***But I tell you*** that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment" (Matt. 5:21–22). This, or the similar formula of "It has been said.… But I say unto you …" is repeated over and over in subsequent verses (cf. Matt. 5:23–48).

Third, Jesus rebuked Nicodemus, saying, ***"You are Israel's teacher … and do you not understand these things?"*** (John 3:10). This is far from accommodation to his false views.

Fourth, speaking specifically about their erroneous view of Scripture, Jesus told the Sadducees bluntly that they were mistaken: "***You are in error*** because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God" (Matt. 22:29).

Fifth, Jesus' words of denunciation to the Pharisees were scarcely accommodating: "***Woe to you, blind guides! …*** Woe to you, teachers of the law

and Pharisees, you hypocrites! … You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! … Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! … You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?" (Matt. 23:16–33).

Sixth, Jesus did not accommodate false beliefs and practices in the temple. The Bible says, "So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the moneychangers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, ***'Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!' "*** (John 2:15–16).

Seventh, Jesus often spoke specifically about the authorship of portions of the Old Testment. Again, He attributed Psalm 110 to David (Matt. 22:43), and He ascribed Deuteronomy to Moses (Matt. 19:8). He even made specific reference to the origin of circumcision, correcting a false belief: "Moses gave you circumcision (***though actually it did not come from Moses, but from the patriarchs***)." As William Caven observed, "This is not the style of one who does not wish his words to be taken strictly!" ("TCOT" in ***TF***, 225).

Eighth, even Jesus' enemies recognized that He did not compromise. Testing Him, the Pharisees said to Him, ***"Teacher, we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are"*** (Matt. 22:16). The facts are that there is nothing in the Gospel record to indicate that Jesus was an accommodator to accepted error on any topic. He even rebuked Nicodemus for not understanding empirical things, saying, ***"I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?"*** (John 3:12).

Accommodation to Error Is Contrary to Jesus' Character

Even from a purely human standpoint, Jesus was known as a man of high moral character. His closest friends found Him impeccable (1 John 3:3, 4:17; 1 Peter 1:19), and the crowds were amazed at His teaching "because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law" (Matt. 7:29).

Pilate examined Jesus and declared, "I find no basis for a charge against this man" (Luke 23:4). The Roman soldier crucifying Jesus exclaimed, "Surely this was a righteous man" (Luke 23:47). Even unbelievers have paid high tribute to

Christ. Ernest Renan (1823–1892), the famous French infidel, declared about Jesus: "His perfect idealism is the highest rule of the unblemished and virtuous life" (***LJ***, 383). He also wrote, "Let us place, then, the person of Jesus at the highest summit of human greatness" (ibid., 386) and "Jesus remains an inexhaustible principle of moral regeneration for humanity" (ibid., 388).

From a biblical point of view, Jesus was the Son of God (see "C, DO" in Geisler, ***BECA***) and, as such, He could not deceive, for "God … does not lie" (Titus 1:2). Indeed, "it is impossible for God to lie" (Heb. 6:18); His "word is truth" (John 17:17); God is true "and every man a liar" (Rom. 3:4). So whatever divine self-limitation is necessary in order to communicate with human beings, there is no error involved. Error is contrary to His very nature.

An Objection Answered

Admittedly, God adapted to human limitations in order to communicate with us. Indeed, Jesus, who was God, was also a human being (see volume 2), and as a human being He was limited in His knowledge. This is borne out by several passages of Scripture; for instance, as a child "he grew in wisdom" (Luke 2:52). Even as an adult He had certain limitations on His knowledge. According to Matthew, Jesus did not know what was on the fig tree before He got to it (Matt. 21:19). Jesus Himself said He did not know the time of His second coming: "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, ***nor the Son***, but only the Father" (Matt. 24:36, emphasis added).

However, despite the limitations on Jesus' human knowledge, we know that He never erred for two basic reasons. ***First***, limits on understanding are different from misunderstanding. The fact that He did not know some things does not mean He was wrong in what He did know. It is one thing to say Jesus did not know as a man the JEPD theory[2] of the authorship of the law (see chapter 19). But it is quite another to say Jesus was wrong when He affirmed that David wrote Psalm 110 (Matt. 22:43) or that Moses wrote the law (Luke 24:27; John 7:19, 23) or that Daniel wrote the prophecy attributed to him in Matthew 24:15. In short, Jesus' limitations on things He did not know as a man did not hinder Him from affirming truly the things He did know.

Second, what Jesus did know and teach He affirmed with divine authority. This is evident for many reasons. For one thing, Jesus said to His disciples: ***"All***

authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:18–20). Further, He affirmed many things He taught with emphasis. In the gospel of John, Jesus said twenty-five times ***"Truly, truly*** …" (John 3:3, 5, 11 RSV). Indeed, He claimed His words were on the level of God's, declaring, ***"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away"*** (Matt. 24:35). What is more, Jesus taught only what the Father told Him to teach: ***"I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me"*** (John 8:28). He added, "By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me" (John 5:30). So to charge Jesus with error is to charge God the Father with error.

Conclusion Regarding the Accommodation Theory

There is no evidence that Jesus ever accommodated Himself to human error in anything He taught. Nor is there any indication that His self-limitation in the Incarnation necessitated any error. He never taught anything false in the areas in which the Incarnation limited Him as a man, and what He did teach, He taught with the authority of the Father, having all authority in heaven and earth.

Arguments for the Limitation Theory

Another critical hypothesis aimed at undermining the above argument that Jesus affirmed the Bible to be the Word of God is the limitation theory. According to this view, Jesus was so limited in His human knowledge that it did not extend to matters such as the authority and authenticity of the Old Testament, and thus He was not really affirming these issues. Rather, His ministry was limited only to spiritual or moral matters, and He affirmed nothing about historical, scientific, or critical matters.

There are two main pillars in the argument for the limitation theory: the

humanity of Christ and the kenosis theory.

The Argument That the Humanity of Christ Reveals His Knowledge Was Limited

Jesus was clearly human. The Bible reveals this in many ways (see "Christ, Humanity of" in Geisler, ***BECA***): Jesus had a human ancestry (Matt. 1:20–25; Luke 2:1–7); a human conception (Matt. 1:20);* a human birth (Luke 2:4–7; cf. Luke 1:26–27; Gal. 4:4); a human childhood (Luke 2:21–22, 40); normal human growth (Luke 2:52); human hunger (Luke 4:2); human thirst (John 4:6–7); human fatigue (Mark 6:31); human emotions (John 11:33, 35; John 2:15); human sense of humor (Matt. 23:24); human language, culture, and national origin (Matt. 1:1; John 4:5–9); human flesh and blood (Heb. 2:14); human death (1 Cor. 15:3; Matt. 16:21; Rom. 5:8); human pain (Matt. 27:34, 46; Matt. 26:38; Luke 22:44; Heb. 5:7); and human temptation (Matt. 4:1f.; cf. Heb. 4:15). But if Jesus was truly human in every respect, then why could He not experience human error? Why could not Jesus have been wrong about many of the things He believed, so long as they did not hinder His overall redemptive mission?

The Argument That in the Incarnation Christ Emptied Himself of Omniscience

Further, some critics have argued that in His incarnation Jesus "emptied himself of" omniscience. He was ignorant, allegedly, of the time of His second coming, for He Himself said, "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Mark 13:32). Again, neither did He know whether there were figs on the tree (Mark 11:13). Luke informs us that Jesus "increased in wisdom" as other humans do (Luke 2:52), and asked many questions that revealed His ignorance of the answers (Mark 5:9, 30; 6:38; John 14:9). This being the case, perhaps Jesus was ignorant of the origin of the Old Testament and of the historical truth of the events in it.

Response to the Arguments for the Limitation View

The limitation theory is faulty at the core. Both arguments in favor of it are mistaken, and each ignores a very important point about Christ.

Jesus Was Also God

While it is true that Jesus was God (see volume 2), it is also true that He was man. That is, one and the same person was both God and man at the same time. This means that if the human person Christ had sinned or erred, then the one and the same person that was God would have sinned or erred as well. This is why the Bible is careful to say "we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—***yet was without sin***" (Heb. 4:15). He was human enough to be tired and tempted but not to be sinful (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Peter 3:18; 1 John 3:3). Likewise, if a sin attributed to Christ must also be attributed to God who cannot sin (Hab. 1:13; Heb. 6:18), then an error attributed to Him would have to be attributed to God as well—one and the same person who is Christ is also God. Thus, it is not possible that error can be attributed to Christ, whether as man or as God, since there is only one and the same person in Christ, who is both God and man.

Jesus Never Emptied Himself of Deity

The so-called kenosis theory (that Jesus emptied Himself of deity when He became man) is biblically and theologically unfounded, for many reasons.
First, this is not what the text affirms in Philippians 2, which claims only that He emptied Himself of His divine prerogatives (not of His deity) by humbling Himself to become a human being (Phil. 2:5–8).
Second, when He emptied Himself He was still in the "form" (essence) of God, for if the same word "form" as applied to a servant means He was a servant (Phil. 2:7), then when applied to God it means He was God (Phil. 2:6). Indeed, this is precisely what John 1:1 declares, viz., "the Word was God" (cf. Col. 2:9).
Third, while on earth in human form Jesus claimed to be God (Mark 2:10; John 8:58; 10:35–36; John 17:1–6).
Fourth, Jesus accepted the attribution of deity given Him by others (Matt. 16:16; John 20:28), as well as worship due only to God (Matt. 28:17; John 9:38).
When Christ became man He never ceased being God. ***The Incarnation was not the subtraction of deity; it was the addition of humanity.*** Thus, had Jesus sinned

or erred when on earth as a man, He would have simultaneously sinned or erred as God, for Jesus was one and the same person with the Second Person of the Godhead (see volume 2, part 1).

Criticism of the Limitation Theory

The limitation theory is much more plausible and potentially damaging to the case for the authority of the Old Testament than is the accommodation theory discussed above. Let us examine the evidence carefully.

Since the orthodox doctrine of Christ acknowledges that He was fully human, there is no problem in admitting that Jesus was ignorant of many things as a man. As God, of course, Jesus was infinite in knowledge and knew all things (Ps. 147:5). But ***Christ has two natures:*** one infinite or unlimited in knowledge, the other finite or limited in knowledge. Could it be that Jesus did not really err in what He taught about the Old Testament but that He simply was so limited as a human being that His knowledge and authority did not extend into those areas? The evidence in the New Testament records demands an emphatically negative answer to this question for many reasons.

Jesus Had a Supernormal Knowledge Even in His Human State

Even in His human state, Christ possessed supernormal if not supernatural knowledge of many things. He saw Nathaniel under the fig tree, although He was not within visual distance (John 1:48). Jesus amazed the woman of Samaria with the information He knew about her private life (John 4:18–19). He knew who would betray Him in advance (John 6:64) and "all that would befall him" in Jerusalem (John 18:4). He knew about Lazarus's death before He was told (John 11:14) and of His crucifixion and resurrection before it occurred (Mark 8:31; 9:31). He likewise had superhuman knowledge of the location of fish (Luke 5:4–9).

There is no indication from the Gospel record that Jesus' finitude deterred His ministry or teaching. Whatever the limitations to His knowledge, it was still vastly beyond that of normal men and completely adequate for His mission and doctrinal teaching.

Christ Possessed Complete and Final Authority for Whatever He Taught

One thing is crystal clear: Christ claimed that whatever He taught came from God with absolute and final authority: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away" (Matt. 24:35). Jesus believed and proclaimed, "All things have been committed to me by my Father" (Matt. 11:27). When Jesus commissioned His disciples, He claimed, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given me. Therefore go and make disciples … teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:18–20).
Elsewhere Jesus claimed that the very destiny of humanity hinged on His words (Matt. 7:24–27) and that His words would judge us in the last day (John 12:48). The emphatic "truly, truly" is found more than two dozen times in John alone (RSV) , and in Matthew Jesus declared that not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law He came to fulfill (Matt. 5:18). Jesus then placed His own words on the level of the law (Matt. 5:21f.) and claimed that His words bring eternal life (John 5:24), vowing that all His teaching came from the Father (John 8:26–28). Furthermore, as we have seen, despite the fact that He was a man on earth, Christ accepted the acclaims of deity and allowed men to worship Him on many occasions (cf. Matt. 28:17; John 9:38).

Conclusion Regarding the Limitation Theory

In view of the foregoing evidence, the only reasonable conclusion is that Jesus' teachings are possessed of divine authority. Despite the necessary limitations involved in a human incarnation, there is no error or misunderstanding in what Christ taught. Whatever limits there were in the ***extent*** of Jesus' knowledge, there were no limits to the ***truthfulness*** of His teachings. Just as Jesus was fully human and yet His ***moral*** character was without flaw (Heb. 4:15), likewise, He was finite in human knowledge and yet without ***factual*** error in His teaching (John 8:40, 46). In summation, whatever Jesus taught came from God. Hence, if Jesus taught the divine authority and historical authenticity of the Old Testament, then His teaching is the truth of God.

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SECTION TWO

HISTORICAL

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

CHURCH FATHERS ON THE BIBLE

The history of the Christian church is in overwhelming support of what the Bible claims for itself, namely, to be the divinely inspired, infallible, and inerrant word of God (see chapters 13 and 27). This is true of the earliest Fathers after the time of Christ, as well as down through the centuries following them up to modern times. Just as the New Testament writers assumed the inspiration of the Old, the Fathers assumed the inspiration of the New. This fact is observable in the two major periods of the development of the Christian church prior to about A.D. 350.

THE APOSTOLIC AND SUB-APOSTOLIC FATHERS' VIEW OF SCRIPTURE (C. A.D. 70–C. 150)

These writers are important because they overlap with the time of the apostles. An examination of their writings indicates an early and widespread acceptance of the New Testament claim for inspiration.

The Testimony of the *Epistle of Pseudo-Barnabas* (c. 70–130)[1]

The title of the ***Epistle of Pseudo-Barnabas*** indicates that it was later wrongly ascribed to Paul's first associate. This work cites the gospel of Matthew (26:3) after stating that it is what "God saith" (5:12). The same writer refers to the gospel of Matthew (22:14) by the New Testament title "Scripture" in 4:14, which the New Testament says is "inspired" or "breathed out" by God (2 Tim. 3:16).

Clement of Rome's *Epistle to the Corinthians* (c. 95–97)

Clement of Rome, also a contemporary of the apostles, wrote his epistle after the pattern of Paul. In it he quotes the Synoptic Gospels (Matt. 9:13; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:32) after calling them "Scripture" (chapter 2). He urges his readers to "act according to that which is written" ("for the Holy Spirit saith, 'Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom,' "chapter 1, quoting Jer. 9:23). He further appeals to "the Holy Scriptures, which are true, given by the Holy Spirit" (chapter 45). The New Testament is included as Scripture by the formula "It is written" (chapter 36), and as being written by the apostle Paul "with true inspiration" (chapter 47).

Polycarp's *Epistle to the Philippians* (c. 110–135)

Polycarp was a disciple of the apostle John. He referred to the New Testament several times in his epistle, introducing Galatians 4:26 as "the word of truth" (chapter 3) and presenting citations of Philippians 2:16 and 2 Timothy 4:10 as "the word of righteousness" (chapter 9). In chapter 12, Polycarp cites numerous Old and New Testament passages as "the Scriptures."

Papias (c. 130–140)

Papias wrote five books titled ***Exposition of the Oracles of the Lord***, which is the same title given to the Old Testament by the apostle Paul in Romans 3:2, revealing Papias's high regard for the New Testament as the very Word of God. (In the ***Exposition of the Oracles of the Lord*** he included the New Testament.)

Other Early Writings

In addition to these early books that cite the New Testament, there are several others that allude to it as Scripture. These include the writings of Ignatius of Antioch (d. 110), ***The Shepherd of Hermas*** (c. 115–140), ***The Didache*** (c. 100–120), and the ***Epistle to Diognetus*** (c. 150).
Taken together, this important early material demonstrates that by about A.D. 150 the early church, both East and West, accepted the New Testament claim for divine inspiration. The Fathers looked upon those books with the same high regard as the New Testament writers did the Old Testament Scriptures, namely, as the inspired, authoritative, and absolutely true Word of God.

THE ANTE-NICENE AND NICENE FATHERS' VIEW OF SCRIPTURE (C. 150–C. 350)

After the sub-apostolic Fathers, those of the later second century and following provided strong testimony for the divine origin of Scripture. These include noted Fathers like Justin Martyr, Tatian, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and others.

Justin Martyr (d. 165)

In his first ***Apology*** (c. 150–155), Justin Martyr spoke of the Gospels as the

“Voice of God” (chapter 65). He added, “We must not suppose that the language proceeds from men who were inspired, but from the Divine Word which moves them” (1.36). Elsewhere, he declared that Moses wrote in the Hebrew character by the “divine inspiration” and that “the Holy Spirit of prophecy taught us this, telling us by Moses that God spoke thus” (***JHOG***, 12, 44).

Tatian (c. 110–180)

A disciple of Justin, Tatian called John 1:5 “Scripture” in his ***Apology*** (chapter 13). In this work Tatian made a passionate defense of Christianity and regarded it as so pure that it was incompatible with Greek civilization. He also wrote a harmony of the Gospels, ***Diatessaron*** (c. 150–160), which reveals his high regard for their divine authority.

Irenaeus (c. 130–202)

Irenaeus is reported to have actually heard the teachings of Polycarp, disciple of the apostle John. In his treatise ***Against Heresies*** (3.1.1), Irenaeus referred to the divine authority of the New Testament, declaring,

> For the Lord of all gave the power of the Gospel to his apostles, through whom we have come to know the truth, that is, the teaching of the Son of God.... This Gospel they first preached. Afterwards, by the will of God, they handed it down to us in the Scriptures, to be “the pillar and ground” of our faith. (*AH*, 3:67.)

In fact, Irenaeus affirmed his belief in the inerrancy of Scripture, proclaiming “the Faith in Scripture and Tradition,” in which he acknowledged the apostles to be “above all falsehood” (3.5.1). He called the Bible “Scriptures of truth,” and he was “most properly assured that the Scriptures are indeed perfect, since they are spoken by the Word of God and His Spirit” (ibid., 2:28.2; 2.35).

Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–215)

Clement became head of the Church School at Alexandria in 190 but was compelled to flee in the face of persecution in 202. He held to a strict doctrine of inspiration, which can be seen in his ***Stromata:***

> There is no discord between the Law and the Gospel, but harmony, for they both proceed from the same Author … differing in name and time to suit the age and culture of their hearers … by a wise economy, but potentially one … since faith in Christ and the knowledge … of the Gospel is the explanation … and the fulfillment of the Law. (Westcott, *AISG*, 439.)

Clement of Alexandria also called the gospel "Scripture" in the same sense as the Law and the Prophets, as he writes of "the Scriptures … in the Law, in the Prophets, and besides by the blessed Gospel … [which] are valid from their omnipotent authority." He went so far as to condemn those who rejected Scripture because "they are not pleased with the divine commands, that is, with the Holy Spirit" (Geisler, ***DFY***, 31–32).

Tertullian (c. 160–220)

Tertullian, the "Father of Latin Theology," never wavered in his support of the doctrine of inspiration of both the Old and the New Testaments. In fact, he maintained that the four Gospels "are reared on the certain basis of Apostolic authority, and so are inspired in a far different sense from the writings of the spiritual Christian; all the faithful, it is true, have the Spirit of God, but all are not Apostles" (Westcott, ***AISG***, 434). For Tertullian,

> [T]he apostles have the Holy Spirit properly, who have Him fully, in the operations of prophecy, and the efficacy of [healing] virtues, and the evidences of tongues; not particularly, as all others have. Thus he attached the Holy Spirit's authority to that form [of advice] to which he willed us rather to attend; and forthwith it became not an *advice* of the Holy Spirit, but, in consideration of His

majesty, a precept. (“OEC” in Schaff, *NPNFCC*, 4)

Hippolytus (c. 170–236)

Hippolytus, a disciple of Irenaeus, exhibited the same deep sense of reverence toward Scripture. Speaking of the inspiration of the Old Testament, he said,

> The Law and the Prophets were from God, who in giving them compelled his messenger to speak by the Holy Spirit, that receiving the inspiration of the Father’s power they may announce the Father’s counsel and will. In these men therefore the Word found a fitting abode and spoke of Himself; for even then He came as His own herald, showing the Word who was about to appear in the world. (Westcott, *AISG*, 431–32.)

Of the New Testament writers, Hippolytus declared,

> These blessed men … having been perfected by the Spirit of Prophecy, and worthily honoured by the Word Himself, were brought to an inner harmony like instruments, and having the Word within them, as it were to strike the notes, by Him they were moved, and announced that which God wished.… [For] they did not speak of their own power (be well assured), nor proclaim that which they wished themselves, but first they were rightly endowed with wisdom by the Word, and afterwards well foretaught of the future by visions, and then, when thus assured, they spake that which was [revealed] to them alone by God. (Westcott, *AISG*, 432.)

Origen (c. 185–c. 254)

Origen, a successor of Clement at the Alexandrian School, held that God “gave the law, and the prophets, and the Gospels, being also the God of the apostles and of the Old and New Testaments.” He wrote, “This Spirit inspired each one of the saints, whether prophets or apostles; and there was not one Spirit in the men of the old dispensation, and another in those who were inspired at the advent of Christ” (Schaff, ***NPNFCC*** 4:240).

Origen's view of the authority of the Scriptures is "that the Scriptures were written by the Spirit of God, and have a meaning … not known to all, but to those only on whom the grace of the Holy Spirit is bestowed in the words of wisdom and knowledge" (ibid., 241). He went on to assert that there is a supernatural element of thought "throughout all of Scripture even where it is not apparent to the uninstructed" (Geisler, ***DFY***, 28–30).

Cyprian (c. 200–258)

Cyprian was an important bishop in the Western church during the time of Roman emperor Decius (249–251). In his treatise ***The Unity of the Catholic Church***, Cyprian appeals to the Gospels as authoritative, referring to them as the "commandments of Christ." He also adds the Corinthian letters of Paul to his list of authorities and appeals to Paul's Ephesian letter (4:4–6). In the same location, he reaffirms the inspiration of the New Testament as he writes, "When the Holy Spirit says, in the person of the Lord.…" Again, he adds, "The Holy Spirit warns us through the apostle" as he cites 1 Corinthians 11:19 (***TUCC***, 5:126). These and several other, examples in his writings lead to the conclusion that Cyprian held that both the Old and New Testaments are "Divine Scriptures" (***EACN***, 5:328).

Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 263 or 265–340)

As the great early-church historian, Eusebius is an important witness to the views of Scripture in the nascent Christian church. He held to the inspiration of the Old and New Testaments and wrote much about God's Word in his ***Ecclesiastical History.*** It was Eusebius who was commissioned to make fifty copies of the Scriptures following the Council of Nicea (325).
Eusebius was a tremendous defender of Scripture, writing extensively on the topic. Related works include ***Against Hierocles*** (a pagan governor of Bithynia), ***The Preparation for the Gospel***, and ***Demonstration of the Gospel.*** On top of these he wrote a work on the Incarnation titled ***The Theophany***, and he penned another book (***Against Marcellus, Bishop of Ancyra***) that is a collection of Old

Testament passages foretelling the coming of Christ. Also, ***Problems of the Gospels*** (Schaff, 2nd series, volume 1, 36) and ***On the Theology of the Church, a Refutation of Marcellus.*** Add to these his treatise on ***Easter*** and his ***On the Names of Places in the Holy Scriptures*** (*Onomastica Sacra*) to round out his massive defense of the Bible as the divinely inspired Word of God.

Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 295–373)

Known as the "Father of Orthodoxy" because of his successful stand against arianism (the heresy denying Christ's deity) at Nicea (325), Athanasius was the first to use the term "canon" in reference to the New Testament books, which he called "the fountains of salvation" (Westcott, ***AGSHCNT***, 456). Athanasius cites the Scriptures repeatedly as having divine authority with final say in resolving all doctrinal issues.

Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 315–386)

Cyril offered what he called a summary of "the whole doctrine of the Faith" that "has been built up strongly out of all the Scriptures." Then he proceeded to warn others not to change or contradict his teachings because of the Scripture's injunction as found in Galatians 1:8–9 (Cyril of Jerusalem in Schaff, 7:32). In his treatise ***Of the Divine Scriptures***, he speaks of "the divinely-inspired Scriptures of both the Old and the New Testaments" (ibid., 26–27). He then proceeds to list all the books of the Hebrew Old Testament (twenty-two) and all of the books of the Christian New Testament except Revelation (twenty-six), saying, "Learn also diligently, and from the Church, what are the books of the Old Testament, and what are those of the New. And, pray, read none of the apocryphal writings." For Cyril the matter was drawn clearly when he wrote,

> With regard to the divine and saving mysteries of faith no doctrine, however trivial, may be taught without the backing of the divine Scriptures.... For our saving faith derives its force, not from capricious reasoning, but from what may be proved out of the Bible (ibid., as cited in J. N. D. Kelly's *ECD*, 4).

Summary of the Early Fathers on Scripture

Virtually every early church Father enthusiastically adhered to the doctrine of the inspiration of the Old and New Testaments alike. J. N. D. Kelly, noted authority on the doctrine of the early church, affirmed,

> There is little need to dwell on the absolute authority accorded to the Scripture as a doctrinal norm. It was the Bible, declared Clement of Alexandria about a.d. 200, which as interpreted by the Church, was the source of Christian teaching. His greater disciple Origen was a thorough-going Biblicist who appealed again and again to Scripture as the decisive criterion of dogma.... "The holy inspired Scriptures," wrote Athanasius a century later, "are fully sufficient for the proclamation of the truth." Later in the same century John Chrysostom bade his congregation seek no other teacher than the oracles of God.... In the West Augustine ... [and] a little while later Vincent of Lerins (c. 450) took it as an axiom [that] "the Scriptural canon was sufficient, and more sufficient, for all purposes" (*ECD*, 42–43).

In short, the Fathers of the early church believed that both the Old and New Testaments were the inspired writings of the Holy Spirit through the instrumentality of the prophets and apostles. They also believed the Scriptures were completely true and without error because they were the very Word of God given for the faith and practice of all believers.

THE GREAT MEDIEVAL CHURCH TEACHERS' VIEW OF SCRIPTURE (C. 350–C. 1350)

The medieval church is represented by several great theologians who represent wide segments of Christianity and had a vast influence on the later centuries of the Christian church. They too held to the orthodox view of Scripture as the divinely inspired and inerrant Word of God. These include Jerome, Augustine, Anselm, and Thomas Aquinas, to say nothing of Ambrose, the teacher of

Augustine.

Ambrose of Milan (340–397)

Ambrose, bishop of Milan, had the distinction of mentoring the great Father of the medieval church, Augustine. In his ***Letters*** Ambrose cites Matthew 22:21 by using the familiar introductory statement for a divinely inspired writing ("It is written," 20.19) as he proceeds to quote loosely John 6:15 and 2 Corinthians 12:10 (***L***, 20, 5:209–17). Ambrose also appeals to "The Divine Scriptures" (10.7) in his letter to the Emperor Gratian (375–83), where he presents his disputation with the followers of arianism (ibid., 10, 184–89).

Jerome (c. 340–420)

Next to Origen, Jerome was the greatest biblical scholar of the early church, and his writings include many references to the "Holy Scriptures" and to their authority. Much of his life work centered around translating the Bible and disputing with others over the canon of the Old Testament. In addition, he assumed the inspiration, canonicity, and authority of the New Testament as it has come down to the modern world.
In a letter to Nepotian in A.D. 394, Jerome wrote, "Read the divine scriptures constantly; never, indeed, let the sacred volume out of your hand" (Schaff, Letter 52.7, v.6). In the same year he enumerates the books of the New Testament as he writes,

> I beg you, my dear brother, to live among these books, to meditate upon them, to know nothing else, to seek nothing else. Does not such a life seem to you a foretaste of heaven here on earth? Let not the simplicity of the Scriptures offend you; for these are due either to faults of translators or else to deliberate purpose: for in this way it is better fitted for instruction (ibid., Letter 53.10, 102).

In his discussion of the difference between righteous ignorance and instructed

righteousness, Jerome answers the question “Why is the apostle Paul called a chosen vessel?” His response is “Assuredly because he is a repertory of the Law and of the holy scriptures” (ibid., Letter 53.3, 97–98).

The Syrian School at Antioch

John Chrysostom (c. 347–407) and Theodore of Mopsuestia (c. 350–428) are representative exegetes and theologians of the Syrian School at Antioch, the city in which the disciples were first called Christians (Acts 11:26). During the early centuries of the Christian church, Antioch was the chief rival to Alexandria in the struggle for theological leadership in the East. Theodore and his contemporaries held that the primary author of all Scripture was the Holy Spirit. They viewed the Holy Spirit as providing the content of revelation and the prophet (in cooperation with the Holy Spirit) as giving it the appropriate expression and form (Wiles, “TMRAS”, 1, in Ackroyd and Evans, ***CHB***). However, unlike virtually all of their predecessors and successors, they allowed for minor discrepancies in this human form (see Ackroyd and Evans, ***CHB***, 493–494).

Augustine of Hippo (354–430)

Augustine was not only the greatest theologian of the early Middle Ages but one of the greatest of all time. He completely endorsed the claims of the New Testament for its inspiration; an example of this view may be seen in his ***Confessions*** (8.29), where the reading of Romans 13:13–14 was sufficient for him to be converted. His monumental work ***The City of God*** contains much Scripture, and therein he indicates the authority of Scripture in contrast to all other writings (see 11.3; 18.41). All through his letters and other treatises, he asserted the truth, authority, and divine origin of Scripture.
In ***The City of God*** Augustine used such expressions as “Sacred Scripture” (9.5), “the words of God” (10.1), “Infallible Scripture” (11.6), “divine revelation” (13.2), and “Holy Scripture” (15.8). Elsewhere he referred to the Bible as the

"oracles of God," "God's word," "divine oracles," and "divine Scripture." With his widespread influence throughout the centuries, such a testimony has stood as an outstanding witness to the high regard given to the Scriptures in the church. Speaking of the gospel writers, Augustine said,

> When they write what He has taught and said, it should not be asserted that he did not write it, since the members only put down what they had come to know at the dictation [dictis] of the Head. Therefore, whatever He wanted us to read concerning His words and deeds, He commanded His disciples, His hands, to write. Hence, one cannot but receive what he reads in the Gospels, though written by the disciples, as though it were written by the very hand of the Lord Himself. (Geisler, *DFY*, 34.)

Consequently, he added,

> I have learned to yield this respect and honour only to the canonical books of Scripture: of these alone do I most firmly believe that the authors were completely free from error (ibid., 40).... If we are perplexed by any apparent contradiction in Scripture, it is not allowable to say, the author of this book is mistaken: but either the manuscript is faulty, or the translation is wrong, or you have misunderstood. (*Against Faustus*, 11.5.)

Gregory I ("The Great," 540–604)

Gregory the Great wrote ***Commentary on Job***, in which he refers to Hebrews 12:6 as "Scripture" (***CJ***, 9:189), the term used for divinely inspired writings in the New Testament (2 Tim. 3:16). He, being the first medieval pope, set the tone for the succeeding centuries just as he epitomized the preceding ones.
Louis Gaussen summarized the view of Scripture in the early Middle Ages well:

> With the single exception of Theodore of Mopsuestia, (c. a.d. 400), that philosophical divine whose numerous writings were condemned for th Nestorianism in the fifth ecumenical council ... it has been found impossible to produce, in the long course of the *eight first centuries of Christianity*, a single doctor who has disowned the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures, unless it be in the bosom of the most violent heresies that have tormented the Christian Church;

> that is to say, among the Gnostics, the Manicheans, the Anomeans, and the Mahometans [Muslims]. (Gaussen, *T*, 139–40.)

Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109)

In his famous *Cur Deus Homo?* (chapter 22), Anselm continued to state the orthodox view of inspiration when he wrote, “And the God-man himself originates the New Testament and approves the Old. And, as we must acknowledge him to be true, so no one can dissent from anything contained in these books” (***SABW***, 287–88). As Archbishop of Canterbury, Anselm addressed the question of authority in another treatise, where he said, “What is said in Scripture … I believe without doubting, of course” (***TFE***, 185).

The Victorines (Twelfth Century)

The Victorines were noted Christian teachers in the Abbey of St. Victor in Paris; they followed the historical and literal approach to biblical interpretation. Victorine representatives included Hugh (d. 1142), Richard (d. 1173), and Andrew (d. 1175), and their respect for Scripture was based on the belief of their predecessors—that the Bible is the divinely inspired Word of God (Ramm, ***PBI***, 51).

Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225–1274)

The foundations for late medieval theology were laid by such outstanding scholars as the categorizer Peter Lombard (c. 1100–c. 1160) and the encyclopedist Albert the Great (c. 1193 or 1206–1280). But the greatest spokesman of scholasticism was Thomas Aquinas, who clearly set forth the orthodox doctrine of inspiration. In his *Summa Theologica* Aquinas states, “The Author of Holy Scripture is God.” Although he asks the question of “senses” of

Scripture, he ***assumes*** the "inspiration" of both the Old and New Testaments. He concurred with the traditional view that the Scriptures are "divine revelation" (***ST*** 1.1.1, 8; 2) and "without error" (***ST*** 2.6.1).

God Is the Author of Scripture

Aquinas insisted "that God is the author of Holy Scripture." Again, "the Author of Holy Scripture is God" (***ST***, 1a, 1, 10). Thus, "revelation is the basis of sacred Scripture or doctrine" (ibid., 1a. 1, 2 ad 2), for "holy Scripture looks at things in that they are divinely revealed" (ibid., 1a. 1, 2 ad 2), and it is "in Holy Scripture [that] the divine will is declared to us" (ibid., 1a. 1, 2 ad 2). Citing Paul's words to Timothy ("All Scripture is inspired of God," 2 Tim. 3:16), Aquinas referred to the Bible as "divinely inspired Scripture" (ibid., 1a 1, 1) and said we stood in need of an errorless "divine revelation," otherwise the "rational truth about God would have appeared only to a few, and even so after a long time and mixed with many mistakes" (ibid., 1a. 1, 1).

God Spoke Through Prophets

"Prophecy implies a certain vision of some supernatural truth beyond our reach" (ibid., 2a2ae. 174, 5). Thus "a true prophet is always inspired by the spirit of truth" (ibid., 2a2ae. 172, 6, ad 2). Again, "prophecy is a knowledge which divine revelation engraves in the mind of a prophet, in the form of a teaching" (ibid., 2a2ae. 171, 6).

The Relation of the Divine and Human in Scripture

Like the Fathers before him, Aquinas sometimes spoke of the human authors of Scripture as being the "instruments of divine operation" (ibid., 2a2ae. 172, 4, ad 1), for "in prophetic revelation the prophet's mind is moved by the Holy Spirit as a defective instrument by its principal cause." Aquinas cites 2 Samuel 23:2 in support of his view: David said, "The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me" (ibid., 2a2ae. 173, 4). When God moves upon a human writer, an imperfect instrument can utter a perfect message, even to the very "words" (ibid). This is possible because of the perfection of the principal or primary Cause (God) working on

the imperfect secondary cause.
However, unlike many of his predecessors, Aquinas did not view the human authors as ***mere*** instruments of God's causality; rather, they were secondary causes under the direct providential action of God, the primary Cause. Aquinas argued that "the proper disposition is a necessary requirement for the correct use of prophecy, since the use of prophecy proceeds from the created power of the prophet. Therefore, a determinate disposition is also required" (***OT***, 12, 4).[2]
This disposition is provided by the Divine Architect of salvation history: God disposes men and events so that they will communicate His Word precisely as they did (***ST***, 2a2ae. 172, 3). In this way the personal characteristics of the prophets in no way deprecate the message they convey; rather, the message "proceeds in harmony with such dispositions" (***OT***, 12, 4 ad 1).[3]
Aquinas illustrated the divine-human relation in prophecy by the model of teacher-learner:

> Prophecy is a type of knowledge impressed on the prophet's intellect from a divine revelation; this happens after the manner of education. Now the truth of knowledge is the same in both the student and the teacher since the student's knowledge is a likeness of the teacher's knowledge. (*ST*, 2a2ae. 171, 6)
> [4]

Unlike the mechanical illustrations used by many of his predecessors (such as God playing on a musical instrument), Aquinas provided new insight into the process of inspiration. Just as a teacher activates the potential of the student for knowledge, so God (the Primary Cause) activates the potential of man (the secondary cause) to know what He desires to reveal to him. Thus, the prophet is not a puppet or even a secretary but a human learner. And, like a human teacher, God only activates in the prophet what he has the potentiality to receive in terms of his own capacities, culture, language, and literary forms.

The Inerrancy of Scripture

While many in modern times have denied the inerrancy of Scripture, there is no question where Aquinas stood on the matter. In his ***Commentary on the Book of***

Job he declared, “It is heretical to say that any falsehood whatsoever is contained either in the gospels or in any canonical Scripture” (13, lecture 1). Elsewhere he insists, “A true prophet is always inspired by the spirit of truth in whom there is no trace of falsehood, and so he never utters untruths” (***ST***, 2a2ae. 172, 6, ad 2). Pointedly, he declares that “nothing false can underlie the literal sense of Scripture” (ibid., 1a. 1, 10, ad 3). Therefore, “the truth of prophetic proclamations must needs be the same as that of divine knowledge. And falsity … cannot creep into prophecy” (ibid., 1a. 14, 3). Agreeing with Augustine, Aquinas confesses of Holy Scripture, “I firmly believe that none of their authors have erred in composing them” (ibid., 1a. 1, 8). In this same passage Aquinas refers to Scripture as “unfailing truth.” The Bible, then, is the inerrant Word of God.

In his ***Commentary on John***, Aquinas claimed,

> Those who wrote the Scriptural canon, such as the Evangelists, Apostles and others like them, so firmly asserted the truth that they left nothing to be doubted. Thus it stresses: “And we know his testimony is true” and “If anyone preach to you a gospel, besides that which you have received, let him be anathema” (21, lecture 6).

In short, the Bible is so completely without error that nothing is to be doubted.

Contrary to some today who believe that only what is essential to faith is without error,[5] Aquinas believed that the Bible is not only true in all it ***teaches*** but also in all it ***touches***, for things “incidentally or secondarily related to the object of faith are all the contents of Scripture handed down by God” (***ST***, 2a2ae. 2, 5). As examples of things in the Bible not essential to faith, but nevertheless without error, Aquinas lists examples such as that Abraham had two sons, or that a dead man rose when Elisha’s bones touched him (ibid., 2a2ae. 1, 6 ad 1).

The Superiority of Scripture

Aquinas agreed with the later Protestant principle of *Sola Scriptura,* the Bible alone as the Word of God, the totally sufficient norm for our faith. He said clearly,

> We believe the prophets and apostles because the Lord has been their witness by performing miracles.... And we believe the successors of the apostles and the prophets *only in so far as they tell us those things which the apostles and prophets have left in their writings.* (*OT*, XIV, 10, ad 11, emphasis added.)

Elsewhere he added, "The truth of faith is contained in sacred Scripture" (***ST***, 2a2ae. 1, 9). Hence, "one is held to explicit belief in such matters ***only when it is clear to him that they are in truth contained in the teaching of faith***" (ibid., 2a2ae. 2, 6, emphasis added). The context of this statement makes it clear that "the teaching of faith" refers to the Scriptures.

After insisting that the biblical writers "so firmly asserted the truth that they left nothing to be doubted" and that anyone who rejects it should be "anathema," Aquinas added:

> The reason for this is that *only the canonical Scriptures are normative for faith.... Others who write about the truth do so in such a way that they do not want to be believed unless what they affirm is true.* (*TCJ*, 21, lecture 6, emphasis added.)

While believing that the Bible alone was God's written revelation,[6] Aquinas did not mean to imply that it needed no interpretation (***ST***, 2a2ae. 1, 9 ad 1; 10 ad 1); he meant that the Scriptures have no peer. "So, sacred Scripture, which has no superior science over it, disputes the denial of its principles; it argues on the basis of those truths held by revelation" (ibid., ***ST***, 1a. 1, 8). The Bible is superior to any other book or person, and all else must be subject to its divine authority.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

While there were minor differences with regard to the mode of inspiration, there was essential unity in the great Fathers of the early and medieval church on the nature of inspiration. Virtually all agreed that the Old and New Testaments were the divinely authoritative and verbally inspired Word of God, having final

authority for the faith and practice of the church. While none actually believed in mechanical word-for-word dictation, their language supporting the plenary (full) verbal divine inspiration was so strong at times that they were convinced that it was just as inspired ***as if it has been*** dictated (see, for example, the above quotation by Augustine).

While there were deviations on the manner of interpretation (particularly from the allegorical school of Origen) that undermined the authority of certain sections of Scripture, there was unanimity that the Bible itself was the Word of God written. Again, many used such strong illustrations of the writers as the mouthpieces of God that they opened themselves up to the unjustified charge of verbal dictation. One thing is certain: While the fact that speaking of the authors of Scripture as the instruments through whom God spoke may have tended to diminish their humanity (see chapter 15), it certainly exalted the divinity of their writings—the Holy Scriptures.

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE HISTORICAL CHURCH ON THE BIBLE

On the nature of Scripture, there are no substantial differences between the views of the Reformers and the great early and medieval Fathers of the church. They all held that the Old and New Testaments were the verbally inspired, divinely authoritative, written Word of God. The first serious deviations within the church were not to come for several centuries after the Reformation, in modern times (see chapter 19).

MARTIN LUTHER ON SCRIPTURE

As an Augustinian monk, Martin Luther (1483–1546) did not depart from the doctrine of Scripture held by his great mentor, Augustine (see chapter 17). He firmly adhered to the divine authority, infallibility, and inerrancy of Scripture, as the following citations demonstrate.

The Origin of Scripture

Like many early and medieval Fathers before him, Luther believed the Bible came from God through the instrumentality of the men God used. In this he did not deviate from the standard orthodox view of Scripture.

The Bible Is the Word of God

Luther wrote: “This is exactly as it is with God. His word is so much like himself, that the godhead is wholly in it, and he who has the word has the whole godhead” (***LW***, 52:46). He added, “It must be observed, however, that another one is the author of this book [Genesis], namely the Holy Ghost.… The Holy Spirit wanted to write this [Gen. 26:19–21] to teach us.” In his exposition of 2 Peter is the statement: “Says Peter, what has been written and proclaimed in the Prophets has not been imagined nor invented by men, but holy and devout men have spoken it ***through the Holy Ghost***” (Reu, ***LS***, 35, 33, italics original). Luther stated emphatically,

> He is called a prophet who has received his understanding directly from God without further intervention, *into whose mouth the Holy Ghost has given the words.* For He (the Spirit) is the source, and they have no other authority than God.… Here (2 Sam. 23:2, “The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and His word was in my tongue”) it becom too marvelous and soars too high for me.… It is these and similar statements to which St. Peter refers in the II Epistle 1:21, “For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of men, etc.…” Therefore we sing in the Creed, concerning the Holy Ghost, “Who spake by the Prophets.” So *we refer all of Scripture to the Holy Ghost.* (*LW*, 36–37, italics original.)

He exhorted, “We must know what we believe, namely, what God’s Word says, not what the pope or the saintly fathers believe or say. For you must not rely on a person. No, you must rely on the Word of God alone” (ibid., 30:105).

> Would to God that my exposition and that of all doctors might perish and each Christian himself make the Scriptures and God’s pure word his norm. You can tell by my verbosity how immeasurably different God’s words are in comparison with any human word, how no single man is able to fathom sufficiently any one word of God and expound it with many words (ibid., 52:286).

The Bible Is Words From God

Luther declared, “The Scriptures, although they too are written by men, are neither of men nor from men but from God. Now since Scriptures and the doctrines of men are contrary one to the other, the one must lie and the other be true” (ibid., 35:153):

> They do not believe they are God’s words. *For if they believed they were God’s words they would not call them poor, miserable words but would regard such words and titles as greater than the whole world and would fear and tremble before them as before God himself. For whoever despises a single word of God does not regard any as important.* (Reu, *LS*, 32, italics original.)

Luther added, “I see that Scripture is consonant in all and through all and agrees with itself in such a measure that it is impossible to doubt the truth and certainty of such a weighty matter in any detail” (ibid., 37).

The Divinely Authoritative Nature of Scripture

Having come from God, the Scriptures have divine authority. Luther expressed this in no uncertain terms:

> We hope that everyone will agree with the decisions that the doctrines of men must be forsaken and the Scriptures retained. For they will neither desire nor be able to keep both, since the two cannot be reconciled and are by nature necessarily opposed to one another, like fire and water, like heaven and earth. … We do not condemn the doctrines of men just because they are the doctrines of men, for we would gladly put up with them. But we condemn them because they are contrary to the gospel and the Scriptures. (*LW*, 35:153.)

Thus, “I have learned to ascribe this honor only to books which are termed canonical, so that I confidently believe that not one of their authors erred” (Reu, ***LS***, 17). Hence,

> Nothing but God’s Word alone should be preached in Christendom. The reason for this is no other, as we have said, than this, that a Word must be proclaimed that remains eternally a Word through which souls may be saved and may live forever. (*LW*, 30:167.)

The Infallibility and Inerrancy of Scripture

Luther proclaimed,

> Neither does it help them to assert that at all other points they have a high and noble regard for God’s words and the entire gospel, except in this matter. My friend, God’s Word is God’s Word; this point does not require much haggling! When one blasphemously gives the lie to God in a single word, or says it is a minor matter if God is blasphemed or called a liar, one blasphemes the entire God and makes light of all blasphemy. (*LW*, 37:26.)

He went on,

> So the Holy Ghost has had to bear the blame of not being able to speak correctly but that like a drunkard or a fool He jumbles the whole and uses wild, strange words and phrases. But it is our fault that we have not understood the language nor the style of the prophets. It cannot be otherwise, because the Holy Ghost is wise and also makes the prophets wise. But one who is wise must be able to speak correctly; that never fails. But because whoever does not hear well or does not know the language well may think he speaks ill because he hears or understands scarcely half the words. (Reu, *LS*, 44.)

In addition,

> Whoever is so bold that he ventures to accuse God of fraud and deception *in a single word* and does so willfully again and again after he has been warned and instructed once or twice will likewise certainly venture to accuse God of fraud and deception in all His words. Therefore it is true absolutely and without exception, *that everything is believed or nothing is believed.* The Holy Ghost does not

suffer Himself to be separated or divided so that He should teach and cause to be believed one doctrine rightly and another falsely (ibid., 33, italics original).

Further,

This is a rather unimportant story, therefore we shall not devote much time to its explanation; indeed, I do not know how to say much about it. But since it is *written by the Holy Spirit*, we cannot well pass by this text but will treat it to some extent. (Rue, *LS*, 35, italics original.)

The Scriptures Are a Revelation of Christ

According to Luther, you should

dismiss your own opinions and feelings, and think of the Scriptures as the loftiest and noblest of holy things, as the richest of mines which can never be sufficiently explored, in order that you may find that divine wisdom which God here lays before you in such simple guise as to quench all pride. Here you will find the swaddling clothes and the manger in which Christ lies, and to which the angel points the shepherds [Luke 2:11–12]. Simple and lowly are these swaddling clothes,[1] but dear is the treasure, Christ, who lies in them. (*LW*, 35:236.)

The Bible Is Scientifically Accurate

Luther was so convinced of the scientific accuracy of the Bible that he is even cited as believing that the sun actually moves around the earth.

There was mention of a certain new astronomer who wanted to prove that the earth moves and not the sky, the sun, and the moon. This would be as if somebody were riding on a cart or in a ship and imagined that he was standing still while the earth and the trees were moving.... [Luther remarked,] so it goes now. Whoever wants to be clever must agree with nothing that others esteem. He must do something of his own. This is what that fellow does who wishes to turn the whole of astronomy upside down. Even in these things that are thrown into disorder I believe the Holy Scriptures, for Joshua commanded the sun to stand still and not the earth [

Josh. 10:12

]. (Luther, *TT*, June 4, 1539.)

Luther added,

> Because we are not sufficiently able to understand how these days occurred nor why God wished to observe such distinctions of times, *we shall rather admit our ignorance than attempt to twist the words unnecessarily into an unnatural meaning.* As far, therefore, as St. Augustine's opinion is concerned, we hold that Moses spoke literally not allegorically or figuratively, that is, the world and all its creatures was created within the six days as the words declare. Because we are not able to comprehend we shall remain disciples and leave the instructorship to the Holy Ghost. (Reu, *LS*, 51, italics original.)

2

The Bible Is Self-Consistent

Luther's difficulty with the book of James was not due to his disbelief in inerrancy but rather his strong belief in it. He was so convinced that the Bible could not err that he found it difficult to accept James, since James appeared to him to contradict other Scripture.

> Though this Epistle of St. James was rejected by the ancients, I praise it and regard it as a good book, because it sets up no doctrine of men and lays great stress upon God's law. But to state my own opinion about it, though without injury to anyone, I consider that it is not the writing of any apostle. My reasons are as follows: First: Flatly in contradiction to St. Paul and all the rest of Scripture it ascribes righteousness to works and says that Abraham was justified by his works in that he offered his son Isaac, though St. Paul, on the contrary, teaches, in
>
> Romans 4
>
> , that Abraham was justified without works, by faith alone, before he offered his son and proves it by Moses in
>
> Genesis 15
>
> ….Second: Its purpose is to teach Christians, and in all its teaching it does not once mention the Passion, the Resurrection, or the Spirit of Christ. (Reu, *LS*, 24.)

3

Summary of Luther's View on Scripture

Some have launched a misdirected attack on Luther's view of the ***nature*** of Scripture because of his questions about the ***extent*** of Scripture (Luther having had doubts about James, Revelation, Esther, and Hebrews). But, as James Orr notes, "These judgments affected canonicity rather than inspiration."

In his landmark study ***Luther and the Scriptures***, M. Reu noted that Luther himself regarded the Bible to be "so much like himself [God], that the Godhead is wholly in it, and he who has the word has the whole Godhead." As for the words of the Bible, Luther writes, "And the Scriptures, although they too are written by men, are neither of men nor from men but from God." Again, elsewhere he says, "Nothing but God's Word alone should be preached in Christendom" (***LS***, 30.167).

Luther believed that the Bible is God's Word, not mere human words. Since God is the author of every word of Scripture, even the smallest part of Scripture (including references to history and science) possesses absolute divine authority. So, to deny anything in the Bible is to deny God Himself.

After Luther, the ***Book of Concord*** (1580) compiled the nine creeds and confessions of the Lutheran faith. It affirms, "Lutherans believe, confess, and teach that the only rule and norm, according to which all doctrines ought to be esteemed and judged, is not other than the prophetic and apostolic writings both of the Old and of the New Testaments." It adds,

> And indeed, as long as the divine authority of the Bible is maintained, and as long as it is conceded that it is the product of a unique cooperation of the Holy Spirit and the human writers and, therefore, as a whole and in all its details the Word of God without contradiction and error, so long as the question after the mode of inspiration is of an entirely secondary nature, and so long as one is in harmony with the best Lutheran theologians from Luther up to the year 1570.

JOHN CALVIN ON SCRIPTURE

John Calvin (1509–1564), the founder of the Reformed tradition, was just as repeatedly emphatic about the divine inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture as were Augustine, Aquinas, and Luther.

The Origin of Scripture

Calvin believed the Bible found its ultimate source in God; the very words of the Bible came from the mouth of God, albeit through the instrumentality of men of God.

The Words of the Bible Are From God

Calvin believed that "the Bible has come down to us from the mouth of God" (***ICR***, 1.18.4). Thus,

> We owe to Scripture the same reverence which we owe to God; because it has proceeded from Him alone, and has nothing belonging to man mixed with it.… The Law and the prophets are not a doctrine delivered according to the will and pleasure of men, but dictated by the Holy Spirit. (Urquhart, *IAHS*, 129–30.)

Hence,

> Our faith in doctrine is not established until we have a perfect conviction that God is its author. Hence, the highest proof of Scripture is uniformly taken from the character of him whose word it is.… If, then, we would consult most effectually for our consciences, and save them from being driven about in a whirl of uncertainty, from wavering, and even stumbling at the smallest obstacle, our conviction of the truth of Scripture must be derived from a higher source than human conjectures, judgments, or reasons; namely, the secret testimony of the Spirit.

Thus,

> If they are not possessed of shameless effrontery, they will be compelled to confess that the Scripture exhibits clear evidence of its being spoken by God, and, consequently, of its containing his heavenly doctrine. We shall see a little farther on that the volume of sacred Scripture very far surpasses all other writings. Nay, if we look at it with clear eyes and unbiased judgment, it will forthwith present itself with a divine majesty which will subdue our presumptuous opposition, and force us to do it homage. (Calvin, *ICR*, 1.7.4.)

Further,

> The Scriptures are the only records in which God has been pleased to consign his truth to perpetual remembrance, the full authority which they ought to possess with the faithful is not recognized unless they are believed to have come from heaven, as directly as if God had been heard giving utterance to them (ibid., 1.7.1).

Calvin concluded,

> But as the Lord was pleased that doctrine should exist in a clearer and more ample form, the better to satisfy weak consciences, he commanded the prophecies also to be committed to writing, and to be held part of his word. To these at the same time were added historical details, which are the composition of prophets, but dictated by the Holy Spirit (ibid., 4.8.6).

The Bible Is Conveyed Through Humans

"As I have observed," said Calvin,

> There is this difference between the apostles and their successors, they were sure and authentic amanuenses of the Holy Spirit; and, therefore, their writings are to be regarded as the oracles of God, whereas others have no other office than to teach what is delivered and sealed in the holy Scriptures (ibid., 4.8.9).

Scripture Has Divine Authority

Having come from God, the Bible has both divine authority and inerrancy in the original manuscripts. It is the certain and unerring rule of the Christian faith. Calvin wrote, “For our wisdom ought to consist in embracing with gentle docility, and without any exceptions, all that is delivered in the sacred Scriptures” (ibid., 1.18.4).

The Bible Is Inerrant in the Original Manuscripts

Calvin said plainly, “[Scripture is] the certain and unerring rule” (***CC***, Ps. 5:11).

> For if we reflect how prone the human mind is to lapse into forget-fulness of God, how readily inclined to every kind of error, how bent every now and then on devising new and fictitious religions, it will be easy to understand how necessary it was to make such a depository of doctrine as would secure it from either perishing by the neglect, vanishing away amid the errors, or being corrupted by the presumptuous audacity of men. (*ICR*, 1.6.3.)

He concluded,

> So long as your mind entertains any misgivings as to the certainty of the word of God, its authority will be weak and dubious, or rather will have no authority at all. Nor is it sufficient to believe that God is true, and cannot lie or deceive, unless you feel firmly persuaded that every word which proceeds from him is sacred, inviolable truth (ibid., 3.2.6).

There Are Copyist Errors in the Manuscripts

Calvin believed that only the original text of Scripture was without any error. Speaking of what he believed to be an error in a copy, he wrote,

> How the name of Jeremiah crept in [the manuscripts at Matt. 27:9], I confess that I do not know, nor do I give myself much trouble to inquire. The

> passage itself plainly shows that the name of Jeremiah has been put down by mistake, instead of Zechariah. (*CC*, Matt. 27:9 .)

Calvin held that the sacred Scriptures are the unerring norm for the Christian faith, having originated from the very mouth of God by the dictates of the Holy Spirit. The only errors were copyists' errors in some manuscripts, not in the originals.

EVANGELICAL TRADITION AFTER CALVIN (C. 1536–C. 1918)

Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531) differed from the other Reformers on some points concerning the ***interpretation*** of the Scripture, but there was unanimity among them on the ***inspiration*** and ***authority*** of Scripture. Zwingli affirmed his view of Scripture in the ***Sixty-seven Articles*** (1523) by writing,

> The articles and opinions below I, Ulrich Zwingli, confess to having preached in the worthy city of Zurich as based upon the Scriptures which are called inspired by God, and I offer to protect and conquer with the said articles, and where I have not now correctly understood said Scriptures I shall allow myself to be taught better, but only from said Scripture.

John Knox (c. 1513–1572), who established Calvinism as the official affiliation of Scotland, believed in the inspiration and authority of Scripture, as did his mentor. It was Knox's disciples who trained King James I of England, during whose reign the famous King James (Authorized) Version of the Bible was produced (in 1611).

The Reformed position was expressed in Switzerland through ***The Sixty-Seven Articles (or Conclusions) of Ulrich Zwingli*** (1523), ***The Ten Conclusions of Berne*** (1528), ***The First Helvetic Confession*** (1536), and ***The Second Helvetic Confession*** (1566).

Francis Turretin (1623–1687) was raised in this tradition and, alongside his son Johann Alfons (1671–1737), taught at Geneva. In France the work of Calvin was perpetuated in the ***Gallican Confession*** (1559), which asserts, "We believe that

the Word contained in these [canonical] books has proceeded from God, and receives its authority from him alone, and not from men." This confession was published in a somewhat modified and abridged form and used by the Waldenses as ***A Brief Confession of Faith of the Reformed Churches of the Piedmont*** (1655).

Elsewhere, the Reformed view of Scripture was set forth in three basic treatises: ***The Belgic Confession*** (1561), ***The Heidelberg (Palatinate) Catechism*** (1563), and ***The Canons of Dort*** (1618–1619). ***The Belgic Confession*** was the basic confessional statement of the Netherlands during the period when Jacob Arminius (1560–1609), a Dutch theologian, promulgated the doctrines now known as Arminianism. His immediate followers were called "the Remonstrants," after their anti-Calvinistic ***Remonstrance***, or "Five Articles," published in 1610.

Arminius devoted six of his seventy-nine private disputations to the nature, authority, and adequacy of Scripture. In them he asserted that in the transmission of His Word, God "first employed ***oral enunciation*** in its delivery, and afterwards, ***writing***, as a more certain means against corruption and oblivion … so that we now have the infallible word of God in no other place than in the Scriptures … the instrument of religion." He continued his argument by stating that the "authority of the word of God, which is comprised of the Old and New Testaments, lies both in the veracity of the whole narration, and of all the declarations, whether they be those about things past, about things present, or about those which are to come, and in the power of the commands and prohibitions, which are contained in the divine word."

The Synod at Dort (1618–19) contains five articles devoted to the Scriptures, including this statement from Article V:

> This Word of God was not sent nor delivered by the will of man, but *holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*, as the apostle Peter saith.... Afterwards God, from a special care which he has for us and for our salvation, commanded his servants, the Prophets and Apostles, to commit his revealed Word to writing; and he himself wrote with his own finger the two tables of the law. Therefore we call such writings holy and divine Scriptures.

Following its presentation of the canonical books and their sufficiency, ***The Belgic Confession*** ends its statement on Scripture by concluding,

> Therefore we reject with all our hearts whatsoever doth not agree with this infallible rule, which the apostles have taught us, saying, *Try the spirits whether they are of God.* Likewise, *If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house.*

The Belgic Confession was adopted as the official doctrinal standard for the Reformed churches following its revision at the Synod of Dort. The Reformed Church settled on the Calvinistic position as it pertained to the doctrine of the inspiration and authority of Scripture and held to that position into the twentieth century.

The Westminster Tradition (c. 1538–c. 1918)

The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion of the Church of England became the official view of the Church of England (1571) and Ireland (1615). The ***Thirty-Nine Articles*** combined features both of the Swiss (or Reformed) and Lutheran confessions. The Article "Of the Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation" affirms,

> Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that should be believed as an article of the Faith, *or* be thought requisite or necessary for salvation.

The Westminster Assembly of Divines was called in 1642 to legislate for Christian doctrine, worship, and discipline in the state church. Its work stands at the forefront of Protestant councils. The Assembly produced ***A Confession of Faith*** (1647) and two "Catechisms" that were written in English and used throughout Anglo-Presbyterian churches into the twentieth century. The first article of ***The Westminster Confession of Faith*** affirms:

> Because of the insufficiency of mankind's knowledge of God, His will, and His salvation, it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in diverse manners, to reveal himself, and to declare that his will unto his Church; and afterwards for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the church against corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing;

> which maketh the holy Scripture to be most necessary; those former ways of God's revealing his will unto his people being now ceased.

The ***Confession*** adds,

> The authority of Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the Author thereof; and therefore it is to be received, because it is the word of God … yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.…
>
> VI. The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.…
>
> IX. The infallible rule and interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself.…
>
> X. The Supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.

The Wesleyan Tradition

After the American Revolution John Wesley (1703–1791) drew up ***The Twenty-Five Articles of Religion***, which were adopted by the American Methodists in 1784. These ***Articles*** were a liberal and judicious abridgment of ***The Thirty-Nine Articles***, with Calvinistic and other features omitted. Nevertheless, in Article II, "The Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation," Wesley set forth:

> The Holy Scriptures contain all things necessary to salvation; so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation. In the name of the Holy Scripture we do understand those canonical books of the Old and New Testaments of whose authority was never any doubt in the Church. (Wesley, cited in Schaff, *CC*, 3.808.)

Wesley frequently affirmed his belief in the inspiration and authority of Scripture as "the oracles of God," written by "men divinely inspired." He attested to their

truthfulness by saying, "'All Scripture is given by inspiration of God,' consequently, all Scripture is infallibly true," and "If there be any mistakes in the Bible, there may as well be a thousand. If there be one falsehood in that book, it did not come from the God of truth" (***WJW***, 5.193; 6.117; 8.45–46; 10.80). Wesley's followers continued in the same high view of the inspiration and authority of Scripture. As Wesleyan scholar Wilber T. Dayton stated,

> The absolute authority and total reliability of the Bible was taken for granted in early Wesleyanism as emphatically as motherhood has been assumed to be the principle for the survival of the human race. Nothing would have been more repugnant to original Methodism than to cast doubt on the Word of God, the very source of life. ("IWBW" in Hannah, *IC*, 223.)

Irish Wesleyan Adam Clarke (c. 1760–1832) affirmed his belief in the plenary inspiration and infallibility of Scripture as "the only complete directory of the faith and practice of man" (***MW***, 12.80, 83, 122; cf. 6.420). Richard Watson (1781–1833), the first systematic theologian of the Wesleyan movement, declared in his two-volume ***Theological Institutes*** (1823),

> The sacred writers composed their works under so plenary and immediate an influence of the Holy Spirit, that God may be said to speak by them to man, and not merely that they spoke to men in the name of God, and by his authority. (*TI*, 6.11.)

It was not until the opening years of the twentieth century that Methodism moved from its moorings in this high view of Scripture. Even then, the shift was based on tendencies other than the objective and historical record of Scripture, tendencies resulting from the impact of subjectivism and secularism, and from when the methodology of modern science as the basis of authority in social matters was transferred to theology.

The Anabaptist and Baptist Tradition (c. 1524–c. 1918)

Early figures associated with this movement include John Wycliffe (c. 1324–1384), John Hus (c. 1372–1415), Balthasar Hubmaier (c. 1480–1528 Martin Bucer (1491–1551), and Menno Simons (1496–1561). Hubmaier's influence is

evident in one of the earliest Anabaptist statements of their beliefs, ***The Schleitheim Confession*** (1527). In the introduction to his ***Treatise Against the Anabaptists***, John Calvin acknowledged that "this sect receives the Holy Scripture, as we do" (***TAA***, 39).

Martin Bucer and Menno Simons' position on Scripture exerted influence on John Calvin during the time that the Genevan Reformer was in Strassburg. Simons became the leader of the peaceful Anabaptists in the Netherlands, and his view of Scripture is set forth in ***The Foundation of Christian Doctrine*** (1539–1540).

In general, Baptists have tended to avoid creedal statements; in particular, they have built their confessional statements on earlier models within their particular tradition. An example of Baptist statements is the ***Confession of Faith*** (1644) of the seven Baptist churches in London, which was reissued in 1688 and 1689 as ***A Confession Put Forth by the Elders and Brethren of Many Congregations of Christians (Baptized Upon Profession of Their Faith) in London and the Country.*** This was a slight modification of the ***Westminster Confession*** of the Church of England and the ***Savoy Declaration*** (1658) of the Congregational churches in order to suit the distinctives of Baptist polity and baptism.

The ***Second London Confession*** was "adopted by the Baptist Association [that] met at Philadelphia, Sept. 25, 1742," and called ***The Philadelphia Confession.*** It followed the model of the ***Westminster Confession*** by placing the doctrine of Scripture in Article I (paragraphs 1–10), where it states,

> (1) The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain and infallible rule of all-saving knowledge, faith, and obedience.... (4) The authority of the Holy Scriptures, for which it ought to be believed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God (Who is truth itself), the author thereof; therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God. (*The Philadelphia Confession of Faith*, 6th ed.)

In the area of North Carolina, Separate Baptists joined their efforts with the Sandy Creek Church, and in 1758 the Sandy Creek Association was formed, with the Sandy Creek Church as its nucleus. Separate Baptists from Virginia and the Carolinas cooperated in their outreach for more than a dozen years; Article II of their brief doctrinal statement says, "The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the word of God, and only rule of faith and practice" (Lumpkin, ***BCF***, 358).

During the nineteenth century, Baptists in both the northern and southern United States came to use the shorter, moderately Calvinistic statement, ***The New Hampshire Declaration of Faith*** (1833). The same statement was adopted, with some additions, deletions, and other changes, as ***A Statement of the Baptist Faith and Message*** of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1925. ***The New Hampshire Declaration of Faith*** (9–12) asserts,

> We believe that the Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired, and is a perfect treasure of heavenly instruction;*
>
> [4] that it has God as its author, salvation for its end,* and truth without any mixtur of error for its matter;* that it reveals the principles by which God will judge us;* and therefore is, and shall remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union,* and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and opinions shall be tried* (Article I, *Of the Scriptures*).

In the meantime the Southern Baptist Convention reaffirmed and even strengthened this particular article in its adoption of ***The Baptist Faith and Message*** (1963).

The Roman Catholic View on Scripture (c. 1545–c. 1918)

The traditional teaching on the doctrine of the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture is based in the teachings of the church fathers (see chapter 17), such as Augustine and Aquinas. Even the great Protestant Reformers never changed the Roman Catholic view on the ***origin*** and ***nature*** of Scripture; their differences with the Catholic Church were over the ***extent*** of the canon (see chapter 28) and the ***interpretation*** of it.

The official Roman Catholic position in ***The Canons and Dogmatic Decrees of the Council of Trent*** (1563) says,

> The Council clearly perceives that this truth and rule are contained in the written books and unwritten traditions which have come down to us, *having been received by the apostles from the mouth of Christ Himself or from the apostles by the dictation of the Holy Spirit*, and have been transmitted as it were from hand to hand.... [Following, then,] the example of the orthodox Fathers, *it receives and venerates with the same*

> *sense of loyalty and reverence all the books of the Old and New Testaments—for God alone is the author of both.* (Neuner and Dupuis, *CF*, 77, emphasis added.)

The Council of Vatican I proclaimed the inerrancy of Scripture, saying, "They contain revelation without error*[5] because having been written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit they have God as their author*" (Denzinger, 1787, 444). Pope Leo XIII affirmed that "it would be entirely wrong either to confine inspiration only to some parts of Scripture, or to concede that the sacred author himself has erred" (Denzinger, 1950, Encyclical, *Providentissimus Deus*, 1893). Vatican II added,

> Since, therefore, all that the inspired authors, or sacred writers, affirm should be regarded as affirmed by the Holy Spirit, we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture, firmly, faithfully and without error, teach that the truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the sacred Scriptures. (*Documents of Vatican II*, "On Revelation," chapter 3, 757.)

More liberal Catholic theologians see a caveat in the phrase "for the sake of our salvation," arguing that inerrancy covers only salvific truths, but, this is contrary to the whole of the Catholic tradition up to modern times. All agree, however, that inspiration and inerrancy are limited to the meaning the sacred authors "intended to express and did in fact express, through the medium of contemporary literary forms."

> To rightly understand what the sacred author wanted to affirm in his work, due attention must be paid both to the customary and characteristic patterns of perception, speech and narrative which prevailed at the age of the sacred writer, and to the conventions which the people of his time followed in their dealings with one another (ibid., 757–58).

During the nineteenth century, Pope Pius IX issued ***The Papal Syllabus of Errors*** (1864), in which he attacked the positions of "Pantheism, Naturalism, and Absolute Rationalism" by listing among their errors the views:

> Divine revelation is imperfect, and therefore, subject to continual and definite progress of human reason.... The prophecies and miracles set forth and narrated in the Sacred Scriptures are fictions of poets ... mythical inventions, and Jesus Christ is himself a mythical fiction. (In Schaff, *CC*, 2.214–215.)

The position of the papacy has not deviated concerning the doctrine of the inspiration and authority of Scripture.
The same view is reflected in ***The Dogmatic Decrees of the Vatican Council concerning the Catholic Faith and the Church of Christ*** (1870), which addressed the question of Scripture as

> divine revelation that can be known by every one with facility, with firm assurance, and with no mixture of error.... Further, this supernatural revelation, according to the universal belief of the Church, declared by the sacred Synod of Trent, is contained in the written books and unwritten traditions which have come down to us. (Schaff, *CC*, 2.240–241.)

As James T. Burtchaell has suggested, "The Catholic Church has displayed little spontaneous desire to refine, revise, and improve her doctrinal formulations. Only when she is goaded and provoked from without does she bestir herself to this apparently disagreeable task" (***CTI***, 1). Justo L. Gonzalez speaks similarly in referring to the papal response to the development of higher criticism during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries:

> When modern forms of critical research were developed, Rome condemned those who tried to relate them to religious questions ... [which] provides some justification for the commonly held view among Protestants that the Catholic Church was one of the most reactionary forces in the world. (*HCT*, vol. 3, 373.)

As Carl F. H. Henry correctly notes:

> Throughout its long medieval influence, the Roman church therefore promoted the doctrine of scriptural inerrancy and opposed notions of a limited inerrancy restricted to faith and morals. The effort by Henry Holden (1596–1662) in *Divinae Fidei Analysis* to promote limited inerrancy garnered no enthusiasm.

He continues,

> But in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, Roman and Protestant clergy alike shared in the flight from inerrancy. *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* indicates the Roman church's traditional support for inerrancy but then goes on to indicate the contemporary mood: "It is nonetheless obvious that many biblical statements are simply not true when judged according to modern

> knowledge of science and history.…" Even the Vatican II declaration that Scripture teaches "without error that truth which God wanted put into the Sacred Writings for the sake of our salvation" is interpreted descriptively by some priests.… Others interpret it restrictively. (*RA*, 374.)

Contrary to the historic view, this ambiguous phrase left the door open for Roman Catholics who deny the doctrine of inerrancy.

The Eastern Orthodox View on Scripture (c. 1643–c. 1918)

Putting aside differences about the role of authority, the Eastern Church has maintained a high view of the authority of Scripture, in line with both Roman Catholic and Protestant views. As recently as 1839, for example, ***The Longer Catechism of the Orthodox Catholic Eastern Church*** contained a lengthy presentation in its "Introduction to the Orthodox Catechism" for use of ***The Orthodox Confession of the Eastern Church*** (1643). In that introduction the discussion "On Divine Revelation" asks, "Why are not all men capable of receiving a revelation immediately from God?" and answers that it is "owing to their sinful impurity, and weakness both in soul and body." After naming the prophets, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the apostles as the heralds of divine revelation, the introduction addresses the question "Can not man, then, have any knowledge of God without a special revelation from him?" and answers by stating that "this knowledge is imperfect and insufficient, and can serve only as a preparation for faith, or as a help towards the knowledge of God from his revelation."

In its section "On Holy Tradition and Holy Scripture" the introduction asks, "How is divine revelation spread among men and preserved in the true Church?" The answer: "By two channels—holy tradition and holy Scripture." The introduction also says, "The most ancient and original instrument for spreading divine revelation is holy tradition," but that Holy Scripture was given "to this end, that divine revelation might be preserved more exactly and unchangeably." Question 23 raises the issue of the relationship of the two: "Must we follow holy tradition even when we possess holy Scripture? We must follow that tradition which agrees with the divine revelation and with holy Scripture, as is taught us by holy Scripture itself … 2 Thess. 2:15" (Schaff, ***CC***, 2.445–542; 2.275–449).

However, as Kallistos Ware says,

> The "Age of the Fathers" in eastern Christendom does not come to a close with the Council of Chalcedon in the fifth century, nor yet with the last meeting of the last Ecumenical Council in the eighth, but it extends uninterrupted until 1453; and even today—despite heavy borrowings from the Roman Catholic and Protestant west during the seventeenth and following centuries—Eastern Orthodoxy remains basically Patristic in outlook. ("CTE" in Drewery, *HCD*, 183–84.)

This is true of the Orthodox view of Scripture as well.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

A survey of the history of the Christian church from the Reformation to recent times reveals that there is virtually unanimous consent that the Bible is the divinely inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word of God. This follows the basic view of the early church (see chapter 17), and deviations from this view were extremely rare before the late nineteenth century, when liberalism (see chapter 20) and neo-orthodoxy (see chapter 21) challenged the longstanding position of the Christian church, both East and West, Catholic and Protestant.

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CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE HISTORY OF DESTRUCTIVE BIBLICAL CRITICISM

The word ***criticism*** simply means to exercise judgment, which is not only a legitimate but also a necessary thing for all rational beings to do. There are two basic kinds of biblical criticism: lower and higher. Lower criticism has to do with the ***text*** of Scripture, and higher criticism with the ***source*** of that text. The former takes the available manuscripts and attempts to reconstruct the original text; the latter asks what the actual source of the original text was. Evangelicals consider both of these to be legitimate disciplines.

Higher criticism can be divided into two categories: positive and negative, also called constructive and destructive. It is the latter, of course, that evangelicals oppose. Destructive criticism is based on presuppositions that are opposed to the Bible and to evangelical theology. One of the most persistent and unjustified presuppositions of negative biblical criticism is anti-supernaturalism. The roots of this kind of criticism began in the early-to-mid–1600s.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL ROOTS OF DESTRUCTIVE BIBLICAL CRITICISM

Destructive biblical criticism is not the result of factual finds but of

philosophical fallacies. It springs not from history but from philosophy—from philosophies that are alien to the realistic theism present in Scripture. The earliest of these ideologies began only a century after the Reformation.

Inductivism: Francis Bacon (1561–1626)

While Francis Bacon took his cue for scientific research from God's command to subdue the world in Genesis 1:28, he also set the stage for modern biblical criticism when he systematically expounded the notion that man's power to control nature rests in his own hands and can be achieved if he applies correct methods. In his *Novum Organum* (1620) Bacon claimed that all truth is discovered by induction and known experimentally. He argued that by making inductions from the simplest facts of experience man could reach forward to discover fundamental principles, which would issue forth in beneficial practical results—thus making truth and utility ("that which works") the very same things in the world of science. In addition, Bacon completely separated the realm of reason and science from the realm of faith and religion (see Geisler, ***BEIPR***, chapter 1), thus setting the stage for later criticism of the Bible without touching matters of faith.

Materialism: Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679)

One of the first philosophers in the modern world to do subtle but destructive criticism on the Bible was the materialist Thomas Hobbes. From this vantage point Hobbes launched an attack on orthodox religion in the form of a defense of the English monarchy—a safe perspective from which to do so in his day.

Materialism

Hobbes wrote,

> Whatsoever we imagine is finite. Therefore there is no idea or conception of

> anything we call infinite. No man can have in his mind an image of infinite magnitude, infinite time, infinite force, or infinite power. When we say anything is infinite, we signify only that we are not able to conceive the ends and bounds of the thing named, having no conception of the thing, but our own inability. And therefore the name God is used … that we may honour Him. (*L*, 80.)

In view of his limited materialistic theory of knowing, Hobbes concluded,

> The world (I mean not the earth only … but the universe, that is, the whole mass of all things that are) is corporeal, that is to say, body; and hath the dimensions of magnitude, namely, length, breadth, and depth: also every part of the body is likewise body, and hath the like dimensions; and consequently every part of the universe is body, and that which is not body is no part of the universe: and because the universe is all, that which is no part of it is nothing, and consequently nowhere. (*L*, 269.)

Desupernaturalized View of the Gospels

On the basis of his materialistic understanding of the world, Hobbes engaged in some desupernaturalizing of the Gospel records more than three hundred years before Rudolph Bultmann (see page 343). Hobbes boldly proclaimed that "the Scriptures by the Spirit of God in man mean a man's spirit, inclined to godliness" (ibid., 70). As to the story of Jesus casting a demon out of a man, Hobbes said, "I see nothing at all in the Scripture that requireth a belief that demoniacs were any other thing but madmen" (ibid., 70–71). By implication the whole gospel record could be desupernaturalized. The miracles of the gospels were labeled parabolical or spiritual but not historical because

> Scripture was written to shew unto men the kingdom of God, and to prepare their minds to become his obedient subjects; leaving the world, and the philosophy thereof, to the disputations of men, for the exercising of their natural reason (ibid., 70).

Miracles Are Not Essential to Religion

For Hobbes, miracles are not necessary and probably not even helpful to religion. What is essential to religion is faith. Claiming that "natural reason" is the "undoubted word of God," Hobbes insists that in the religious realm we must live by "the will of obedience" to the lawfully imposed religion of the state. This

means that “we so speak as, by lawful authority, we are commanded; and when we live accordingly; which, in sum, is trust and faith reposed in him that speaketh [the ruler], though the mind be incapable of any notion at all from the words spoken” (ibid., 165). In a word, faith and obedience are what is essential to religion, not reason; piety, not philosophy, is what God expects of believers. There is complete separation of faith and fact—hence, belief in objective factual miracles is not essential to true religious faith.

Hobbes’s complete separation of divine revelation (for spiritual truth) from human reason (for cognitive truth) not only anticipates Søren Kierkegaard and Karl Barth, but it also goes beyond them in paving the way for a radical form of biblical criticism.

Antisupernaturalism: Benedict Spinoza (1632–1677)

As we have seen (see chapter 3), Benedict Spinoza was neither a theist nor a deist; rather, he was a Jewish pantheist, operating from a rationalistic and naturalistic framework of thought. Using a now outdated closed view of the universe and adhering to Euclidian geometric deductivism, Spinoza insisted on the universal, exceptionless nature of natural law, and from this he concluded that miracles are not possible.

Spinoza lived in an age increasingly impressed with the orderliness of a physical universe, an age in which it was believed that Newton’s newly discovered law of gravitation was without exception. Because of this it seemed axiomatic to Spinoza that natural laws are immutable and, therefore, unbreakable.

Argument for Antisupernaturalism

In his highly influential ***A Theologico-Political Treatise***, Spinoza declared,

> Nothing, then, comes to pass in nature in contravention to her universal laws, nay, everything agrees with them and follows from them, for … she keeps a fixed and immutable order. [In fact,] a miracle, whether in contravention to, or beyond, nature, is a mere absurdity.

Spinoza was nothing short of dogmatic about the impossibility of miracles. He unashamedly proclaimed, "We may, then, be absolutely certain that every event which is truly described in Scripture necessarily happened, like everything else, according to natural laws" (***TPT***, 83, 87, 92).

As we observed in part 1, when Spinoza's argument against miracles is reduced to its basic premises, it goes something like this:

(1) Miracles are violations of natural laws.
(2) Natural laws are immutable.
(3) It is impossible to violate immutable laws.
(4) Therefore, miracles are impossible.

The second premise is the key to Spinoza's argument: Nature "keeps a fixed and ***immutable*** order"—everything "***necessarily*** happened … according to natural laws," and "nothing comes to pass in nature in contravention to her [nature's] universal laws." ***If*** this were true, then Spinoza would be right; to believe otherwise "***is*** a mere absurdity."

Critics have noted serious problems with Spinoza's radical form of naturalism, including its basis in a now outmoded science; its unjustified deductivism; its fallacy of begging the question; its self-defeating determinism, and its philosophical pantheism (see chapter 2). From this unstable foundation, Spinoza launched the first systematic attack on the historic view of Scripture.

Negative Biblical Criticism

Over a century before biblical critic Johann Salomo Semler (1725–1791), and two centuries prior to Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918), Spinoza was engaged in systematic antisupernatural criticism of the Bible. ***A Theologico-Political Treatise*** was widely circulated in the late seventeenth century, and even though it took some two centuries to blossom, it was largely through the influence of this book that negative higher criticism began to undermine the traditional view of Scripture.

First, building on his naturalistic rationalism, Spinoza concluded that since

“there are many passages in the Pentateuch that Moses could not have written, it follows that the belief that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch is ungrounded and even irrational” (ibid., 126). “Who wrote the first five books of the Old Testament? The same person,” said Spinoza, “who wrote the rest of the Old Testament: Ezra the scribe, who lived around 400 B.C.” (***TPT***, 129–30).

Second, Spinoza rejected the Resurrection accounts in the Gospels. Concerning Christianity he said that “the Apostles who came after Christ, preached it to all men as a universal religion ***solely*** in virtue of Christ’s Passion” (ibid., 170, emphasis added). In other words, Spinoza reduced Christianity to a mystical, nonpropositional religion, a religion without foundations. The orthodox faith has held, since the apostle Paul (cf. 1 Cor. 15:1–14), that apart from the truth of the resurrection of Christ, Christianity is a religion without hope.

Third, for Spinoza, the Scripture merely “***contains*** the word of God” (ibid., 165, emphasis added), a position characteristic of later liberal Christianity following Schleiermacher (see chapter 20). In Spinoza’s view, it is false to say, as orthodox Christians have, that the Bible ***is*** the Word of God. For him the parts of the Bible that ***contain*** the word of God are known to be such because the morality in them conforms to a natural law known by human reason (ibid., 172, 196–97).

Fourth, Spinoza categorically denied all miracles in the Bible, commending “anyone who seeks for the true causes of miracles and strives to understand natural phenomena as an intelligent being” (***Ethics***, part 1, prop. XXXVI, appendix). Not only did he conclude that “every event … in Scripture necessarily happened, like everything else, according to natural laws” (***TPT***, 92), but also that Scripture itself “makes the general assertion in several passages that nature’s course is ***fixed and unchangeable***” (ibid., 96).

Fifth, Spinoza said that biblical authors did not speak from supernatural “revelation” and “the modes of expression and discourse adopted by the Apostles in the Epistles show very clearly that the latter were not written by revelation and divine command, but ***merely by the natural powers*** and judgment of the authors” (ibid., 159, emphasis added). When the Bible says the prophets spoke by “revelation,” Spinoza understands this as the “extraordinary power … [of] the imagination of the prophets” (ibid., 24).

It is evident that Spinoza’s antisupernaturalism led to a systematic and negative critique of Holy Scripture, denying the historicity of much of the text and changing the focus to the moral message of the Bible. This is the essence of liberalism—a view not to flower for two centuries after Spinoza (see chapter 20).

Skepticism: David Hume (1711–1776)

Skepticism did not originate with Scotland's David Hume, but it was seriously advanced in the modern world through his writings. Spurred by the revival of Greek skepticism in Western thought following the rediscovery and publication of the writings of Sextus Empiricus (flourished c. late second and early third centuries A.D.) in 1562, Hume's skeptical ***Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*** (1748) became a classic of so-called Enlightenment thought. Between Spinoza and Kant, more than anyone else, Hume probably had the most adverse effect on views of biblical authority. His antisupernaturalism and his extreme emphasis on empiricism were the two most basic elements of Hume's attempt to undermine the traditional doctrine of Scripture.

Hume rejected the claim that Scripture is inspired or that the Bible is an authoritative revelation of God to humanity. He also denied the deity of Christ and rejected miracles as he sought to make theology the subject of empirical testing. He consigned the Bible and any other work speaking of metaphysical reality to the furnace in these famous words:

> When we run over libraries, persuaded of these principles, what havoc must we make? If we take in our hand any volume—of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance—let us ask, *Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number?* No. *Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence?* No. Commit it then to the flames, for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion. (*ECHU*, 12.3.173.)

Recall, from part 1, Hume's antisupernaturalistic boast:

> I flatter myself that I have discovered an argument … which, if just, will, with the wise and learned, be an everlasting check to all kinds of superstitious delusion, and consequently will be useful as long as the world endures (ibid., 10.1.18).

Just what is this "final" argument against miracles? In Hume's own words:

> A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and … firm and unalterable experience has established these laws.… [Therefore,] the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from

> experience can possibly be imagined (ibid., 10.1.122).

The reason for this is that "a uniform experience amounts to a proof, there is here a direct and full ***proof***, from the nature of the fact, against the existence of any miracle" (ibid., 123). In summary, Hume wrote,

> There must, therefore, be a uniform experience against every miraculous event. Otherwise the event would not merit that appellation. [So] nothing is esteemed a miracle if it ever happened in the common course of nature (ibid., 122–23).

Agnosticism: Immanuel Kant (1724–1804)

Immanuel Kant is considered by many to be the crossroad thinker of modern philosophy. He synthesized the two dominant but conflicting modes of thought of the Enlightenment—empiricism and rationalism—into an intellectual whole. The result, unfortunately, was philosophical agnosticism (see chapter 3), though Kant remained a deist. In his creative synthesis (see ***CPR***), Kant argued that the mind "knows" only ***after*** it constructs the data of experience, not before. Hence, we know only what ***appears*** (the ***phenomenal***) to us, not that which really ***is*** (the ***noumenal***). Further evidence for Kant that we cannot know the real world is that whenever one attempts to apply the categories of the mind (such as unity or causality) to the real world, hopeless contradictions and antinomies arise.
Another consequence of Kant's agnosticism is his fact/value dichotomy. For him, the "objective" world of fact is the phenomenal world of experience, while the "subjective" world of will cannot be known by pure reason. Instead, the subjective world is known by practical reason, or a morally postulated act of the will. Even though it is not possible to ***think*** that God exists, one must ***live*** as if God does exist. Thus Kant philosophically questioned the objectivity and rationality of divine revelation. He placed religion in the realm of the postulated rather than the known. This gave rise to the moral imperative that lies behind Kant's use of "moral reason" as the ground for determining what is essential to true religion.
Also from this Kant reasoned that miracles do not occur. Thus, like another deist, Thomas Jefferson, he was able to reject the Resurrection account at the close of

the Gospels (Kant, ***RWLRA***, 119). In making the moral imperative the criterion for true religion, Kant is the forerunner of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834). Following in the subjective footsteps of Kant and Schleiermacher, Rudolph Otto (1869–1937) used an irrational basis for his higher criticism of the Bible.

Romanticism (c. 1780–c. 1840)

Nothing seemed more characteristic of the late eighteenth century than the dominance of reason, as unemotional and intellectual questioning swept away ancient superstitions and abuses. Yet a strong opposition arose to that cold, one-sided approach, as the claims of feeling were reasserted. This movement emphasized great people and heroic movements of the past rather than ideas and institutions. The generic term “romanticism” is generally applied to this complex and elusive shift that radically challenged the older “rationalism.” It had advocates in literature, music, painting, and philosophy throughout Europe before running its course in the late 1830s. Its most effective early proponent was Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), but it became most dominant in Germany, where its participants included Gotthold Lessing (1729–1781), Johan Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), Johan Christoph Friedrich von Schiller (1759–1805), and Johann Christian Friedrich Hölderlin (1770–1843). Romanticism had a widespread negative influence on Christianity, especially through Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768–1834), the father of modern liberalism.

Deism (c. 1625–c. 1800)

Deism is theism minus miracles, or “theistic naturalism.” It is the idea that God got the universe going, and it has run on its own natural steam since then; i.e., God is the universe’s absentee Landlord. Some of the more prominent European deists were Herbert of Cherbury (1583–1648, the Father of English deism), John Toland (1670–1722), Anthony Collins (1676–1729), Thomas Woolston (c.

1670–1733), and Matthew Tindal (c. 1655–1733). Some of the more notable American deists were Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790), Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826), Stephen Hopkins (1707–1785), and Thomas Paine (1737–1809). Another well-known deist was the aforementioned Immanuel Kant, whose book ***God Within the Limits of Reason Alone*** is a deist classic.

Thomas Paine's Deistic View of God

"I believe in one God, and no more," wrote Paine, a belief he shared with theists. Also, like theists, he believed that the one God was all-powerful, all-knowing, all-good, infinite, merciful, just, and incomprehensible (see ***CWTP***, 5, 26–27, 201). However, his God made the world but never intervened within it afterward. According to Paine, God created the world but never interacts with it.

Paine's Attack on the Bible

However, Paine rejected all forms of supernatural revelation, believing them to be unknowable. Paine also argued that supernatural revelation was impossible given the inadequacy of human language to convey it; God's revelation must be absolutely "unchangeable and universal" (ibid., 25). Given this, human language, which the Bible employs, could not be the means for its communication.

Paine's Contention That the Bible Is Not Verbally Inspired

Paine rejected all claims by any religious group to have received a verbal revelation from God. Instead he held that all such beliefs were "no other than human inventions, set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit" (ibid., 6). The "revealed religion" Paine had the most contempt for was Christianity. He wrote,

> Of all the systems of religion that ever were invented, there is none more derogatory to the Almighty, more unedifying to man, more repugnant to reason, and more contradictory in itself, than this thing called Christianity … [which is] too absurd for belief, too impossible to convince, and too inconsistent

> for practice; it renders the heart torpid, or produces only atheists and fanatics.

He added, “The only religion that has not been invented, and that has in it every evidence of divine originality, is pure and simple deism.” In fact, deism “must have been the first, and will probably be the last that man believes” (ibid., 150).

Paine further argued,

> The continually progressive change to which the meaning of words is subject, the want of a universal language which renders translation necessary, the errors to which translations are again subject, the mistakes of copyists and printers, together with the possibility of willful alteration, are of themselves evidences that the human language, whether in speech or in print, cannot be the vehicle of the word of God (ibid., 19; cf. 55–56).

Early Critics of Deism

Deism’s detractors included Thomas Sherlock (1678–1761), Joseph Butler (1692–1752), and William Paley (1743–1805), who attacked deism rationally, as well as John Wesley (1703–1791), George Whitefield (1714–1770), and Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), who also added a theological and spiritual dimension to the defense of historical Christianity.

Transcendentalism: Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831) was born in Wurtenberg, Germany, to a Lutheran family. His main writings include: ***Philosophy of History, Philosophy of Nature, Encyclopedia, Logic, Philosophy of Religion*** (his major work), ***Phenomena of Spirit***, and ***Philosophy of Aesthetics.***

Hegel’s Philosophical Roots

Like most other great figures, Hegel stood on the shoulders of many who had come before him. From ***Plato*** he learned that man’s meaning is found in the

state, that philosophy is the highest expression of reality, and that all determination is by negation. He accepted ***Plotinus's*** view that the world and consciousness are a manifestation of the Absolute—a form of pantheism. ***Spinoza*** taught him the inseparability of God and nature and, hence, antisupernaturalism. From ***Kant***, Hegel concluded that we must begin with the phenomena of experience and use the transcendental method to arrive at truth. Of course, his ***Judeo-Christian*** training provided him with a linear view of history.

Hegel's So-Called Dialectic

Contrary to a widely held misunderstanding, Hegel did not believe in a Marxian kind of "dialectic" consisting of thesis/antithesis → synthesis. In fact, he never used the word ***dialectic*** in the body of any of his works. It appears once in the preface of his ***Phenomenology of Mind***, where he claimed it came from Kant, and he rejected it, calling it "a lifeless schema" (Meuller, "HLTAS" in ***JHI***, 412). The legend is based on Johann Gottlieb Fichte's (1762–1814) misinterpretation of Hegel and spread widely by Karl Marx's use of it in his dialectical materialism.

The Transcendental Argument

Following Kant, Hegel argued transcendentally, not dialectically (see Corduan, "TH" in Geisler, ***BEIPR***). But unlike Kant, Hegel believed that both the content and form of all knowledge was transcendentally necessary to posit as a condition for knowing. Hence, he argued that partial (relative) knowledge is impossible because it presupposes knowledge of the whole (the absolute).

Hegel's Pantheistic View of God

Hegel's metaphysics is a kind of developmental pantheism (or panentheism—see chapter 2) worked out in the historical process. History is the footprints of God in the sands of time. Better, history is God's self-unfolding in the temporal world, the progressive overcoming of the world by Absolute Spirit.

Hegel's View of Christianity

Hegel viewed Christianity (Lutheranism) as the absolute religion, the highest manifestation of the Absolute to date. This is particularly manifest in the incarnation of God in Christ, by which God appeared on earth in a particular man at a particular time. Here the Infinite is identified with the finite.
The core of religion is the Incarnation. Absolute Spirit is where the God-man duality is overcome. This is done in three stages: art, religion, and philosophy, which are progressively more abstract. The highest manifestation of the Absolute, then, is in philosophy. It is the eternal Idea, the epitome, the fullest and most complete of all concepts. So, ***while God becomes man in religion, man becomes God in philosophy.***

Hegel's View of the Bible

In an early attempt at a ***Life of Jesus***, Hegel presented a desupernaturalized view of Christ and formulated His teachings in terms of a Kantian ethic, something he had learned from Kant's famous ***Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone.*** Here Jesus is depicted by Hegel as narrow-minded and obscurantist (as opposed to the open-minded Socrates). Further, Jesus is presented as not virgin-born, and all miracles mentioned are interpreted naturalistically. The prologue of John's gospel is reinterpreted to state: "Pure reason incapable of all limitations is the Deity itself."
Later, in ***The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate***, Hegel contrasted the gospel ethic of love with the Jewish and Kantian ethics of law, but he never gave up either his antisupernaturalism or his moral-centered view of the Gospels. Hegel also reinterpreted the gospel stories of the redemptive death and resurrection of Christ in terms of Greek tragedy.
In ***The Positivity of the Christian Religion***, Hegel affirms that in claiming to be the Messiah, Jesus was merely using the language of His listener, a form of the accommodation theory (see chapter 16). Instead of revering Him for His teaching about virtue, they revered His teaching about virtue because of the miracles He is supposed to have performed.

Hegel's Later Transcendental Pantheism

Even later, in his ***Encyclopedia***, which is dominated by his transcendental idealism or developmental pantheism, Hegel was a radical revisionist of the literal, historical truth of the death and resurrection of Christ. The core of revealed religion is Christology: Jesus Christ is the God-man. As such, He died on the cross; thus both God and man died there. The Resurrection was neither of God nor man. Rather, in the Resurrection both God and man merge in Absolute Spirit. Therefore, in Hegel's developmental pantheism is found the highest manifestation of Absolute Spirit.

Hegel's Influence on Modern Biblical Criticism

Of special interest to Christian apologetics is Hegel's significant influence on negative biblical criticism. For example, following Hegel, F. C. Baur (1792–1860) and his Tubingen school claimed that the first-century tension between Peter's Judaistic form of Christianity opposed by Paul's anti-Judaistic form found its reconciliation in John's gospel in the second century, thus insisting on a late date of John's gospel. Also, David Strauss's desupernaturalized version of the life of Christ springs from Hegel's idea that spiritual reality is higher than the historical. Thus, as Rudolph Bultmann (1884–1976) was to affirm later, Christianity is myth. Likewise, Martin Heidegger's (1889–1976) mystical pantheism and hermeneutic, developed by Bultmann and Hans-Georg Gadamer (b. 1900), are rooted in Hegel's stress on spiritual interpretations of Scripture. This gave rise to the whole subjectivistic "new hermeneutic" (see chapter 10).

Scientism: Auguste Comte (1798–1857)

Naturalism has taken many forms in the modern and postmodern world, becoming a dominant view of its own, apart from its progenitors, in a view called positivism, and more descriptively known as scientism[1]. Auguste Comte is the forefather of this position, which, in his case, was also one of the early forms of secular humanism.

Comte's Life and Works

Auguste Comte was born in 1797 to a French rationalist Catholic family. He studied science and was secretary of Saint-Simone at *Ecole Polytechnique.* He said he "naturally ceased believing in God" at age fourteen.
Comte is known as the father of both positivism and sociology, which are terms he coined. He also developed a mystical (nontheistic) humanistic religious cult in which he installed himself as high priest. Comte's main works were *Cours, The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte* (1830–1842, trans. 1853) and ***The Catechism of Positive Religion*** (1852, trans. 1858). The latter included a humanistic religious calendar of secular "saints."

Scientism

With an epistemological starting point in Immanuel Kant's anti-metaphysical agnosticism and Hegel's historical developmentalism, Comte developed his law of growth. This included three stages of human development: ***theological*** (child)—ancient; ***metaphysical*** (youth)—medieval; and ***positivistic*** (adulthood)—modern. The first was the primitive belief in personal gods, later replaced by the Greek idea of impersonal law, only to be superseded by the modern (positivistic) belief in the methodological unity of science. These three stages represent the mythological (***mythos***), metaphysical (***logos***), and scientific (positivistic theories) stages of the human race. According to Comte, they move forward from the personal explanation of nature to impersonal law and finally to an objective method. They advance from the belief in supernatural beings to natural forces, and then to phenomenal (empirical) descriptions. Instead of animating spirits or impersonal powers, natural laws are posited. In this three-stage growth, spiritual and then rational causes are discarded for purely natural (positivistic) descriptions.
The religious stage has its own evolution whereby earlier polytheistic belief, which personified nature into gods, develops eventually into monotheistic faith, which consolidated them all into a godhead. The problem with the religious interpretation of nature is that it anthropomorphizes reality. The problem with the metaphysical stage is that it reifies (makes real) ideas rather than merely describing them and relating them as the positivistic stage does.

Comte's goal was to find a general law by which all phenomena are related. Such a law, he believed, would be the ideal result of positivistic philosophy. However, the best likely result is a unity in the scientific method. True freedom lies in rational subjection to scientific laws. One law is that society must develop in the direction of scientism (positivism).

Religious Views

Comte disliked Protestantism, pronouncing it negative and productive of intellectual anarchy. As mentioned, he developed a humanistic (non-theistic) religion of his own in which he was the high priest of this cult of humanity; his mistress (Mme. Clothilde Vaux) was proclaimed the high priestess. Also, his humanistic religious calendar with "saints" included such persons as Frederick the Great, Dante, and Shakespeare.

In effect, Comte deified the scientific method, yet he protested that others had deified nature. Scientism was not just ***a*** method for discovering some truth, but ***the*** method for discovering truth. As such, it involved self-defeating beliefs in materialism, the denial of metaphysics, and the rejection of other absolute morality such as is taught in Scripture.

Evolutionism: Spencer and Darwin (1860f.)

Evolution existed as a philosophy before it existed as a science—even some ancient Greeks believed in evolution. However, it was not rooted in any testable scientific theory. Before Darwin's ***On the Origin of Species*** (1859), English philosopher Herbert Spencer "advocated a theory of evolution similar to that of Darwin's" (Edwards, ***EOP***, Volume 7–8, 523).

Herbert Spencer (1820–1903)

Following in the line of the positivistic philosophy of Auguste Comte and John Stuart Mill (1806–1873), Herbert Spencer was the first to provide an overall philosophical framework for evolution; even Charles Darwin called him "our great philosopher Herbert Spencer." He published his first book, ***Social Statistics***, in 1850, which was nine years before Darwin's ***Origin*** laid both an

alleged scientific ground and philosophical model for evolution. This model he applied to all of science, and from 1860 to 1893 he developed his project: ***First Principles*** (1862), ***Principles of Biology*** (1864–1867), ***Principles of Psychology*** (1870–1872), ***Principles of Sociology*** (1876–1896), and ***Principles of Ethics*** (1879–1893). They are all an outworking of his synthetic view of evolution. Despite the lack of any real scientific basis for his view, being grounded in the now disproved theory that acquired characteristics are genetically transmitted to one's offspring, Spencer's views gained wide recognition. Following Mill's empiricism, he was left with what he called the Unknowable. Pantheism was rejected along with theism, and Spencer was left with agnosticism as the only reasonable alternative in religion and metaphysics. Scientific (empirical) knowledge was regarded as the only valid form of knowledge about the physical universe, and it yields at best only general laws about its operation. Only philosophers deal with theories that hold for everything; nonetheless, Spencer believed that the Darwinian hypothesis could be used as the genuine core of an overall theory of evolution to explain everything in the physical universe.

Charles Darwin (1809–1882)

Charles Darwin accomplished what others before him (like Hume) had attempted but failed, namely, the supposed demise of the design argument by way of evolution. With the replacement of design by natural selection, there was finally no room left for a Designer (God); in the absence of any supernatural Creator, the rest of traditional supernatural Christianity would come crumbling down as well—at least as the dominant model in the intellectual world. This, of course, included the downfall of the traditional view of the divine inspiration of Scripture.

Darwin's View of Origins

What Darwin did for evolution was to give it, in the eyes of the scientific community, a plausible scientific basis in the mechanism of natural selection. This he did by convincingly combining the evidence for micro-evolution (small-scale changes ***within*** certain types of life) by natural selection with knowledge gained from Thomas Malthus's (1766–1834) population theory (as well as the alleged analogy of natural selection and artificial selection). From this Darwin

concluded that macroevolution (large-scale changes ***between*** different types of life) is true. He knew this was a lead not justified by fossil evidence, and he considered it the weakest part of his theory (***OOS***, 152).

In spite of Darwin's admission, his conviction of the truth of evolution grew, and in his famous ***On the Origin of Species*** (1859) he set forth his hypothesis that all animal life evolved from one or a few simple forms of life. Later, in ***The Descent of Man*** (1871), Darwin ventured to argue that humankind too had evolved from lower forms of animal life. Since the evolution of Darwin's views on religion are a revelatory microcosm of the entire period, which experienced the overthrow of nearly two millennia of orthodox beliefs on God and the Bible, they will be treated biographically.

Darwin's Early Religious Training

Darwin was baptized in the Church of England and later, despite his rejection of Christianity, was buried in Westminster Abbey! Although christened an Anglican, Darwin was sent to a school conducted by a Unitarian minister (Moore, ***PDC***, 315). He later entered the University of Cambridge in 1828, "where his father had decided that he should prepare for the ministry" (ibid.). Even at this early date, with the aid of Pearson's ***Exposition of the Creed*** and Bishop Sumner's ***Evidence of Christianity Derived From Its Nature and Reception*** (1824), "Darwin abandoned whatever were his scruples about professing belief in all the doctrines of the Church" (ibid.). Nonetheless, he read carefully and was deeply impressed with William Paley's books, ***A View of the Evidences of Christianity*** (1794) and ***Natural Theology; or, Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity*** (1802).

Darwin's Original Theistic Beliefs

Even as an adult, Darwin began his intellectual pilgrimage as a theist; he accepted, for example, Paley's design argument. In his ***Autobiography*** he referred to his journal entry about experiencing the wonder of creation standing in the midst of a Brazilian forest: "I remember my conviction that there is more in man than the mere breath of his body" (***ACD***, 91).

Darwin also spoke of "the extreme difficulty or rather impossibility of conceiving this immense and wonderful universe, including man with his

capacity of looking far backward and far into futurity, as the result of blind chance or necessity." Thus, "when reflecting I feel compelled to look to a First Cause having an intelligent mind in some degree analogous to that of man; and I deserve to be called a Theist." He added, "This conclusion was strong in my mind about the time, as far as I can remember, when I wrote the ***Origin of Species;*** and it is since that time that it has very gradually become weaker" (***ACD***, 92–93).

Darwin's Rejection of Christianity

By 1835, before Darwin set sail on the ***Beagle***, he was yet a creationist. Darwin describes his own religious descent in his ***Autobiography:*** "Whilst on board the ***Beagle*** [October 1836–January 1839] I was quite orthodox, and I remember being heartily laughed at by several of the officers (though themselves orthodox) for quoting the Bible as an unanswerable authority on some point of morality." However, he did not believe the Bible was an unanswerable authority on science at this time. According to Ernst Mayr, Darwin had become an evolutionist some time between 1835 and 1837 ("Introduction" to Darwin's ***Origin***, x): "By 1844, his views [on evolution] had reached considerable maturity, as shown by his manuscript 'Essay' " (ibid.).

Charles Darwin's son and biographer, Sir Francis Darwin, said that "although Darwin had nearly all the key ideas of ***Origin*** in mind as early as 1838, he deliberated for twenty years before committing himself publicly to evolution" (***LLCD***, 3.18). Only a decade later (1848) Darwin was fully convinced of evolution, defiantly declaring to J. D. Hooker: "I don't care what you say, my species theory is all gospel" (cited by Moore, ***PDC***, 211).

Darwin's declining Christian beliefs began with an erosion of his belief in the trustworthiness of the Bible. As late as 1848 he read Harvard's Professor Andrew Norton (***The Evidence of the Genuineness of the Gospels***), who argued that the Gospels "remain essentially the same as they were originally composed" and that "they have been ascribed to their true authors" (***LLCD***, 212). However, Darwin's faith in the Old Testament had eroded some years before this.

The Acceptance of Negative Higher Criticism

> I had gradually come, by this time, to see that the Old Testament from its manifestly false history of the world, with its Tower of Babel, the rainbow as a sign, etc., etc., and from its attribution to God the feelings of a revengeful tyrant, was no more to be trusted than the sacred books of the Hindoos, or the beliefs of any barbarian. (*ACD*, 85.)

The Acceptance of Antisupernaturalism

Both Benedict Spinoza in 1670 and David Hume a century later had attacked the basis of supernatural intervention in the world. Darwin added,

> By further reflection that the clearest evidence would be requisite to make any sane man believe in miracles by which Christianity is supported—that the more we know of the fixed laws of nature the more incredible do miracles become—that the men of that time were ignorant and credulous to a degree almost incomprehensible by us—that the Gospels cannot be proved to have been written simultaneously with the events—that they differ in many important details, far too important as it seemed to me to be admitted as the usual inaccuracies of eyewitnesses—by such reflections as these … I gradually came to disbelieve in Christianity as a divine revelation (ibid., 86).

Nonetheless, Darwin continued,

> I was very unwilling to give up my belief … thus disbelief crept over me at a very slow rate, but was at last complete. The rate was so slow that I felt no distress, and have never since doubted even for a single second that my conclusion was correct (ibid., 87).

The "Damnable Doctrine" of Hell

Darwin notes the significance of the orthodox Christian belief in hell as a particular influence in his rejection of Christianity:

> I can indeed hardly see how anyone ought to wish Christianity to be true; for if so plain language of the text seems to show that the men who do not believe, and this would include my Father, Brother and almost all my best friends, will be everlastingly punished. And this is a damnable doctrine (ibid., 87).

The Death of Darwin's Daughter

Darwin's increased skepticism was heightened by the death of his beloved daughter, Anne, in 1851. James Moore notes that "two strong emotions, anger and grief, in the ***Autobiography*** mark off the years from 1848 to 1851 as the period when Darwin finally renounced his faith" (***PDC***, 209). This, of course, was just after his view in evolution had solidified (1844–1848) and before he wrote his famous ***On the Origin of Species*** (1859).

Darwin openly put himself outside the pale of Christianity. Referring to himself as a "horrid wretch" (one of the condemned), in May (1856) he warned a young entomologist: "I have heard Unitarianism called a feather bed to catch a falling Christian; and I think you are now on just such a feather bed, but I believe you will fall much lower and lower" (cited by Moore, ***PDC***, 221). A month later, Darwin referred to himself as "the Devil's Chaplain," a satirical figure of speech of a confirmed unbeliever (ibid., 222).

Darwin's Descent to Deism

As late as 1841 Darwin reread William Paley's ***Evidences*** and was impressed by his "good" arguments. Yet Darwin gradually discarded theism for deism, leaving room only for the single act of divine intervention for the creation of the first form or forms of life. This was apparently his view at the time of ***Origins*** where, in the second edition, he wrote,

> There is grandeur in the view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed *by the Creator* into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed laws of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved. (*OOS*, 490, second edition

[2]

, emphasis added.)

Paley's Design Argument Rejected

Darwin had read and accepted William Paley's famous argument for design (found in nature) to a Designer (God) of nature. However, because of his growing belief in evolution he gradually discarded it. Although previously Darwin still clung to a deistic God who created the world but let it operate by "fixed natural laws," gradually he came to reject even the cogency of the design argument. He said he was "driven" to the conclusion:

> The old argument of design in nature, as given by Paley, which formerly seemed to me so conclusive, fails, now that the law of natural selection had been discovered.... There seems to be no more design in the variability of organic beings and in the action of natural selection than in the course which the wind blows. Everything in nature is the result of fixed laws. (*ACD*, 87.)

The only design involved, then, was that a Creator set up these fixed natural laws. Darwin wrote, "I am inclined to look at everything as resulting from designed laws, with the details, whether good or bad, left to the working out of what we may call chance" (F. Darwin, ***LLCD***, 1.279; 2. 105).

In view of this Darwin even ventured so far as to refer to natural selection as "my deity." To believe in miraculous creations or in the "continued intervention of creative power," said Darwin, "is to make 'my deity Natural Selection' superfluous and to hold ***the*** Deity—if such there be—accountable for phenomena which are rightly attributed onto his magnificent laws" (cited by Moore, ***PDC***, 322). By the phrase "if such there be," Darwin not only stated his deism but also signaled his growing agnosticism.

As early as 1871, in ***Descent of Man***, Darwin denied a widely accepted basis for belief in an infinitely powerful God. He wrote, "***Belief in God—Religion.*** There is no evidence that man was aboriginally endowed with the ennobling belief in the existence of an Omnipotent God" (3, 302). Here Darwin hints at finite godism (see chapter 2); be this as it may, it was short lived, and Darwin definitely eventuated an agnostic.

Agnosticism

By 1879 Darwin was an agnostic, writing, "I think that generally (and more and more as I grow older), but not always, that an Agnostic would be the more correct description of my state of mind" (cited by Moore, ***PDC***, 204). Eventually, he wrote, "The mystery of the beginning of all things is insoluble by us; and I for one must be content to remain an Agnostic" (ibid., 84).

His agnosticism notwithstanding, Darwin clearly denies ever being an atheist[3]: "In my most extreme fluctuations I have never been an atheist in denying the existence of God" (ibid., 204).

Most reputable scholars reject the stories of Darwin's deathbed conversion as apocryphal. Interestingly, as late as 1879, several years after ***Descent of Man*** (1871), Darwin declared, "It seems to me absurd to doubt that a man may be an ardent Theist and an evolutionist" (Letter 7, May 1879). However, Darwin

himself was content to remain an agnostic.
It is difficult to overestimate the vast negative influence Darwin's view has had on the orthodox view of God and the Bible. Needless to say, it forms the turning point in the modern liberal view of Scripture. Before Darwin, unorthodox views of Scripture were never given a foothold in the nearly 1,900 years of the church's existence. Since the time of Darwin, unorthodox views of God and Scripture have come against the church from all directions and have had tremendous effect.

Principial Atheism

Although Darwin, and many Darwinists, stoutly deny that Darwin's view is in principle atheistic, the charge has been laid very seriously at his door. Princeton scholar Charles Hodge, in a penetrating analysis, asked and answered his own question:

> What is Darwinism? It is Atheism. This does not mean that Mr. Darwin himself and all who adopt his views are atheists; but it means that his theory is atheistic, that the exclusion of design from nature is … tantamount to atheism. (*WID*, 177.)

Hodge's logic is challenging. Evolution excludes design, and if there is no design in nature there is no need for a Designer of nature. So regardless of protests to the contrary, evolution is in principle an atheistic theory.
Even many evolutionists acknowledge that Darwin's scenario of a "warm little pond" in which life first spontaneously generated excludes God entirely from the realm of biology. Darwin wrote, "It is often said that all the conditions for the first production of a living organism are now present which could ever have been present." Thus, spontaneous generation would be possible if "we could conceive in some warm little pond with all sorts of ammonia and phosphoric salts, light, heat, electricity present that a protein was formed ready to undergo still more complex changes" (cited by F. Darwin, ***LLCD***, 3.18).
Francis Darwin admitted that his father "never claimed his theory could explain the origin of life, but the implication was there. ***Thus, not only was God banished from the creation of species but from the entire realm of biology***" (ibid., 3.18). This being the case, there was no allowance for a Creator, at least not in the realm of biological science. All one needs to do is to posit what many long believed, that the material universe is eternal and there appears to be no place for a First Cause at all. And if there is no Creator, then the Bible, being a thoroughly theistic book, is completely undermined.

THE RELIGIOUS ROOTS OF DESTRUCTIVE BIBLICAL CRITICISM

The philosophical roots of biblical criticism in various forms of naturalism were shadowed by certain religious movements that became fertile soil in which it could grow. These include pietism, liberalism, and existentialism.

Pietism (c. 1650–c. 1725)

Pietism arose in Germany under the leadership of Philipp Jakob Spener (1635–1705) and his close friend August Hermann Francke (1663–1727). Spener had published the influential *Pia Desideria* (1675) while serving as a pastor in Frankfurt. By 1694 they were settled at Halle, where they established charitable centers and founded a university. While pietists held to the traditional doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture, their stress on subjective personal experience eventually led to an undermining of the objective authority of Scripture. As Francke put it,

> We may safely assure those who read the word with devotion and simplicity, that they will derive more light and profit from such a practice, and from connecting meditation with it ... than can ever be acquired from drudging through an infinite variety of unimportant minutiae. (*AGRSHS*, 83.)

By stressing the primary importance of feeling, they hoped to avoid the cold orthodoxy of so-called Protestant scholasticism but inadvertently opened the door for the equally dangerous enemy known as subjective experimentalism. While first-generation pietists could recall and reflect on their grounding in Scripture while validly advocating the need for individual experience, the second generation focused on the need for individual experience and often neglected the sound basis for their experience in the authority of Scripture. Under the onslaught of naturalism, rationalism, and evolutionism, pietism soon gave way to deism, skepticism, and negative biblical criticism.

Liberalism: Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834)

Friedrich Schleiermacher is the father of modern liberalism. He was a noted German theologian who was educated in Moravian (pietistic) institutions, ordained and preached in Berlin (1796), and later taught theology at Halle (1804) and Berlin (1810). His two major works are ***On Religion*** (1799), which is experiential in its orientation, and ***The Christian Faith*** (1821–22), which is doctrinal in its approach. He also wrote ***Brief Outline on the Study of Theology*** and a posthumously published book titled ***Hermeneutics.***

Importance of Schleiermacher

Among Schleiermacher's more significant modern influences are pietism, which stressed the devotional over the doctrinal, romanticism (following Friedrich Schlegel, 1772–1829), which affirmed pantheism in contrast to theism, and agnosticism (following Kant), which emphasized the practical versus the theoretical.

Schleiermacher exerted a tremendous influence on his followers, including most major liberals after him: Albrecht Ritschl (1822–1889), who wrote ***Critical History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*** (1870–1874); Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930), who wrote ***What Is Christianity;*** and Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918), who wrote ***Introduction to the History of Israel*** (1878), in which he defended the famous JEPD hypothesis of the authorship of the Pentateuch (see chapter 15).

View of Religion

For Schleiermacher, the basis of religion is found in experience. In his famous work ***On Religion*** he argued that we must ***have*** it before we can ***utter*** it—the locus of religion is in the self; the inner is key to the outer. The object of religion is the All (which many call ***God***), and the nature of religion is found in a feeling (sense) of absolute dependence, which is described as a sense of creaturehood, an awareness that one is dependent on the All, or a sense of existential contingency.

Schleiermacher distinguished religion from ethics and science in the following manner: Ethics is a way of living; science is a way of thinking; religion is a way

of feeling (sensing). Whereas ethics is a way of acting and science a way of knowing, by contrast, religion is a way of being. Thus, ethics is practical, science is contemplative, and religion is attitudinal. Likewise, ethics is a matter of self-control, but religion involves self-surrender.

The relation of religion to doctrine is that of a sound to its echo or experience to its expression. Religion is found in feeling, and doctrine is only a form of the feeling. Religion is the "stuff," and doctrine is the structure. First one must sense it, and then he states it. Doctrine is not essential to religious experience and is scarcely necessary to the expression of it, since it can be expressed in symbol as well.

As to the universality of religion, Schleiermacher believed that all men have this religious feeling of dependence on the All; thus there are no real atheists. In this view Schleiermacher foreshadowed Paul Tillich (1886–1965), who believed everyone, even atheists, has an ultimate commitment to something.

Since religion is primarily a feeling, Schleiermacher believed it is primarily communicated by personal example—better caught than taught. Secondarily, religion can be communicated through symbols and doctrines, but doctrines are only accounts of religious feeling; they are statements about our feeling, not about God, His attributes, or His nature.

There are endless varieties of religious expressions, largely due to personality differences. The pantheistic expression results from those who delight in the obscure; theists by personal propensity are those who delight in the definite.

The liberalistic aim or goal of religion is the love of the All, the World-Spirit. This is achieved through loving other human beings; the result of religion is unity of life, and its influence is manifest in morals. Religion produces a wholeness of life, but it has no specific influence on individual acts—we act ***with*** religion but not ***from*** it.

Likewise, the influence of religion on science is not direct, as one cannot be scientific without piety. The feeling of dependence on the All removes presumption to knowledge, which is ignorance. The true goal of science cannot be realized without a vision arising from religion.

The Test for the Truth of a Doctrine

Schleiermacher believed religions are neither true nor false as such. Truth and falsity do not apply to religion, which is a feeling (sense) of absolute

dependence. He held that truth and falsity apply to ideas, and the truth of an idea is determined by two sets of criteria: scientific and ecclesiastical.

Scientific criteria include clarity, consistency, coherence, and cohesion with other doctrines. The primary ecclesiastical criterion is the value a doctrine has for the life of the church. Indeed, the knowledge of God is mediated through the corporate experience of redemption rather than in a body of doctrine, and it is for this reason that Schleiermacher relegated his treatment of the Trinity to an appendix—he believed it was a speculation divorced from piety (see ***CF***, appendix).

Schleiermacher's concept of salvation was less than orthodox. He understood redemption to be the impression made by Jesus; unclouded consciousness on the Christian community that replaced their own impoverished God-consciousness with that of Jesus. Schleiermacher's view of miracles and Providence was ambivalent, and his almost complete stress on God's immanence made him liable to the charge of pantheism.

Impact on Liberalism

Schleiermacher offers many notable insights into religion. Among them are: (1) his stress on the contingent and dependent nature of all creatures; (2) his emphasis on the importance of religious experience; (3) the helpfulness of many of his distinctions between religion, science, and ethics; (4) his belief that truth needs to be tested; (5) his stress on Christian community; and (6) his belief in systematic theology.

However, the negative influence of Schleiermacher's liberal views has been massive. Among these are: (1) his experimental form of pantheism; (2) his acceptance of a Kantian epistemology; (3) his disjunction of experience and doctrine; (4) his contention that truth does not apply to religion; (5) his reduction of theology to anthropology, and (6) his acceptance of negative (destructive) higher criticism of the Bible.

Schleiermacher's revision of Christian theology had its most radical impact on the issue of authority, because he argued that no external authority, whether it be Scripture, church, or historic creedal statement, takes precedence over the immediate experience of believers. He also contributed to a more critical approach to the Bible by questioning its inspiration and authority. Further, he rejected doctrines he believed were unrelated to the religious experience of

redemption: for instance, the Virgin Birth, the Trinity, and the return of Christ. He felt such teachings implied a cognitive and indirect knowledge rather than immediate God-consciousness.

Schleiermacher greatly influenced Christianity through three major achievements. ***First***, he made religion socially acceptable to those who no longer took the Bible and its doctrines seriously by showing its appeal to man's aesthetic tendencies. ***Second***, he attracted to theology countless young men who were interested in religion primarily as an expression of man's imaginative spirit. And ***third***, for a time he changed biblical criticism from historical to literary analysis. His influence, limited to Germany during his lifetime, was enormous on later Protestants because of Albrecht Ritschl (1822–1889), Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930), and Ernst Troeltsch (1865–1923).

Existentialism: Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855)

The father of modern existentialism was not a twentieth-century French atheist (Sartre) but a nineteenth-century Danish Christian named Søren Kierkegaard, who was orthodox enough that he could have signed a statement subscribing to the historic fundamentals of the faith. He wrote, "On the whole, the doctrine as it is taught [in the church] is entirely sound."

Nonetheless, few have done more from within the evangelical fold to methodologically undermine historic orthodoxy than Kierkegaard. Indeed, it was his theological son, Karl Barth, who gave rise to neo-orthodoxy. Kierkegaard concluded that even if we assume that

> the defenders of Christianity have succeeded in proving about the Bible everything that any learned theologian in his happiest moment has ever wished to prove about the Bible, [namely,] that these books and no others belong in the canon; they are authentic; they are integral; their authors are trustworthy—one may well say, that it is as if every letter were inspired.

Kierkegaard then asked, "Has anyone who previously did not have faith been brought a single step nearer to its acquisition? No, not a single step" (***CUPPF***, 29–30).

Then Kierkegaard posed the opposite:

> [What if] the opponents have succeeded in proving what they desire about the Scriptures, with a certainty transcending the most ardent wish of the most passionate hostility—what then? Have the opponents thereby abolished Christianity? By no means. Has the believer been harmed? By no means, not in the least (ibid., 31).

At the minimum, Kierkegaard's bifurcation of fact and value is axiologically misplaced.[4] In fact, it has been biblically disastrous, as Barth, Brunner, and Bultmann (and their followers) demonstrate. We need only mention these Kierkegaard-inspired beliefs: (1) Religious truth is located in personal encounter (subjectivity); (2) Propositional truth is not essential to the faith; (3) Higher criticism is not harmful to real Christianity; (4) God is "wholly other" and essentially unknowable, even through biblical revelation. These maxims give further significance to the Pauline warning to "beware of philosophy" (see Geisler, "BPWBE" in ***JETS***).

THEOLOGICAL MANIFESTATIONS OF DESTRUCTIVE BIBLICAL CRITICISM

Theological manifestations of destructive biblical criticism shadow the destructive philosophies they imbibe both logically and historically. This is certainly true of the French scholar Richard Simon (1638–1712), "the father of biblical criticism," for his views were directly influenced by Spinoza. Likewise, David Strauss (1808–1874), who wrote the first desupernaturalized life of Christ, was influenced by the antisupernaturalism of David Hume, and so on.

Richard Simon (1638–1712)

After extensive studies in oriental language, Richard Simon published his *Histoire Critique du Vieux Testament (Historical Critique of the Old Testament)*

in 1678 only a few years after Spinoza's *Tractatus* (1670). He later wrote *Histoire Critique du Texte du Nouveau Testament (Historical Critique of the Text of the New Testament)* (1683).
Although Simon believed he kept the interest of Roman Catholicism at heart, he denied that Moses wrote the Pentateuch. Contrary to Spinoza, however, he based his views on what he considered duplicate accounts of the same incident and a variation in style of writing.

Jean Astruc (1684–1766)

Jean Astruc was one of the first scholars to bring to prominence the notion that Genesis chapters 1 and 2 were written by two different authors. He published his ***Conjectures*** in 1753, in which he attempted to reconcile some of the difficulties he found in the Genesis record. As a result, he emphasized the distinctions between such words as ***Elohim, Yahweh Elohim*** (or ***Jehovah Elohim***), and ***El-Elyon*** in espousing a view that would later become popular among such German rationalists as Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1752–1827), Karl H. Graf (1815–1869), Abraham Kuenen (1828–1891), Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918), and others.

Johann Salomo Semler (1729–1791)

Johann Semler is often referred to as the father of German rationalism because he was the first to advocate the so-called accommodation theory, which plays a crucial role in liberal theology. In this way he set the stage for the rise of the historical-critical method, of which Gerhard Maier says, "The general acceptance of Semler's basic concept that the Bible must be treated like any other book has plunged theology into an endless chain of perplexities and inner contradictions."[5]
Semler was reared in pietism before he adopted a more rationalistic approach.

> He distinguished between the permanent truths in Scripture and the elements due

> to the times in which the books were written. He denied the equal value of all parts of Scripture. Revelation, he taught, is in Scripture, but all Scripture is not revelation. The creeds of the church are a growth. Church history is a development. (Walker, *HCC*, 483.)

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–1781)

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, the son of a pastor in Saxony, served as librarian to the Duke of Brunswick after 1770. Lessing published a series of ***Fragments of an Unknown Writer***, popularly known as the ***Wolfenbuttel Fragments*** (1774–1778). This was actually a defense and restatement of skeptical deism by Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694–1768), which included a fragment entitled ***The Goal of Jesus and His Disciples.*** Left unpublished during his own lifetime, this Reimarus fragment claimed to expose the Gospel accounts of Jesus as a piece of fraud because of their alleged unfulfilled eschatological predictions. It unreservedly rejected miracles and revelation and cast accusations of conscious fraud, innumerable contradictions, and fanaticism upon the biblical writers. Such a perspective raised a storm of controversy when it was published by Lessing, and it revolutionized the image of Jesus in modern theology. Indeed, it was the point of departure for Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965) in his ***Quest for the Historical Jesus*** (1906). Lessing himself wrote an essay in gospel criticism entitled ***New Hypothesis on the Evangelists considered as merely human historical Writers*** (1788), which posited a single Hebrew or Aramaic source behind the Gospel narratives and portrayed Jesus as a merely human messiah.

Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1752–1827)

Johann Gottfried Eichhorn was a German theologian who appears to have followed the views of Astruc and Presbyterian scholar Joseph Priestly (1733–1804) in preparing the way for the rise of the critical method. The term ***higher criticism*** was used as a synonym for historical criticism by Priestly, who regarded the historical method to be “one of the most satisfactory modes of argumentation” in the preface to his ***History of the Corruptions of Christianity*** (1782).

Eichhorn then used the term “higher criticism” in the preface to his three-volume

Einleitung in das Alte Testament (1780–1783). He was one of the first commentators to make a scientific comparison between the biblical books and other Semitic writings; he also divided Genesis into “Jehovist” and “Elohist” sources and distinguished the priestly from the popular law code in the Pentateuch.
Although Eichorn’s work was inaccurate, it was popular and did much to encourage biblical study and criticism. Later higher criticism came to be identified more particularly with literary criticism than with historical method.

Heinrich Eberhard Gottlob Paulus (1761–1851)

In his ***Life of Jesus*** (1828), Heinrich Paulus attempted to reconcile his belief in the substantial accuracy of the Gospel narrative with his personal disbelief in miracles and the supernatural. He attempted to turn miracles into ordinary facts and events that had been exaggerated or misconceived, and he treated the Gospel writers as sufferers of hallucinations who intentionally recorded such things as visions and miracles. Paulus applied Eichhorn’s principles to the New Testament even though he believed himself to be championing the Bible’s cause against rising skepticism. His influence waned in the face of the more radical skepticism of David Friedrich Strauss.

Wilhelm Martin Leberecht De Wette (1780–1849)

Wilhelm De Wette studied at one time under Heinrich Paulus before publishing his own works on biblical criticism from 1806 until 1813, when he turned to theological studies. He was a radical rationalist early in his career but became more conservative in later years. Although he was a non-supernaturalist, he continually criticized the theories of Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792–1860) and his disciples at the Tubingen School of New Testament Criticism.
De Wette also tried to reconcile the transcendent and finite. He was one of the most respected theologians of the nineteenth century, although he displeased rationalists with his condemnation of cold reason and offended pietists by

doubting biblical miracles and by reducing the stories of the birth, resurrection, and ascension of Christ to myths. The employment of myths was De Wette's attempt to absolve the biblical writers from charges of lunacy and imbalance by contending that they prosaically turned metaphor and allegory into fact as they wrote.

David Friedrich Strauss (1808–1874)

Armed with antisupernatural bias in advance of looking at the evidence, liberal biblical scholars (as well as scientists) after Hume uniformly desupernaturalized God's revelation, whether general or special. David Hutton, a friend of Hume's, was one of the first to do it in science (geology), as was David Strauss in biblical studies.

Following Hume's lead, Strauss published his famous desupernaturalized ***Life of Jesus*** (two volumes, 1835–1836). He rejected all miracles, claiming they were an exercise in mythmaking, and also eventually denied God and the immortality of the soul. He threw out miracles, viewing the Gospels as unintentional myths created by the piety of the early second century, steeped in the messianic anticipation of the Old Testament and eager to prove that Jesus was the Messiah. Strauss was the first to apply this thesis consistently to every part of the New Testament.

In 1840–1841 Strauss published the ***History of Christian Doctrine***, a polemical account of Christian doctrine from the New Testament to its dissolution in Hegel. In 1862 he wrote a work on Herman Samuel Reimarus, the noted biblical critic whose ***Fragments*** (published posthumously by Gotthold Lessing in 1778) gave rise to the first quest for the historical Jesus. In 1864 Strauss published a slightly more positive version of his first work, titled ***The Life of Jesus for the German People.*** In 1865 he penned ***The Life of Christ and the History of Jesus***, which was an attack on Frederick Schleiermacher's attempt to combine the history of Jesus and the Christ of dogma. His last work, ***The Old Faith and the New*** (1872), is a call for a new religion of humanity that negates belief in theism and immortality in favor of scientific materialism. It is the first theological work to accept Darwinian evolutionism.

Karl Heinrich Graf, Abraham Kuenen, and Julius Wellhausen

Karl Graf (1815–1869), Abraham Kuenen (1828–1891), and Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918) picked up on the notion of Spinoza, who considered Ezra to be the final composer of the Torah. Although Spinoza's view on this topic was largely ignored by his contemporaries, it was a remarkable anticipation of the final formulation of the documentary hypothesis (JEPD) by Graf, Kuenen, and Wellhausen in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Although the documentary hypothesis had its beginning with Jean Astruc, it moved into its next stage of development with Eichhorn's *Einleitung* (1780–1783); and its third stage was reached with De Wette's ***Dissertation*** (1805) and *Beitrage zur Einleitung* (1806), with Hermann Hupfeld's epoch-making work *Die Quellen der Genesis (The Source of Genesis)* being published in 1853. Graf added to that work with his own efforts to show that the priestly code in the Pentateuch was distinct from and later than Deuteronomy itself (1866). Abraham Keunen refined Graf's work in *De Godsdienst van Israel (The Religion of Israel)* (1869). The stage was set for Wellhausen's important contributions, *Die Komposition des Hexateuchs (The Composition of the Hexateuch)* (1876), and *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israel (Introduction to the History of Israel)* (1878).

Gleason Archer observes that although Wellhausen made no real innovations, he restated the documentary theory with great skill and persuasiveness, supporting the JEPD sequence upon an evolutionary basis. This was the age in which Charles Darwin's ***On the Origin of Species*** was capturing the allegiance of the scholarly and scientific world, and the theory of development from primitive animism to sophisticated monotheism as set forth by Wellhausen and his followers fit well with Darwinian evolutionism as well as with Hegelian dialecticism.

> The age was ripe for the documentary theory, and Wellhausen's name became attached to it as the classical exponent of it. The impact of his writings soon made itself felt throughout Germany … and found increasing acceptance in both Great Britain and America. (Archer, *SOTI*, 87.)

The Continuation of the Wellhausean Tradition

The publication of Wellhausen's ***Introduction to the History of Israel*** marks the beginning of the triumph of the *Religionsgeschichte* ("history of religions") approach to Old Testament studies over the next four decades. In England, William Robertson Smith (***The Old Testament and the Jewish Church***, 1881) introduced the Wellhausen view to the public, whereas Samuel R. Driver (1846–1914) (***Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament***) gave the documentary hypothesis its classical English formulation. Sir George Adam Smith (1856–1942) applied the approach to the Old Testament prophets in his contribution to the ***Expositor's Bible***, edited by W. R. Nicoll (1887f). In the United States the most notable advocates of the new school were Charles Augustus Briggs (1841–1913), who wrote ***The Higher Criticism of the Hexateuch*** (1893), and his collaborator, Henry Preserved Smith (1847–1927). During the twentieth century the general outlines of the Wellhausean theory continued to be taught in most nonconservative institutions, although some uncertainties were expressed concerning the comparative dating of the "documents" by W. O. E. Osterley and T. H. Robinson (***Introduction to the Books of the Old Testament***). In general, however, such advocates as Julius A. Bewer (***Literature of the Old Testament***) and Robert H. Pfeiffer (***Introduction to the Old Testament***) adhered to Wellhausen's theory.

No other systematic account of the origin and development of the Old Testament has commanded the general acceptance of the scholarly world. Nevertheless, vigorous reaction to the documentary hypothesis, which undermines the unity of the Old Testament, and additional developments in Old Testament studies have culminated in the provocative challenge to the documentary hypothesis by Isaac M. Kikawada and Arthur Quinn.

Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792–1860)

The rationalistic and naturalistic spirit invading New Testament studies also came from Germany through the writings of Schleiermacher, Eichhorn, and the more radical criticism of F. C. Baur. Following a so-called Hegelian dialectic of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis,[6] Baur postulated that the gospel of John must

be a second-century synthesis between the thesis of Peter and antithesis of Paul in the first century. This, of course, is contrary to strong opposing historical evidence (see chapter 26) and is an example of how philosophical presuppositions have influenced the development of destructive biblical criticism.

Baur also reduced what he believed were the authentic Pauline Epistles to four (Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians) and denied the genuineness of most other New Testament books. Although his critical opinions fell into disrepute with the rejection of his historical reconstruction and presuppositions, other critics began from equally tenuous assumptions.

Rudolph Bultmann (1884–1976)

Rudolph Bultmann developed an antisupernatural form of demythologizing the New Testament, contending that the New Testament world "is the scene of the supernatural activity of God and his angels on the one hand, and of Satan and his demons on the other. These supernatural forces intervene in the course of nature and in all that we think and will and do" (***KMTD***, 1).

Demythologizing the New Testament

According to Bultmann,

> The NT documents need to be stripped of this mythological structure. For all this is the language of mythology and is incredible to modern man, for he is convinced that the mythical view of the world is obsolete.... All our thinking today is shaped for good or ill by modern science. [So] a blind acceptance of the New Testament ... would involve a sacrifice of the intellect.... It would mean accepting a view of the world in our faith and religion which we should deny in our everyday life (ibid., 3–4).

With unlimited confidence, then, Bultmann pronounced the biblical picture of miracles to be impossible, for "man's knowledge and mastery of the world have advanced to such an extent through science and technology that it is no longer possible for anyone seriously to hold the NT view of the world—in fact, there is

hardly anyone who does." Therefore, the only honest way of reciting the creeds is to strip the mythological framework from the truth they enshrine.

If the biblical picture is mythological, how then are we to understand it? For Bultmann,

> The real purpose of myth is not to present an objective picture of the world as it is, but to express man's understanding of himself in the world in which he lives. [Therefore,] myth should be interpreted not cosmologically, but anthropologically, or better still, existentially. [That is,] myth speaks of the power or the powers which man supposes he experiences as the ground and limit of his world and of his own activity and suffering. [In other words,] the real purpose of myth is to speak of a transcendent power which controls the world and man, but that purpose is impeded and obscured by the terms in which it is expressed (ibid., 10–11).

Bultmann concluded confidently, "Obviously [the Resurrection] is not an event of past history.… An historical fact which involves a resurrection from the dead is utterly inconceivable" (ibid., 38–39). He offers several reasons for this antisupernatural conclusion. ***First***, there is "the incredibility of a mythical event like the resuscitation of a corpse." ***Second***, "there is the difficulty of establishing the objective historicity of the resurrection no matter how many witnesses are cited." ***Third***, "the resurrection is an article of faith which, as such, cannot be a miraculous proof." ***Fourth***, "such a miracle is not otherwise unknown to mythology" (ibid., 39–40).

What, then, is the Resurrection if not an event of objective, space-time history? For Bultmann, it is an event of subjective history; that is, it is an event of faith in the hearts of the early disciples. As such, it is not subject to objective historical verification or falsification, for it is not really an event in the space-time world. Christ did not rise from Joseph's tomb; He arose by faith in the disciples' hearts. Bultmann's reasoning goes like this:

(1) Myths are by nature more than objective truths—they are transcendent truths of faith.
(2) But what is not objective cannot be part of a verifiable space-time world.
(3) Therefore, miracles (myths) are not part of the objective space-time world.

Several objections have been offered to this view, which, basically, is built on several unproven assumptions. It does not follow that because an event is ***more*** than historical it must be ***less*** than historical. Gospel miracles, to be sure, have a "moreness" or transcendent dimension; they cannot be reduced to mere historical events. For example, the Virgin Birth is more than biological; it points to the divine nature of Christ and to the spiritual purpose of His mission. It is not merely a matter of science; it is also presented as a "sign" (Isa. 7:14). The same is true of Christ's resurrection. Although it is at least that, it is portrayed as more than a mere resuscitation of a corpse. It has a divine dimension that entails spiritual truths as well (Rom. 4:25; 2 Tim. 1:10).

First, miracles can occur ***in*** the world without being ***of*** the world. A miracle can originate out of the supernatural world (its source) and yet it can occur in the natural world (its sphere). In this way the event can be objective and verifiable without being reducible to its purely factual dimensions. Thus one could verify directly by historical means whether or not the corpse of Jesus of Nazareth was raised and empirically observed (the objective dimensions of the miracle), without reducing the spiritual aspects of the event to mere scientific data. But in claiming that miracles such as the Resurrection cannot occur in space-time history, Bultmann is merely revealing an unjustified, dogmatic, naturalistic bias.

Second, it is clear that the basis of Bultmann's antisupernaturalism is not evidential, nor even open to real discussion; the dogmatism of his language is revealing. Antisupernaturalism is something he holds "no matter how many witnesses are cited" (ibid.). Miracles are "incredible," "irrational," "no longer possible," "meaningless," "utterly inconceivable," "simply impossible," and "intolerable." Hence, the "only honest way" for modern people is to hold that miracles are "nothing else than spiritual" and that the physical world is "immune from interference" in a supernatural way. This is not the language of one open to historical evidence for a miracle. It looks more like a mind that does not wish to be "confused" with the facts.

Third, Bultmann's mythological events are unverifiable. If miracles are not objective historical events, then they are unverifiable or unfalsifiable—there is no factual way to determine their truth or falsity. But if this is true, then they have been placed beyond the realm of objective truth and must be treated as purely subjective (see Flew, "TF" in ***NEPT***, 98). To rephrase Flew's question for Bultmann, "If the corpse of Jesus of Nazareth had been discovered after the first Easter, would this falsify your belief in the Resurrection?" His answer, clearly, is no. By contrast the answer of the apostle, Paul, clearly, is yes, for "if Christ has

not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (1 Cor. 15:17). Therefore, it is obvious that Bultmann's understanding of miracles is contrary to that found in one of the earliest known Christian records of these events, the New Testament. First Corinthians is widely accepted, even by biblical critics, as the work of the apostle Paul from about A.D. 55 or 56.

Fourth, Bultmann's myths have no evidential value. If miracles are not historical events, then they have no power, and nothing can be proven by them, since they have value only for those who wish to believe them. However, the New Testament writers claim evidential value for miracles. They consider them "convincing proofs" (Acts 1:3) and not "cleverly devised myths" (2 Peter 1:16 RSV). Paul declared, "He [God] has given proof of this to all men, by raising him [Jesus] from the dead" (Acts 17:31).

Fifth, Bultmann's demythological view is unbiblical and is unjustified for several reasons. To begin with, it is contrary to the overwhelming evidence for the authenticity of the New Testament documents and the reliability of the witnesses. Also, it is contrary to the New Testament claim for itself not to be "cleverly invented stories" (2 Peter 1:16) but an eyewitness account (cf. John 21:24; 1 John 1:1–3). Finally, the New Testament is not the literary genre of mythology. As we saw in part 1, C. S. Lewis noted that "Dr. Bultmann never wrote a gospel." He asks, therefore,

> Has the experience of his learned ... life really given him any power of seeing into the minds of those long dead [who have]? ... The "assured results of modern scholarship," as to the way in which an old book was written, are "assured," we may conclude, only because the men who knew the facts are dead and can't blow the gaff.

In brief, Bultmannian biblical critiques are unfalsifiable because, as Lewis pointedly remarks, "St. Mark is dead. When they meet St. Peter there will be more pressing matters to discuss" (Lewis, ***CR***, 161–63).

Post-Bultmannian Developments

In the 1960s two newer movements grew out of Bultmann's approach as they moved away from his historical skepticism. These "post-Bultmannians" went beyond his hermeneutic, particularly his adoption of existentialism, to criticize Bultmann's understanding of the way language functions in their pursuit of "new quest" and redaction criticism. Representatives of "new quest" seek to support some aspect of the historical as authentic without returning to the historical Jesus

of the old liberal school. Among the leading "new quest" spokesmen are Ernst Käsemann, Gunther Bornkamm, and Ernst Fuchs. The diversity of theories proposed by these critics have little in common, and they do not instill confidence in their quest. Redaction criticism has arisen directly out of form criticism and focuses attention on the Evangelists as writers. Several German scholars, including Gunther Bornkamm, Willi Marxsen (who coined the term *redaktionsgeschichte*, "form history"), Hans Conzelmann, and Ernst Haenchen, have devoted attention to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Acts respectively.
In recent times focus has ranged through source, form, redaction, and tradition criticism. Even more recently structuralism and then deconstructionism have been in vogue.[7] Other philosophical influences have infected evangelical scholarship, particularly New Testament studies. These include phenomenology, conventionalism, process theology, allegorism, and anthropological monism.[8] All have the same negative result—a denial of the historicity of the New Testament documents and with that an erosion of the very foundation of orthodox Christianity. These results have been popularized by the self-appointed radical group called the "Jesus Seminar," who deny the authenticity of some 82 percent of the sayings of Jesus recorded in the Gospels (see chapter 26).

THE RESULTS OF DESTRUCTIVE BIBLICAL CRITICISM

A couple of generations ago a popular apologist, Harry Rimmer, published a powerful image under the title: "The Assured Results of Higher Criticism"—a termite-eaten Bible.[9] In brief, the historicity and authenticity of the Bible have been seriously damaged by modern negative criticism. Along with that, divine authority has been completely undermined in the minds of those who accept these destructive critical forms. Many evangelical scholars who have bought into the philosophical presuppositions of negative higher criticism have been exposed in an excellent new work by Robert Thomas and others titled ***The Jesus Crisis: The Inroads of Historical Criticism Into Evangelical Scholarship.*** Former New Testament negative critic Eta Linnemann has the insight of an insider in her book ***Is There a Synoptic Problem?*** as well as an article called "Is There a Q?"

(***Biblical Review***, Oct. 95), in which she attacks the very foundations of modern destructive criticism. More recently she has produced a scholarly tome titled ***Biblical Criticism on Trial.***

CONCLUSION

Many forces converged to form liberalism and to mold its view of Scripture. The diversity of the attacking views may disguise the underlying unity. True, there were the inductivism of Bacon, the materialism of Hobbes, the rationalistic pantheism of Spinoza, the skepticism of Hume, the agnosticism of Kant, the romanticism of Rousseau, the pietism of Schleiermacher, the deism of Paine, the scientism of Comte and Mill, the evolutionism of Spencer and Darwin, or the more recent philosophies of phenomenology, conventionalism, and deconstructionism.[10] Unmistakably, however, is the commonality of a consistent and persistent antisupernaturalism that attacks orthodox Christianity at its core.

If miracles do not occur, then the Bible is unreliable and historic Christianity is not credible. On this unjustified premise (see chapter 3) modern liberalism is based. Its view of Scripture, then, is as faulty as its view of miracles. Of course, the Bible cannot be a supernatural revelation of God if there are no supernatural events. Some form of negative biblical criticism thus becomes necessary.

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CHAPTER TWENTY

LIBERALISM ON THE BIBLE

The rise of modern antisupernaturalism (see chapters 3 and 19) undermined the historical orthodox view of Scripture. From it sprang the view called "liberalism," the roots of which, in regard to Scripture, go back as far as Thomas Hobbes and Benedict Spinoza (seventeenth century). These roots were embodied in many of the negative higher critical views of Scripture following the time of Darwin (1860f., see chapter 19). Their eventual manifestation in pulpits and denominations in the United States began in the early 1900s.

THE CLASSICAL LIBERAL VIEW OF SCRIPTURE

There are varying degrees of theological liberalism, from moderate to radical. As measured by the orthodox position, the liberal views can be classified under two headings: classical liberalism and neoclassical liberalism. Since there is a direct relationship between one's view of God and one's view of Scripture, the liberal views follow respectively from whether it embraces a more classical view of God or a more neoclassical view. Representatives of the former are Harold DeWolf and Harry Emerson Fosdick, and representatives of the latter are

Schubert Ogden and John Cobb.

L. Harold DeWolf (1905–)

Well-known Methodist theologian Harold DeWolf expressed his perspective in two major works: ***The Case for Theology in Liberal Perspective*** and ***A Theology of the Living Church.*** He believed that in view of modern thought it was necessary to revise the orthodox view of Scripture in a more naturalistic direction.

Antisupernatural Basis of the Liberal View of Scripture

DeWolf declared,

> The questions whether such miracles have actually happened and if so how they should be thought of in relation to the natural order are questions needing to be considered later. [But] just now we are concerned simply to point out that, in the light of our theistic evidences, if a miracle were to be properly called a special revelation it could not be so-called because of its being any more an act of God than are the ordinary processes of nature, but only because it was more revealingly meaningful to men. (*TLC*, 66.)

Cultural Accommodation Is Necessary

DeWolf held that "some degree of accommodation to culture seems inevitable unless Christian teaching is to become a mere irrelevant echoing of ancient creeds—which were themselves products of some accommodation to Hellenic [Greek] thought" (***CTLP***, 58).

The grounds of this cultural accommodation is the so-called "scientific" view of the world, but in reality it is a naturalistic and evolutionary view, which is made evident by DeWolf's insistence that there are scientific errors in the Bible:

> Plainly the narrator [of Gen. 30:35–43] simply accepted the false science prevalent in his day. Similarly, some or all

> Biblical writers assume the fixity of the earth [1], the actual movement of sun and moon from east to west, a space above the firmament reserved for God's dwelling and the demonological explanation of disease. Such views cannot be intelligently accepted as infallible teaching. (*TLC*, 71.)

Negative Criticism of Scripture

This compromise in favor of a naturalistic "scientific" view leads to the adoption of negative criticism of Scripture. DeWolf believed,

> The correcting of the text and the historical locating of the writing are but different aspects of one great task. The intimate and inseparable relation between textual and historical studies of the Bible seems not to be adequately appreciated by some conservative scholars.... [Thus,] textual and historical criticism are intricately interwoven with each other and with non-Biblical archaeological, historical, and linguistic studies (ibid., 51–52).

What DeWolf said about natural theology

> serves to correct some of the errors produced by exclusively Biblical and traditional theology. [So,] God's word spoken to us through the Bible depends for the clarity and purity of its reception both upon our own open and understanding minds and also upon the reception and expression given his word by the ancient men who wrote the words of the Bible (ibid., 32).

He concluded,

> The insistence of some conservative Christians on a Biblical literalism that is rationally indefensible and an appeal based on the "proofs" of prophecy and miracles, in defiance of the natural sciences and the new historical understanding of Biblical times, needless derives from the Christian faith of intelligent young people who will not blind themselves to scientific and historical evidences (ibid., 43).

By what criterion does one judge what is of God in Scripture? DeWolf believes it is "the spirit of Christ." Thus he admonishes that "the untrained reader does well to read for the nurture of his spirit and not to become unduly concerned about passages that appear to contradict the spirit of Christ or the scientific

knowledge of our times" (ibid., 48). Using a moral norm to determine what is truthful in the Bible follows the principles of Spinoza and Kant before him (see chapter 19).
Needless to say, a desupernaturalized Bible is also an errant Bible; a Bible that is wrong about the scientific world is not an inerrant Bible.

The Bible Is Not the Word of God

DeWolf wrote, "Strictly speaking, the Bible itself is not the pure Word of God. Although by figure of intimate association we may, on occasion, without impropriety, call the Bible the Word of God, we ought not to use this language in careful theological discourse" (***CTLP***, 17).

The Bible Is Fallible and Errant

The result of DeWolf's cultural "accommodation" to naturalism was that "to the intelligent student who is more concerned with seeking out and declaring the truth than with maintaining a dogma it must be apparent that the Bible is by no means infallible" (***TLC***, 68). According to DeWolf, "Jesus himself challenged some commands of the Old Testament (Matt. 5:21–48)" (***CTLP***, 48). He added, "But while we are treating the fallibility of the Scriptures we must note that Jesus unhesitatingly and repeatedly sets Old Testament teaching at naught" (***TLC***, 73).

> In regard to many facts of minor importance there are obvious contradictions within the Bible. For example, in Exodus 37:1–9 we read that Bezalel made the Ark of the Covenant, while in Deuteronomy 10:1–5 Moses reports that God commanded him to make the Ark and he says, "So I ma an ark of acacia wood…." When Joab was ordered to take a census, 2 Samuel 24:1 tells us that it was by God's command while 1 Chronicles 21:1 says it was by Satan's command (ibid., 69).

The Origin of Scripture

What, then, is the origin of Scripture, if not God by divine inspiration? According to DeWolf, the time-honored designation of Scripture as the Word of God was no longer appropriate. His response:

> It is evident that the Bible is a collection of intensely human documents. These books were written by men who had their own characteristic education, interests, vocabularies and literary styles. [So] most of the events described are activities of obviously fallible human beings. Many passages contradict one another or well-established knowledge. Many of the moral and religious ideas, especially in the more ancient documents, are distinctly sub-Christian (ibid., 73).

In brief, while conservatives have long held that the Bible ***is*** the Word of God (see chapters 13–18), liberals insist that the Bible merely ***contains*** the Word of God. Inspiration is not supernatural; it is merely a divine elevation of natural powers.

The Meaning of "Inspiration"

According to DeWolf,

> This doctrine is that the writing of the Bible as a whole was accomplished by an extraordinary stimulation and elevation of the powers of men who devoutly yielded themselves to God's will and sought, often with success unparalleled elsewhere, to convey truth useful to the salvation of men and of nations.... This was possible mainly because they had truth of such extraordinary importance to convey. It is upon that truth that we must lay our principal stress (ibid., 76).

Indeed,

> The human fallibility of the Bible does not preclude the possibility of its divine inspiration nor of its unmatched moral and religious authority.... Although written by men with characteristic individual traits and typical human failings it may still have been written by men seized and impelled by the spirit of God (ibid., 75).

Sola Scriptura Rejected

Protestants have long held that the Bible is the only written and infallible authority for our faith. Roman Catholics added to this the teaching authority of the ***church;*** Protestant liberals like DeWolf mixed biblical authority with that of the ***culture.*** DeWolf held that "the authority of the Bible is not such as to be strengthened by isolation from all other authority." In fact,

> Throughout the history of Christendom, Christian scholars have organized total views of the world in which the sciences, philosophical inferences from the evidences of common human experience, and the teachings of the Bible have all been woven together in unity. (*CTLP*, 57.)

Harry Emerson Fosdick (1878–1969)

Popular American preacher Harry Emerson Fosdick promoted a more radical form of liberalism from his influential New York pulpit and in his many writings. Like his liberal predecessors and colleagues, Fosdick's foundational beliefs included antisupernaturalism, which was one of the two strong negative influences of his liberalism, both of which he acknowledged. The other was his evolutionism.

Antisupernatural Basis

Fosdick declared his disbelief in miracles:

> Multitudes of people, so far from being well-stabilized traditionalists, are all at sea in their religious thinking.... If ever they were drilled in older uses of the Bible they have rebelled against them. Get back to the nub of their difficulty and you find it in Biblical categories which they no longer believe—miracles, demons, fiat creation, apocalyptic hopes, eternal hell, or ethical conscience. (*GUB*, 5.)

Naturalistic Evolution

Like other liberals, Fosdick admitted the influence of evolutionism on his view of Scripture:

> As for the modern scene with its contemporary problems, the New Testament's

> idea of man faces immense difficulties in maintaining itself. [Thus] the vast enlargement of the physical cosmos, the evolutionary origin of man, materialistic theories which endeavor to explain him, brutality of social life involving low conceptions of him, the innumerable masses of men such that old cynicisms gain new force … tend in many minds to undo what the Hebrew-Christian development did (ibid., 97).

With fervent zeal, he confessed,

> On the one side we are paying for it in multitudes of churches waiting to be swamped by theological obscurantism, fanatical premillennialists, antievolutionary propaganda, or any other kind of reactionary movement in religious thinking against which no intellectual dikes ever have been raised by thoroughgoing consistent teaching as to what our new knowledge really means to religion.… On the other side we are paying for it in the loss of our more intelligent young people (ibid., 61).

It is no surprise that with this naturalistic grid, Fosdick's view of Scripture would be seriously skewed. Since he believed the Bible was not the words of an infallible God, it is understandable that he believed it to be errant.

The Bible Is Fallible and Errant

Fosdick claimed,

> Any idea of inspiration which implies equal value in the teachings of Scripture, or inerrancy in its statements, or conclusive infallibility in its ideas, is irreconcilable with such facts as this book presents. The inspirations of God fortunately have not been thus stereotyped and mechanical (ibid., xiv).

He added, "The utmost cruelty was not only allowed but commanded by Yahweh against Israel's rivals, and in the presence of habitual conflict fine ideals of humaneness had their chance to develop only within the circle of blood-brotherhood" (ibid., 100).

> The fact that one biblical book is later in time than another is in itself not the slightest indication that it is superior in quality—Nahum is on a much lower spiritual level than Amos, and the Book of Revelation in the New Testament is morally inferior to the writings of the Great Isaiah in the Old Testament.… [Furthermore,] there is no smooth and even ascent in the Book. There are,

> instead, long detours, recrudescence of primitivism, lost ethical gains, and lapses in spiritual insight. There are even vehement denials of nascent truth, and high visions that go neglected for centuries (ibid., xiii).

The Bible Contains Contradictions

What is more, Fosdick held that the Bible was full of errors. He summarized:

> For one thing, we are saved by it [biblical criticism] from the old and impossible attempt to harmonize the Bible with itself, to make it speak with unanimous voice, to resolve its conflicts and contradictions into a strained and artificial unity. [So,] how could one suppose that such internal harmony ever could be achieved between writings so vital and real, springing hot out of the life of the generations that gave them being, and extending in their composition over at least twelve hundred years? (ibid., 24–25).

He went on:

> No straightforward dealing with these and other similar facts can resolve their incompatibility into even the semblance of consistent narrative. Moreover, underlying such disharmonies is the still more substantial conflict, which we earlier noted, between two ideas of Jesus' resurrected body, one altogether fleshly, the other so spiritualized as to escape the trammels of a material organism (ibid., 294).

The Bible Has Scientific Errors

Following logically from his uncritical acceptance of naturalistic evolution, Fosdick concluded that there were scientific errors in the Bible:

> It all was made in six days, each with a morning and an evening, a short and measurable time before. This is the world-view of the Bible.… [Moreover,] it remained the world-view of the Christian church for a long time. Augustine, with uncompromising strictness, stated the authority of Scripture in matters such as this: "Scripture, which proves the truth of its historical statements by the accomplishment of its prophecies, gives no false information." [Therefore,] those early fathers have been severely handled because they thus clung to a world-view which might have been outgrown long before it was, had not their literalism barred the way. In this insistence upon an old cosmology, however, they were but children of their age (ibid., 47).

Fosdick derided Martin Luther for his prescientific view of Scripture, saying,

“Even Luther called Copernicus a fool for suggesting that the earth moved, and roundly capped his argument by calling to witness the Scripture which says that Joshua made the sun stand still and not the earth” (ibid., 50).

Negative Criticism of Scripture

Fosdick, like liberals before him, denied that Moses wrote the Pentateuch, adhering to the documentary hypothesis of Julius Wellhausen that there were at least four different authors: J, E, P, and D (see chapter 19). He wrote:

> This passage [Exodus 6:2–3] appears in the late Priestly document and all the more because of that the probabilities favor its truth. Without a solid basis in historic fact, such a delayed beginning of Yahweh’s worship would not have been invented by succeeding generations. (ibid., 1).

The Nature of Biblical Inspiration

It is understandable that, given his antisupernaturalism and evolutionism, Fosdick’s view of inspiration was severely truncated: “Our ideas of the method of inspiration have changed; verbal dictation, inerrant manuscripts, uniformity of doctrine between 1000 B.C. and A.D. 70—all such ideas have become incredible in the face of the facts” (ibid., 30–31).

Fosdick believed that the first results of critical research into the Bible seemed disruptive, tearing the once unified Book into many disparate and often contradictory documents. Even so, “The final result has turned out to be constructive, putting the Bible together again, not indeed on the old basis of a level, infallible inspiration, but on the factually demonstrable basis of a coherent development” (ibid., ix).

Immorality in the Old Testament

Fosdick commented,

> The Old Testament exhibits many attitudes indulged in by men and ascribed to God which represent early stages in a great development, and it is alike

> intellectually ruinous and morally debilitating to endeavor to harmonize those early ideals with the revelations of the great prophets and the Gospels. Rather, the method of Jesus is obviously applicable: “It was said to them of old time … but I say unto you” (ibid., 27).

The Bible’s Theology Is Revised

For Fosdick,

> It is impossible that a Book written two to three thousand years ago should be used in the twentieth century a.d. without having some of its forms of thought and speech translated into modern categories.... [When, therefore,] a man says, I believe in the immortality of the soul but not in the resurrection of the flesh; I believe in the victory of God on earth but not in the physical return of Jesus; I believe in the reality of sin and evil but not in the visitation of demons; [and] I believe in the nearness and friendship of the divine Spirit but I do not think of that experience in terms of individual angels; only superficial dogmatism can deny that man believes the Bible (ibid., 29).

According to Fosdick,

> The Book is not a good forest to cut timber in for theistic dogmatism. Not only are its ideas of God in constant process of change, but it is everywhere conscious of depth beyond depth in the divine nature, uncomprehended and incomprehensible (ibid., 53).

Having forsaken an infallible guide to truth in the orthodox view of Scripture, Fosdick offered several other tests for truth. Among these were the Spirit of Christ, human reason, and human experience.

The Spirit of Christ

Fosdick declared that the Spirit of Christ was his test for what was true in Scripture. He wrote, “So long as a man knows the whole road and judges every step of it by the spirit of Christ, who is its climax, he can use it all” (ibid., 30). It did not seem to occur to Fosdick that he could not be sure of the Spirit of Christ

apart from the authenticity of Scripture. Indeed, he seemed oblivious to the circularity of his reasoning, since without a reliable Scripture he could not know what the Spirit of Christ is. To take this Spirit from the Bible and then use it to reject the Bible is inconsistent. Furthermore, his special pleading, whereby he took only part of the Spirit of Christ and rejected other parts (such as Jesus' statements on hell), reveal that his criteria were really extrabiblical, not biblical.

Human Reason

Fosdick believed,

> The man who ministers ... must have an intelligible way of handling the Bible. He must have gone through the searching criticism to which the last few generations have subjected the Scriptures and be able to understand and enter into the negations that have resulted. Not blinking any of the facts, he must have come out with a positive, reasonable, fruitful attitude toward the Book. Only so can he be of service in resolving the doubts of multitudes of folk today (ibid., 5–6).

Human Experience

Fosdick confessed,

> The liberal emphasis rests upon experience; we regard that, rather than mental formulas, as the permanent continuum of the Gospel; we proclaim our freedom from bondage to the mental formulas of the past [and] often the total result is that our unformulated religious experience, refusing the discipline of older thinking and shirking the discipline of new thinking, lands in chaos. It is often much easier to discover what liberals do not think than to discover what they do think (ibid., 183).

A Fosdick Postscript

Fosdick had some serious second thoughts about his view of Scripture. Here is what he wrote a generation later:

> Today, however, looking back over forty years of ministry, I see an outstanding difference between then and now with regard to what is standard and who must do the adjusting. What man in his senses can now call our modern civilization standard? ... It is not Christ's message that needs to be

> accommodated to this mad scene; it is this mad scene into which our civilization has collapsed that needs to be judged and saved by Christ's message.

And,

> This is the most significant change distinguishing the beginning of my ministry from now. Then we were trying to accommodate Christ to our scientific civilization; now we face the desperate need of accommodating our scientific civilization to Christ. (*GTBA*, 201–02.)

THE NEOCLASSICAL LIBERAL VIEW OF SCRIPTURE

Like other forms of liberalism, there is a wide range in the neoclassical forms. What most of them share in common, however, is a neoclassical view of God, namely, process theology (panentheism, see chapter 2). In seeking to understand this view, we will examine the beliefs of Schubert Ogden.

Schubert Ogden (1928–)

Working out of the background of Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947), Schubert Ogden represents the way many new liberal thinkers consider Scripture. As a process theologian, Ogden does not believe God is infinite, all-powerful, or all-knowing. Nor does he believe the Bible contains infallible predictions about the future. Another process theologian, Lewis Ford, observes,

> Divine providence cannot be understood as the unfolding of a predetermined course of events. Prophecy is not prediction, but the proclamation of divine intent, dependent for its realization upon the continued presence of those conditions which called forth that intent and upon the emergence of the means whereby that intent may be realized. [Thus] *God becomes the great improvisor and opportunist* seeking at every turn to elicit his purpose from every situation: if not by the hand of Sennacherib, then by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. ("BRPP" in *I*, 206, emphasis added.)

“Revelation,” then, is not supernatural but only a divine “lure,” an attempt to persuade humankind. Indeed, as Ogden wrote, “What Christian revelation reveals to man is nothing new, since such truths as it makes explicit must already be known to him implicitly in every moment of existence” (“OR” in ***OCHC***). Not only does God not inform man in advance what will occur, God must be informed Himself. As John Rice frankly admits, “***God, as it were, has to wait with bated breath until the decision is made***, not simply to find out what the decision was, but perhaps even to have the situation clarified by virtue of the decision of that concrete occasion” (***OGBTB***, 49, emphasis added). So for neoliberals in the process tradition, like Schubert Ogden, the Bible has neither divine authority nor infallible predictions. It is a human document with only instrumental authority to bring about man’s salvation.

Nature of Scripture

Ogden rejects the view that “what the Bible says, God says.” He writes,

> In Protestant orthodoxy, then, the developed doctrine of the verbal inspiration of the canonical writings entailed the assertion of their uniform authority, and thus made it possible to claim without qualification that “what Scripture says, God says.” But, with the emergence of Protestant liberal theology and its commitment to the historical-critical method, as well as its insistence that Scripture neither is nor can be a sufficient authorization for the meaning and truth of theological assertions, this claim was abandoned, never again to be made by those who have led in the subsequent important developments in Protestant theology. (“AST.”)

Negative Criticism

Given his acceptance of negative higher criticism, it is not surprising to hear Ogden claim that “none of the New Testament writings, in its present form, was authored by an apostle or one of his disciples” (ibid., 251). Ogden believes the norm for the church is not the New Testament but, rather, the apostolic witness: “This witness is, of course, found in the New Testament, but it is not identical with the New Testament. In the strict sense only the apostolic testimony to Jesus as the Divine revelation can be described as canonical.” In rejecting the divine

authority of Scripture, Ogden claims,

> We today must indeed recognize a higher theological authority than the canon of Scripture, and hence can no longer maintain that Scripture is in some sense the sole primary authority for Christian theology. [Thus] the theological authority of Scripture, great as it may be, is nevertheless a limited authority, in that it could conceivably be greater than it is—namely, as great as that of the apostolic witness by which itself is and is to be authorized (ibid., 251–52).

For Ogden, the Bible has only a functional but not an essential authority (ibid., 246); it is an authority insofar as it brings Christ to us. The Bible is "perfect" only "with respect to the end of man's salvation, and so to witnessing to all that is necessary to the attainment of that end" (ibid., 245).

Ogden's liberal theology is dependent on negative higher criticism. Thus he believes that " 'the historic, apostolic Christ,' just like 'the historic biblical Christ,' is every bit as historical as the so-called 'historical Jesus,' and to this extent there is no escaping the dependence of theology on the work of the historians." In fact, Ogden insists that "historical-critical inquiry is theologically necessary and legitimate" (ibid., 256).

In his claim that the locus of the canon "cannot be the writings of the New Testament as such but can only be the earliest traditions of Christian witness accessible to us today by historical-critical analysis of those writings," Ogden rejects the New Testament as the canon. Rather, he believes that "the canon of the church, and hence also the highest authority for theology, must now be located in what form critics generally speak of as the earliest layer of the Synoptic tradition, or what Marxism in particular refers to as 'the Jesus-kerygma' " (ibid., 258).

AN EVALUATION OF LIBERAL VIEWS OF SCRIPTURE

For the sake of this evaluation, focus will generally be placed on the common elements in the various liberal views, and in an attempt to avoid reduplication, only brief reference will be made to points that are treated more fully elsewhere.

Some Positive Aspects of the Liberal Views

Liberal theologians have many positive things to offer in the search for a comprehensive and adequate view of Scripture. Indeed, without their extensive critique it is doubtful that evangelical scholars would have developed a full-orbed view of inspiration.

The Emphasis on the Human Element of Scripture

Some evangelicals and many fundamentalists, particularly those on the more conservative end of the spectrum, tend to downplay and at times even diminish the human side of Scripture (see chapter 15). However, the Bible is a 100 percent human book, as well as being a totally divine work. Liberals, then, do us the service of stressing the human dimension of Scripture, for like Christ, the Living Word of God, the Bible is theanthropic; both are fully human and fully divine, and to diminish the human nature of either is a serious error.

The Focus on Matters of Higher Criticism

Contrary to the belief of some extreme conservatives, biblical higher criticism is not a misdirected and essentially anti-Christian pursuit. Indeed, almost all conservative scholars engage in higher criticism; anyone who asks who wrote Genesis or Job or Esther or how they were written and under what circumstances and with what purpose, is engaging in a form of higher criticism. Likewise, so-called “lower” or textual criticism, which seeks to establish, by a study of the manuscripts, the content of the original text, is not an inherent enemy of the evangelical, and liberal scholars have long taken a leading role in both forms of biblical criticism.

An Understanding of the Need for Philosophy

The liberal emphasis on the understanding and use of philosophy for a proper understanding of inspiration is also a helpful element. Many evangelicals fail to see that the basic issues behind biblical studies are of a philosophical nature, and

without a proper understanding of philosophy, these issues cannot be resolved. Indeed, liberals correctly understand, as many evangelicals often do not, that one's philosophy will determine his bibliology. This too is a beneficial emphasis provided by a liberal approach to Scripture.

The Emphasis on the Need for Biblical Scholarship

All too often, and even more so in the past two generations, liberals have been in the forefront of biblical scholarship. Given evangelicalism's high view of Scripture, it seems ironic that we have failed to be leaders in this field. Liberals are to be commended for demonstrating in practice what so often evangelicals have only confessed in principle, namely, a high view of Scripture that warrants dedicating one's life to the pursuit of a better understanding of the biblical languages and text.

Some Negative Aspects of the Liberal Views

Of course, it does not follow from this that liberals have the correct understanding of the origin and nature of Scripture. Ironically, what it does demonstrate is that both liberals and evangelicals have been inconsistent with their own beliefs about Scripture. For example, why should liberals, who do not believe that the original language of the original text of Scripture is the verbally inspired Word of God, pursue with such dedication and scholarship a knowledge of the language and original text when they do not believe it expresses the very Word of God? And again, on the other hand, why have evangelicals, who do believe this, often lag behind in these disciplines?

Liberalism's Belief Is Contrary to the Claim of the Bible

Whatever else may be said in favor of a liberal view of Scripture, any fair and objective reading of the text reveals that this is not the Bible's view of itself. As has been demonstrated earlier (see chapters 13–16), the Bible claims that the very words of Scripture (cf. 2 Sam. 23:2; 2 Tim. 3:16) comprise the unbreakable

(John 10:35), indestructible (Matt. 5:17–18), ultimately authoritative (Matt. 15:1–6), and absolutely true Word of God (John 17:17; cf. Heb. 6:18).

It Is Contrary to the Claim of Christ

Since liberal Christian scholars claim to be followers of Christ, it is inconsistent on their part to reject what Christ taught about the Bible. Since there is strong evidence, better than that for other books from antiquity, that the New Testament documents are historically reliable (see chapters 4 and 26), a careful examination of the Gospels reveals that Jesus taught that the Bible is the divinely inspired and authoritative Word of God (see chapters 13 and 27). But how can liberals be followers of the teachings of Jesus if they deny one of the essential teachings of Jesus, namely, that the Bible is God's Word?

It Is Contrary to the Historical Claim of the Church

What is more, the liberal view, of whatever stripe, is contrary to the historical confession of the Christian church. As was demonstrated earlier (see chapters 17–18), virtually every Father and major teacher in the Christian church from the time of the apostles to the present affirmed that the Bible is the divinely inspired, supremely authoritative, written Word of God. Once again, Augustine summed up the first four hundred years well when he wrote,

> I have learned to yield this respect and honour only to the canonical books of Scripture: of these alone do I most firmly believe that the authors were completely free from error.... If we are perplexed by any apparent contradiction in Scripture, it is not allowable to say, the author of this book is mistaken: but either the manuscript is faulty, or the translation is wrong, or you have misunderstood. (*AF*, 11.5.)

Later Thomas Aquinas summed up the first twelve hundred years of church history in these words: "The author of Holy Scripture is God" (***ST***, 1a. 1, 10), for "Holy Scripture looks at things in that they are divinely revealed" (ibid., 1a. 1, 3). So it is "in Holy Scripture, through which the divine will is declared to us" (ibid., 3a. 1, 3). Aquinas speaks of "Divinely inspired Scripture" (ibid., 1a. 1, 1), and after insisting that the biblical writers "so firmly asserted the truth that they left nothing to be doubted" and that anyone who rejects it should be "anathema,"

he added, “The reason for this is that ***only the canonical Scriptures are normative for faith***” (***CJ***, 21.6, emphasis added).
Martin Luther then summarized the view in the time of the Reformation in these emphatic declarations: “The Scriptures, although they too are written by men, are neither of men nor from men but from God” (***LW***, 35:153). As we have seen, speaking of his opponents, Luther said,

> They do not believe they are God’s words. *For if they believed they were God’s words they would not call them poor, miserable words but would regard such words and titles as greater than the whole world and would fear and tremble before them as before God himself. For whoever despises a single word of God does not regard any as important.* (Reu, *LS*, 32, italics original.)

Luther added, “I have learned to ascribe this honor only to books which are termed canonical, so that I confidently believe that not one of their authors erred” (ibid., 17). Recall too the following citation:

> My friend, God’s Word is God’s Word; this point does not require much haggling! When one blasphemously gives the lie to God in a single word, or says it is a minor matter if God is blasphemed or called a liar, one blasphemes the entire God and makes light of all blasphemy. Therefore it is true absolutely and without exception, *that everything is believed or nothing is believed.* The Holy Ghost does not suffer Himself to be separated or divided so that He should teach and cause to be believed one doctrine rightly and another falsely. (*LW*, 37:26, 33, italics original.)

In point of fact, right up to the time of Darwin (c. 1860) there was virtually no significant deviation on the absolute divine authority of Scripture (see H. D. McDonald, ***TRHS***). Not until the rise of modern liberalism, with its rejection of miracles, was there a serious challenge inside the church for its nearly nineteen hundred years to the historical orthodox view on the divine inspiration of Scripture. Whatever else can be said for it, one thing is certain: The liberal view of Scripture is contrary to almost two millennia of confession by the Christian church.

It Is Based on a Wrong View of God

At the basis of the rejection of the divine inspiration of Holy Writ is a faulty view of God. Not until the influence of pantheism, deism, finite godism, and

even agnosticism and atheism (see chapters 2, and 19) on the Christian church was there any significant deviation on its view of the nature of Scripture.[2] Logic demands that one's view of the ***Word*** of God can be no greater than his view of the ***God*** of this Word. Thus, it should come as no great surprise that naturalistic views of God, such as Spinoza's pantheism or Kant's deism or Mill's finite godism, would seriously undermine the orthodox view of Scripture, for if there is no God who can or does perform miracles, then the Bible's claim to authenticity must be seriously challenged, since it is filled with miracles. In point of fact, this is exactly how the denial of the historical orthodox view of Scripture came about.

Hence, it was the rejection of classical theism that led to the demise of the classical view of Scripture, but, as was demonstrated earlier (see chapter 2), there are solid reasons supporting classical theism that in turn argue for the traditional view of Scripture.

It Is Based on an Unjustified Antisupernaturalism

Furthermore, liberalism is grounded in antisupernaturalism, both logically and historically. If a theistic God exists, then miracles are possible (see chapter 3), for if there is a God who can perform special (i.e., supernatural) natural) acts, such as creating the universe from nothing, then there can be special (supernatural) acts of God, and, if there can be supernatural acts, then the Gospel records cannot be summarily dismissed as inauthentic. But this is precisely what has occurred, for in the wake of David Hume's antisupernaturalism, there appeared the first desupernaturalized ***Life of Jesus*** (by David Strauss, 1835–1836), and from this to Rudolph Bultmann's demythologized New Testament (see ***KM***), and then on to the "Jesus Seminar."[3] The history of liberalism reveals a continual rejection of the authenticity of the Gospel records based on an antisupernatural bias.

However, since it has been demonstrated that there are no valid philosophical grounds for ruling out miracles (see chapter 3), it follows that there are thereby no valid grounds for the antisupernaturalistic liberal view that denies the authenticity of the New Testament. Indeed, to the contrary, the historicity of the New Testament has been firmly established by both external and internal evidence (see chapter 26). Thus the liberal view of Scripture crumbles with the

failure of antisupernaturalism.

It Is Inconsistent With Its Own Assumption

Finally, the classical liberal view of Scripture is circular, for it uses the Bible as an authentic basis for determining what the Spirit of Jesus is and then in turn uses the Spirit of Jesus to attack the authenticity of large parts of the Bible. Nor does the attempt to avoid this succeed when it argues that the parts of the Gospels that contain miracles are to be rejected and the nonmiraculous narrations accepted. Jesus' strongest statements about Scripture are found in the nonmiraculous narrations (cf. Matt. 5:17–18; John 10:35), and to accept or reject parts of the Gospels on other grounds turns out to be arbitrary. Indeed, it is the case that one's view of what is authentic and what is not in the record becomes the ground for accepting or rejecting what is authentic and what is not.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Since liberal theologians differ in their view of God, ranging from modified theism through deism, finite godism, and into process theology, their views of Scripture cover a large spectrum as well. Nonetheless, they have many things in common. First and foremost is their rejection of the orthodox Christian view of Scripture, which entails a consistent antisupernaturalism, along with its concomitant acceptance of negative higher criticism.

Classical liberalism accepted partial inspiration of the Scriptures so that the Bible did at least ***contain*** the Word of God here and there amid the many errors; hence, their theories of inspiration ranged from partial inspiration through divine illuminationism to mere human intuitionism. The neoclassical liberals, of course, with their process view of God, have a totally naturalistic view of Him. Thus, "inspiration" is allegedly no more than a natural resonance between the fallible human writers of Scripture and a finite process God who is trying to lure the writers into His process of self-perfection.

Whereas there are some positive features to the liberal approach to Scripture, such as the recognition of the Bible's humanness and the need for biblical scholarship, nonetheless, there are serious flaws in the liberal denial of the supernatural source, absolute authority, and complete historical reliability of the

New Testament.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

NEO-ORTHODOXY ON THE BIBLE

The neo-orthodox view of Scripture arises out of a reaction to dead orthodoxy (as in the reaction of Søren Kierkegaard—the grandfather of the movement) as well as out of a reaction to dead liberalism (as in the reaction of Karl Barth—the father of the movement). In Kierkegaard's case, he himself held an orthodox view of Scripture theologically, but axiologically he set the stage for its later denial by shifting the emphasis from doctrine to existential experience—something he did in attempting to counter the lifeless rigidity of the Scandinavian Lutheran Church.

In Barth's case, he was awakened from his liberal dogmatic slumber by the reality of the bankruptcy of optimistic liberalism in the face of the evil of World War I. Barth turned to the Bible (especially the book of Romans), to Martin Luther, and to Søren Kierkegaard, who helped him to take a step away from liberalism and toward orthodoxy.

THE FORERUNNER OF NEO-ORTHODOXY: SØREN KIERKEGAARD

Kierkegaard's Theological Orthodoxy

Søren Kierkegaard, a Danish literary figure and iconoclast[1] theologian, attempted to prod the Danish church back into a personal experience with Christ. Kierkegaard personally held to all the great fundamentals of the faith, including the Trinity, Christ's deity, the Virgin Birth, the Atonement, Christ's bodily resurrection, and the inspiration of the Bible. He wrote, "On the whole, the doctrine as it is taught [in the church] is entirely sound. Consequently that is not what I am contending for. My contention is that something should be done with it." (***SKJP***, 6:362.)

Kierkegaard's Axiological Unorthodoxy

Axiology is the study of values, and Kierkegaard succeeded in shifting the discussion from doctrine (which orthodoxy stressed) to values (which neo-orthodoxy would stress). Kierkegaard insisted that the confession of these orthodox beliefs was insufficient to save anyone; rather, he contended, these beliefs needed an existential encounter with the living Christ. This could be done by a "leap of faith" in order to move out of the lower aesthetic and ethical stages of life into personal relationship with Jesus. In his own words, Kierkegaard said,

> I am and was a religious author, that the whole of my work as an author is related to Christianity, to the problem "of becoming a Christian," with a direct or indirect polemic against the illusion that in such a land as ours all are Christians of a sort (*PVMWA*, 5–6).

In ***Fear and Trembling*** Kierkegaard reveals how the ethical transcends the religious. Abraham (Gen. 22), a man devoted to God's law, which declares "Thou shalt not kill," was asked by God nonetheless to take his son Isaac and offer him as a sacrifice. Unable to explain his action to anyone else or justify it before any human court, Abraham suspended the ethical and made a "leap of faith" to the religious. In so doing he dethroned the ethical but did not destroy it. It was only ***temporarily*** suspended, not permanently discarded, in order to show the transcendent value of the religious (experiential) over the ethical (moral).

Truth As Subjectivity

Søren Kierkegaard believed that religious truth is personal, not impersonal; i.e., it is something we are, not something we have—we must live it and not just know it. It is something that grips us, not just something we grip. Spiritual truth cannot be merely acknowledged; it must be appropriated; it is not correspondence but commitment. While there is objective truth (e.g., in science and history), according to Kierkegaard it is largely irrelevant to religious truth, which is found in a ***subjective*** encounter with God by the will, not by an ***objective*** understanding with the mind.

Kierkegaard's View of Faith and Reason

In his ***Philosophical Fragments*** Kierkegaard sets forth his view of the relation between faith and reason, the theme of which is an attack on man-centered philosophy at its best. He believed that, left to himself, man views the Christian God as a perplexing Unknown. This exercised a considerable influence on Karl Barth: If communication is to occur, God must initiate it. Two questions are raised:

(1) Is it possible to base eternal happiness on historical knowledge?
(2) How can the transcendent God communicate to us?

The Contrast of Revelation and Reason

The difference between God's revelation and human reason is illustrated by contrasting Socrates and Christ. Socrates' wisdom was a backward recollection, whereas Christ's was a forward expectation. The former aroused truth from

within, but the latter gives truth from without. For Socrates truth was immanent, whereas for Christ truth is transcendent. According to the former truth is rational, but for the latter truth is paradoxical. Finally, in Socrates, truth comes from the wise man, whereas in Christ truth comes from the God-Man.
Christian truths are neither self-evident nor known from experience, because even if they are factually correct, such statements lack the certainty Christian claims have—they are paradoxical and can be accepted only by a leap of faith. There is a real transcendent God whom men gain only by choosing Him in His self-revelation; this God is meaningful and real, but also paradoxical. He is the Unknown limit to knowing who magnetically draws reason and causes passionate collision with man in the paradox.
Reason cannot penetrate God, nor can it avoid Him; the very zeal of the positivists[2] to eliminate God shows their preoccupation with Him. The supreme paradox of all thought is its attempt to discover something that thought cannot think. Herein thought attempts to commit suicide, that is, to run out of thinking. Kierkegaard adds in ***Concluding Unscientific Postscripts*** that objective reason can never find real truth. Proofs can neither establish nor overthrow Christianity. To try to prove God is a shameless insult of ignoring Him, and to reduce Him to an objective probability would threaten Christianity, making it a treasure one could carelessly possess, like money in the bank.
Faith in religious facts, like the Incarnation or the Bible, is not true faith. True faith is the gift of God and is not something attainable by human effort. The Incarnation and the Bible are objective points of reference; however, they are not reasons, for they are unconvincing. True faith is a "leap" to God's revelations, but it does not rest on objectively rational or empirical evidence.[3] Reason, however, does have a negative role by helping us distinguish nonsense from paradox. Kierkegaard wrote of the Christian, "Nonsense therefore he cannot believe against the understanding, for precisely the understanding will discern that it is nonsense and will prevent him from believing it" (***PF***, 504).

Kierkegaard's Orthodox View of the Bible

Kierkegaard believed the Bible was the inspired word of God. He wrote,

> To be alone with the Holy Scriptures! I dare not! When I turn up a passage in it, whatever comes to hand—it catches me instantly, it questions me (indeed it is as if it were God Himself that questioned me), "Hast thou done what thou readest there?"

He added, "My hearer, how highly dost thou esteem ***God's Word?***" (***SE***, 51). He also believed the canon was closed and that God was not giving additional revelation today, severely criticizing someone who claimed he had received a new revelation.

Kierkegaard's Unorthodox View on the Historicity of the Bible

Nevertheless, Kierkegaard did not believe it was either necessary or important to defend the complete historicity or inerrancy of Scripture. This is evident from what he said about the relation of the eternal and temporal, as well as his comments about biblical criticism. According to Kierkegaard, the problem is, how can eternal salvation depend on historical (and thereby uncertain) documents? How can the historical give nonhistorical knowledge of God?
His answer is that insofar as the Bible gives empirical data it is an insufficient ground for religious belief. Only Spirit-inspired faith finds the eternal God in the temporal Christ. The biblical writers are not primarily certifying the historicity of Christ's deity but the deity of Christ in history; hence, biblical criticism is irrelevant. The important thing is not the historicity of Christ but His contemporaneity as a person who confronts men today by faith in the offense of the Gospel. The Jesus of history is a necessary presupposition, but history does not prove His messiahship. The only proof of His messiahship is our discipleship; the "proof" is not empirical but spiritual.
Faith is ***centered*** in an historical event but it is not ***based*** on it. No superficial contemporaneity can occasion faith; only spiritual contemporaneity can:

> If the contemporary generation had left nothing behind them but these words: "We have believed that in such and such a year God appeared among us in the humble form of a servant, that he lived and taught in our community, and finally died," it would be more than enough (ibid., 130).

So, then, time is immaterial to faith. Non-eyewitnesses are at no disadvantage; there is no secondhand discipleship. Further, contemporaneity is not to be confused with like-mindedness through the centuries. Admiration of Jesus is not religious but aesthetic; allegiance is necessary.

Biblical Criticism Is Irrelevant to True Christianity

In a very clear passage, Kierkegaard addresses both the defender and critic of the Bible:

> Whoever defends the Bible in the interest of faith must have made it clear to himself whether, if he succeeds beyond expectations, there could from all his labor ensure anything at all with respect to faith.... [Likewise,] whoever attacks the Bible must also have sought a clear understanding of whether, if the attack succeeds beyond all measure, anything else would follow than the philological result.[4]

Thus, once again, even if we assume,

> [The defenders] have succeeded in proving about the Bible everything that any learned theologian in his happiest moment has ever wished to prove about the Bible, these books and no others belong in the canon; they are authentic; they are integral; their authors are trustworthy—one may well say that it is as if every letter were inspired.

So, asks Kierkegaard,

> Has anyone who previously did not have faith been brought a single step nearer to its acquisition? No, not a single step. Faith does not result simply from a scientific inquiry; it does not come directly at all. On the contrary, in this objectivity one tends to lose that infinite personal interestedness in passion, which is the condition of faith. (*CUP*, 29–30.)

Then, as we have seen, he theoretically assumes the opposite:

> If the opponents have succeeded in proving what they desire about the Scriptures, with a certainty transcending the most ardent wish of the most passionate hostility—what then? Have the opponents thereby abolished Christianity? By no means. Has the believer been harmed? By no means, not in the least, [for] if he had assumed it by virtue of any proof, he would have been on the verge of giving us his faith.

Indeed, Kierkegaard asks, "For whose sake is it that the proof is sought? Faith does not need it; aye, it must even regard the proof as its enemy" (ibid., 31).

KARL BARTH: THE FATHER OF NEO-ORTHODOXY

Karl Barth was aroused from his liberal beliefs in the perfectibility of man by a strong dose of reality called the First World War. Though he had taught that the world was getting better, it was clearly getting worse. As he turned to the Bible, the Reformers, and Søren Kierkegaard, Barth moved from liberalism in the direction of orthodoxy, embracing Trinitarianism, the Virgin Birth, and Christ's deity and bodily resurrection. Unfortunately, however, he did not return to an orthodox view of Scripture, and he adopted an unorthodox view of salvation called universalism (see volume 3).

While orthodoxy proclaims that the Bible ***is*** the Word of God, and liberalism that at best the Bible merely ***contains*** the Word of God, neo-orthodoxy insists that the Bible is a fallible human witness to the Word of God (Christ) that only ***becomes*** the Word of God to us in an existential encounter with the Christ it conveys.

The Origin of Scripture

For Barth, God is the source of the Bible:

> Certainly it is not our faith that makes the Bible the Word of God.... That the Bible is the Word of God is not left to accident or to the course of history and to our self-will, but to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. (*CD*, 1:534.)

Even so, the Bible is not identical to the Word of God, for "the statement that the Bible is the Word of God cannot therefore say that the Word of God is tied to the Bible. On the contrary, what it must say is that the Bible is tied to the Word of God" (ibid., 1:513). The Bible merely conveys the Word of God: "It 'holdeth God's word,' is what Luther once said about the Bible.… It only 'holds,' encloses, limits and surrounds it: that is the indirectness of the identity of revelation and the Bible" (ibid., 1:492).

The Threefold Word of God

Barth said there are three levels to the Word of God. The first and primary level is Christ, the Living Word of God:[5]

> This is primarily because apart from Jesus Christ Himself there is still this other form of the Word of God, which Scripture needs to be the Word of God, just as it needs Scripture. Preaching and the sacrament of the Church do indeed need the basis and authority and authenticity of the original Word of God in Scripture to be the Word of God (ibid., 1:501).

The Purpose of the Bible

The Bible is not a revelation of God as such but merely the instrument through which God reveals His Word. "[The human words] are the instruments by which [the Bible] aims at becoming a Word which is apprehended by men and therefore a Word which justifies and sanctifies men, by which it aims at executing upon men the grace of God which is its content" (ibid., 1:223).

The Bible Is a Record of Revelation

The Bible is not itself a revelation from God; it is merely a record of God's

revelation in Christ:

> In every age, therefore, the Evangelical decision will have to be a decision for Holy Scripture as such. As such, of course, it is only a sign. Indeed, it is the sign of a sign, i.e., of the prophetic-apostolic witness of revelation as the primary sign of Jesus Christ (ibid., 1:583).

God does not reveal Himself in words but in events:

> Among the signs of the objective reality of revelation we have to understand certain definite events and relations and orders within the world in which revelation is an objective reality, and therefore within the world which is also our world, the world of our nature and history.... [Hence,] to say "the Word of God" is to say the work of God. It is not to contemplate a state or fact but to watch an event, and an event which is relevant to us, an event which is an act of God, an act of God which rests on a free decision (ibid., 1:223, 1:527).

A Witness to the Word of God

The Bible is a human witness to God's revelation in Christ.

> "What stands there," in the pages of the Bible, is the witness to the Word of God, the Word of God in this testimony of the Bible. Just how far it stands there, however, is a fact that demands unceasing discovery, interpretation, and recognition. (*ET*, 36.)

Barth insisted,

> In contrast to all kinds of similar literature these communities approved the canon as the original and faithful document of what the witnesses of the resurrection saw, heard, and proclaimed. They were the first to acknowledge this collection as genuine and authoritative testimony to the one Word of God, at the same time taking over, with a remarkable naturalness and ease, the Old Testament canon from the synagogue (ibid., 30).

The Bible Is Fallible and Errant

Barth believed that “there are obvious overlappings and contradictions—e.g., between the Law and the prophets, between John and the Synoptists, between Paul and James” (***CD***, 1:2.509). What is more, there are alleged cultural accommodations in the Scriptures: “Each [biblical author] in his own way and degree, they [sic] shared the culture of their age and environment.” Instead of talking about the “errors” of the biblical authors in this sphere, if we want to go to the heart of things it is better to speak only about their “capacity for errors,” for “in the last resort even in relation to the general view of the world and man the insight and knowledge of our age can be neither divine nor even Solomonic” (ibid., 1:2.508–9).
Scientifically, Barth held the Bible to be fallible:

> The post-Biblical theologian may, no doubt, possess a better astronomy, geography, zoology, psychology, physiology, and so on than these biblical witnesses possessed; but as for the Word of God, he is not justified in comporting himself in relationship to those witnesses as though he knew more about the Word than they. (*ET*, 31.)

Thus,

> [Higher criticism] migrates from the Old Testament to the New and returns again, from the Yahwist to the priestly codex, from the psalms of David to the proverbs of Solomon, from the Gospel of John to the synoptic gospels, from the Letter to the Galatians to the so-called “straw” epistle of James, and so on continually. Within all of these writings the pilgrimage leads from one level of tradition to another, taking into account every stage of tradition that may be present or surmised.
>
> The prophets and apostles as such … were real, historical men as we are, and therefore sinful in their action, and capable and actually guilty of error in their spoken and written word.… But the vulnerability of the Bible, i.e., its capacity for error, also extends to its religious or theological content. (*CD*, 1:2.529, 1:509.)

EMIL BRUNNER

Emil Brunner (1889–1966), another neo-orthodox theologian, was less conservative but clearer than Barth. Unlike Barth, Brunner gave more validity to

human reason, but like Barth he too rejected the historical orthodox doctrine of the divine inspiration of Scripture.
For Brunner the Bible is not the Word of God but the words of men about God; revelation is not found in alleged words from God but in acts of God for men.

The Bible Is Not the Word of God

According to Brunner, “There is a certain danger in this assumption that the ‘Word of God’ can be equated with Holy Scripture.” This view, allegedly, arose from a twofold misunderstanding: first, from an academic view of the nature of revelation, and second, from a Judaistic understanding of the Bible.

> The Bible itself does not give any occasion for this misunderstanding; by “revelation” it does not mean a supernaturally revealed doctrine; nor does it equate “revelation” either with a collection of books or with one particular Book; in the Bible “revelation” means God’s mighty acts for man’s salvation. (*RR*, 118.)

Thus,

> The content of Scripture is true, not because as a whole it is to be regarded as God’s word, but because and to the extent that God meets me there and speaks: He attests Himself to me as present and “decides me”: that is why we call Scripture the Word of God. (*WGMM*, 32.)

The Bible Is the Word of Man

The Bible is intrinsically human: “The word of Scripture is not in itself the word of God but of man, just as the historical appearance of the God-man is in itself that of a man” (ibid.). Nonetheless, the Bible has divine authority as an instrument God uses to convey His Word to us.
The nature of Scripture as a divine authority is instrumental—it is the means by which God brings His Word (Christ) to us. As such, the Bible has no formal

authority, only an instrumental one:

> Scripture is not a formal authority which demands belief in all it contains from the outset, but it is an instrumental authority, in so far as it contains that element before which I must bow in the truth, which also itself awakens in men the certainty of truth.... This is what Luther means by the "Word of God," which therefore is not identical with the Word of Scripture, although it is only given to me through the Scriptures, and as the Word of the Scriptures.... [Therefore,] the content and the real authority of Scripture is Christ. (*CDG*, 110.)

The Bible Has Only a Derived Material Authority

From Brunner's perspective, the authority of the Bible is not formal but material; it is not intrinsic but derived.

> As in the case of the Reformers, we must express our first principle thus: the Scriptures have the authority of a norm, and the basis for this principle is this: the Scriptures possess this authority because they are the primary witness to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ (ibid., 45).

Therefore,

> We believe in Christ, not because Scripture, or the Apostles, teach us about Him in such and such a way, but we believe in the Scriptures because, and in so far as they teach Christ. The authority of Scripture is not formal but material: Christ [is] the revelation (ibid., 110).

The Bible Is a Subjective Authority

There is no objective divine authority in the text of Scripture; it ***becomes*** the Word of God in the hearts of believers: "The word in Scripture, Christ, becomes the same as the word in the heart, the Holy Spirit." (***GM***, 28.)

> Faith in Jesus Christ is not based upon a previous faith in the Bible, but it is based solely upon the witness of the Holy Spirit; this witness, [however,] does not come to

us save through the witness of the Apostles—that apostolic testimony to which our relation is one of freedom, and, although it is true, it is fundamental for us, it is in no way dogmatically binding, in the sense of the theory of Verbal Inspiration (*CDG*, 34).

The Bible Is Fallible and Errant

Brunner believed,

> The orthodox view of the Bible … is an absolutely hopeless state of affairs.… God's revelation cannot be measured by the yardstick of theological doctrine. It has pleased God to make use of childlike and primitive ideas as an expression of His will. (*RR*, 291.)

Supposedly, contradictions are found in Scripture, even in the teachings of the apostles.

> At some points the variety of the Apostolic doctrine … is an irreconcilable contradiction. In spite of this, even the Epistle of James contributes something to our knowledge of Christ that we should not gain from Paul alone, and which acts as a corrective (ibid., 290).

Indeed,

> Literary criticism of the Bible brought to light the thousands of contradictions and human characteristics with which the Old and New Testaments abound. In this way the authority of the Bible was completely overthrown. (*GM*, 36.)

Brunner believed that there are also scientific inaccuracies in the Bible: "This truth is that the Holy Scriptures contain no divine oracles about all kinds of possible cosmological facts" (***RR***, 280). In fact,

> In so far as the Bible speaks about subjects of secular knowledge, it has no teaching authority. Neither its astronomical, cosmological picture of the world, nor its geographical view, nor its zoological, ethnographical or historical statements are binding upon us, whether they are in the Old Testament or in the New. Here, rather, free course should be given to rational scientific criticism. (*CDG*, 48.)

Brunner noted the similarity between his view and that of Karl Barth, saying,

> Fundamentally, Karl Barth's *Dogmatik* takes the same position: "The Bible is not a book of sacred oracles; it is not an organ of direct communication. It is real witness" (1, 2, 562). He says that we could not expect that the Apostles and Prophets, in addition to their encounter with the divine revelation, "should also have had imparted to them a compendium of … divine Wisdom concerning everything in the universe" (ibid., 113).

The Bible Is Only a Human Record of Revelation

According to Brunner, the Bible itself is not a revelation from God but only a human fallible record of divine revelation. He chides the historical view of Scripture:

> Orthodoxy, which understands revelation as revealed doctrine, finds it very easy to establish correct doctrine. All one has to do is to formulate the revealed doctrine—in a formal sense—for purposes of instruction, in a systematic or catechetical form. The doctrine is already there, in the revelation. We find it impossible to take this enviable short-cut; but we are also aware at what a price this short-cut was purchased, what terrible consequences sprang from it, and indeed, that these consequences are still bearing their own fruit (ibid., 28).

Further, "There is no such thing as revelation-in-itself, because revelation consists always of the fact that something is revealed to me. Revelation is … an act of God, an event involving two parties; it is a personal address" (***WGMM***, 32). More precisely, revelation is a Person.

> Between us and the Old Testament, however, there stands a new form of revelation, the fulfillment of all that was only promised in the Old Testament, and the actual content of the divine revelation proclaimed by the Apostles and the Church: Jesus Christ Himself.

Thus, this "revelation" is not a "Word" but a Person—a human life fully visible within history, a human destiny so like, and so unlike, every other: Jesus of

Nazareth (***CDG***, 23).

Truth Is Not Impersonal but Personal

> [Jesus said:] 'Therefore I am the Truth." This is not an impersonal, objective "it" truth, but a "Thou" truth. In this Event of revelation, in the Person of Christ the divine Thou addresses me, in love. God imparts Himself to me in the life of Him who alone was able to say [this]. (*RR*, 370.)

Truth, so the theory goes, is not found in an "it" but in an "I." Following the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber (1878–1965), Brunner believed that true revelation is found in an "I/Thou" experience with God, not in an "I/it" experience with a book. He even referred to the orthodox Protestant view of Scripture as belief in a "paper pope." Like Søren Kierkegaard, religious truth for Brunner was not objective but subjective.

There Is No Verbal Revelation

Further, verbal inspiration must be rejected, for "as a matter of fact … this doctrine of revelation [verbal inspiration] proved to be the death of faith, and the dogma of inspiration the very point on which orthodoxy quickly and finally came to an end" (***WGMM***, 36).

> The doctrine of the verbal inspiration of Holy Scripture … cannot be regarded as an adequate formulation of the authority of the Bible. It is a product of … late Judaism, not of Christianity. The Apostolic writings never claim for themselves a verbal inspiration of this kind, with the infallibility that it implies. (*RR*, 127–28.)

Brunner believed it was fatal to regard the Bible as true. He wrote:

> Once the fatal step is taken of regarding Scripture as true in itself, it is obvious that this quality applies equally to every single part of Scripture down to the smallest detail.... The dogma of verbal inspiration is involved not as the cause but as the consequence of the new unspiritual conception. The identity of the word of Scripture with the word of God has now changed from indirect to direct. (*WGMM*, 34.)

JOHN BAILLIE

John Baillie (1886–1960) was a prominent Scottish theologian. His influential book ***The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought*** (1956) is a clear statement of the neo-orthodox view of Scripture from the British Isles.

The Bible Is Not Revelation

Baillie stated that "the weakness of Protestant orthodoxy has been that it could show no convincing reason for insisting on the plenary nature of the divine assistance to the Scriptural authors while as firmly denying it to the mind of the Church in later days" (***IRRT***, 112).
Baillie compared and summarized the positions of modern theologians about the impact of the doctrine of revelation in men's lives. In his work he stressed the existential nature of man's role in the revelatory process, opposed the notion of propositional revelation (which he confused with mechanical dictation), and suggested that revelation is essentially a personal encounter in the present moment. Also, he criticized the Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions for their "simple identification of divine revelation with Holy Scripture" (ibid., 36, 40).

The Need for Personal Encounter

Baillie asserted, "The propositions on the Scriptural page express the response of human witnesses to divine events, not a miraculous divine dictation" (ibid., 36). He also stated,

> The deepest difficulty felt about the equation of revelation with communicated truths is that it offers us something less than personal encounter and personal communion; and that difficulty is in no way relieved by the proposal to replace communicated truths by implanted images (ibid., 39).

True Knowledge of Scripture Is Determined by Man

Baillie held that "all true knowledge is knowledge that is determined not by the subject [God] but by the object [man]" (ibid., 20). Further,

> The intelligent reading of the Bible, in the Spirit but with the mind also, and the reading of it so as to understand how it
> *Christum treibt*
> [conveys Christ], depends entirely on our ability to distinguish what is central from what is peripheral; to distinguish its unchanging truth from its clothing in the particular cultural and cosmological preconceptions of the times and places in which it was written.

It further helps us

> to distinguish between its essential message and its numerous imperfections, historical inaccuracies, inaccurate or conflicting reports, misquotations or misapplied quotations from the Old Testament in the New, and such like; and withal to distinguish the successive levels of understanding both within the Old Testament and in the transition from that to the New (ibid., 120).

Even more candidly, when speaking of the inadequacy of the events portrayed in Scripture to reveal God, Baillie himself insisted,

> I could not know that God had revealed Himself to the prophets and apostles through these events, unless through His revelation of Himself to them He were now revealing Himself to me.... [Consequently,] I could know indeed that they claimed to have received such a revelation, but I can know that their claim is justified only if, as I read what they say, I too find myself in the presence of God (ibid., 105).

As Leon Morris rightly observes, for Baillie and others in his tradition, "The propositions laid down in Scripture are unimportant, even irrelevant. What matters is the encounter the man of faith has with God" (***IBR***, 113). The neo-orthodox view is hardly compatible with what the Bible has to say for itself (see chapters 13–16) and what has been taught by Christians throughout church history (see chapters 17–18).

To sum it up, the neo-orthodox view is that the Bible is a fallible human book. Nevertheless, it is the instrument of God's revelation to us, for it is a record of God's personal revelation in Christ. Revelation, however, is personal; the Bible is not a verbally inspired revelation from God—it is merely an errant human vehicle through which one can encounter the personal revelation, who is Christ. In itself it is not the Word of God: at best, the Bible only becomes the Word of God to the individual when he encounters Christ through it.

The Bible Has Errors

Finally, Baillie approves of the statement by C. H. Dodd, who quotes several passages from Isaiah and says,

> Any theory of inspiration of the Bible which suggests that we should recognize such utterances as authoritative for us stands self-condemned. They are relative to their age. But I think we should say more. They are false and they are wrong. (*AB*, 128.)

AN EVALUATION OF THE NEO-ORTHODOX VIEW OF SCRIPTURE

Like other unorthodox views of Scripture, the neo-orthodox view has many commendable features as well as some serious problems. First of all, several positive features of the neo-orthodox view will be set forth.
Among the commendable aspects of the neo-orthodox view of inspiration and revelation are its stress on the need for a personal, subjective encounter with God through Scripture and its appropriate critique of a form of bibliolatry that embraces mechanical dictation.

Rejection of Mechanical Dictation

Neo-orthodox adherents are to be commended for their uniform condemnation of

the mechanical dictation theory that they attribute to a fundamentalist view of Scripture. The rejection of this form of biblical docetism, diminishing or denying the human side of Scripture, is contrary to both the claim and character of Scripture itself. The Bible claims to be and proves to be a completely human book in every proper sense of the word (see chapter 15). In this critique champions of neo-orthodoxy have rightly provided a corrective for overzealous conservative views of the Bible that are tacitly docetic, if not cultic, in their explanation of the role of human authors in the revelation process.

Emphasis on the Centrality of Christ

Another helpful emphasis of the neo-orthodox view is the stress on the centrality of Jesus Christ, God's Living Word. Overemphasis on the written Word, without stressing its purpose to convey the Living Word (Christ), has indeed led to some outlandish conservative views that make the Word of God the object of their study rather than the God of the Word. Jesus Himself warned against this error when He chided the Jews, saying, "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life" (John 5:39–40). Indeed, four other times Jesus said that He was the central theme of the Bible (Matt. 5:17–18; Luke 24:27; 24:44; Heb. 10:7). It is possible, as neo-orthodoxy rightly reminds us, to miss the person of the Living Word of God while stressing the propositions of the written Word of God.

Rejection of Bibliolatry

Neo-orthodoxy also sounds a proper alarm against bibliolatry: The Bible is not divine, and it should not be worshiped. It is the Word of God, but it is not God, and as such it should be treated with respect but not with the reverence due to God alone. Bibliology is a proper pursuit, but bibliolatry is not. Orthodoxy is right when it insists on being Bible-based but wrong when it becomes Bible-centered rather than Christ-centered.

Stress on the Need for Personal Encounter

The neo-orthodox view puts proper emphasis on the need for a personal, existential encounter with God. It tries to avoid abstract truth for a concrete relationship, and here again Jesus and the rest of the New Testament place a kindred stress. Our Lord condemned an impersonal, dispassionate, formal religion (cf. Matt. 6:1–7; Luke 18:1–8), and Paul spoke against "having a form of godliness but denying its power" (2 Tim. 3:5). Surely the aim of Scripture is not that we merely know more propositional truth but that we have an encounter with the person who is the Truth (John 14:6).

The Revelation of God in His Acts

Another neglected emphasis stressed by the neo-orthodox view of Scripture is that God reveals Himself in His works. Much of the Old Testament is an illustration of this truth: The God of the Bible is a God who performs mighty acts. The deliverance of His people Israel from Egypt displayed an awesome array of these mighty actions. The incarnation and life of Christ is an even more dramatic display of God's great acts in history, and the Bible declares that these actions were revelatory.

Indeed, the very common word for "do" (Heb: ***asah***) in the Old Testament can and does often mean to reveal or to "show."[6] Likewise, the normal word for "reveal" (***galah***) in the Old Testament is associated with the mighty acts of God (see Isa. 53:1). God does not need to speak to reveal Himself; often, His actions speak louder than His words, as was the case, for instance, in the ten plagues on Egypt (cf. Ex. 7–12).

Focus on the Need for Illumination

Regardless of the term one uses to describe it, neo-orthodoxy is right in reminding us that the chain from God to us is not complete without an appropriation of God's truth to ourselves. Objective disclosure is not enough; there must be a subjective discovery of truth. Further, the Bible exhorts us: "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says" (James 1:22). Metaphorically put, the morocco leather of the Bible must be translated into the shoe leather of experience. In theological language, objective revelation is insufficient; we need subjective "illumination" (i.e., appropriation) of this revelation that effects a transformation in our lives.

Despite its many good emphases, the neo-orthodox view of Scripture has many serious shortcomings. Among these are that it is unbiblical, contrary to the historical view of the Christian church, and inconsistent.

The Neo-Orthodox View of Scripture Is Biblically Unfounded

Whatever else may be said for it, the neo-orthodox view of the Bible is not biblical—it is contrary to what the Bible claims for itself, that it is the verbal, plenary Word of God (see chapters 13–14), composed of "writings" (Gr: ***grapha***) that are God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:16). Indeed, the very words of Scripture came from God (2 Sam. 23:2; Matt. 4:4), who has revealed Himself in its words (1 Cor. 2:11–13). The prophets were told not to omit a single word God spoke to them (Jer. 26:2); in fact, the written Old Testament as a whole is referred to as the "Word of God" (John 10:34–35).

The Neo-Orthodox View of the Bible Is Historically Unsupported

One looks in vain to find support for the neo-orthodox contentions that the Bible is not to be identified with the Word of God or that it is fallible and errant (see chapters 13–16, 27). ***The evidence in its entirety is to the contrary.*** One must scrounge here and there to find a text—out of context—to provide even scant and superficial support for the view that the great Fathers of the church taught

anything except the orthodox view that the Bible is the divinely inspired, infallible, and inerrant written Word of God. These feeble efforts fail in view of the multiple, repeated, and overwhelming support of the Fathers for the orthodox view of Scripture.

Some scholars, like Jack Rogers, have attempted to do this, but their attempts were in vain, for others have carefully and systematically answered them.[7] For example, in light of Martin Luther's repeated and emphatic declarations in favor of the inerrancy of Scripture, the futile effort to take his reference to the Bible as the lowly cradle of Christ (see chapter 18) in no way proves he disbelieved inerrancy. Likewise, his rejection of James as inconsistent with Paul is not a denial of inerrancy; rather, it is such a strong affirmation that the Bible cannot err that anything believed to be inconsistent with Scripture was to be rejected.

The Neo-Orthodox View of the Bible Is Philosophically Inconsistent

One of the interesting inconsistencies of neo-orthodoxy is its contention that God can ***act*** in human history but He cannot ***speak*** in human language. To this, one is inclined to extend the prophet's analogy and ask, "He who made the mouth, can He not speak?" Surely a God who created beings who can communicate in language can Himself communicate in their language. Indeed, it is a denial of the principle of analogy (see chapter 9) to claim that God can give perfections He does not have. Can God share with others what He does not possess?

Neo-Orthodoxy Is Christologically Incoherent

For those, like Karl Barth, who accept the deity of Christ, the denial of the verbal nature of revelation is incoherent, for if Christ as God assumed a completely human nature in the Incarnation (John 1:14; 1 John 4:1–2), then it is inconsistent to affirm that this person (who is God), when He spoke while on earth, was not speaking the words of God. That is, since Christ was two natures in one person,

then the words this one person spoke were both the words of God and the words of man. But if it is possible that one and the same words can be both divine and human as they came from the mouth of Jesus, then why can't this be true of the words of Scripture? In short, the orthodox view of the written Word and the orthodox view of the Living Word go hand-in-hand (see chapter 15).

The Neo-Orthodox View of Scripture Is Axiologically Misplaced

While it may be granted that the grandfather of neo-orthodoxy held an orthodox view of the ***nature*** of the historicity and inerrancy of Scripture, it is also true that Kierkegaard's view of the ***value*** of these facts was unorthodox, for the stance he took as to the relative unimportance of all but the bare historical facts of Jesus was axiologically unorthodox. His claim that events like the Resurrection, not being part of that bare historical core necessary for Christianity, weren't important, is contrary to the claim of the New Testament itself; Paul declared emphatically that "if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.… And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (1 Cor. 15:14, 17).

Furthermore, by separating the realms of fact and value, existentialism, following Kierkegaard, succeeded in setting the stage for the later denial of the historicity of most of the Gospels, including the Resurrection, by other existentialists like Rudolph Bultmann (see chapter 19). But fact and value ***cannot*** always be separated. Paul made this clear in his statement about the Resurrection, and from the beginning God made it clear in his statement about murder: Murdering another human being is not just an attack on his/her facticity; it is an attack on the image of God (Gen. 9:6). Such action against a body (the factual) is also an attack on a person (the valuable). The two are inseparable in this world.

The Neo-Orthodox View Is Logically Fallacious

Much of the neo-orthodox rejection of the historical orthodox view is based on

two logical fallacies. The false disjunction is a common one; for example,

(1) Either the Bible is a personal revelation, or it is a propositional revelation.
(2) Revelation is personal.
(3) Therefore, revelation cannot be propositional.

But even if one accepts the premise that "revelation is personal," the conclusion does not follow, for in an either/or form of reasoning (i.e., disjunctive syllogism), one of the two alternatives must be denied in order to get a valid conclusion. But the neo-orthodox reasoning affirms (rather than denies) one alternative, which is the fallacy of ***affirming an alternate.*** Why not both? Indeed, this is precisely what the orthodox view entails, namely, that God has given both a personal revelation (Christ) and a propositional revelation (Scripture), and it is the purpose of God's written Word (the Bible) to reveal God's Living Word (Christ).

Another common fallacy in neo-orthodox thought on the Bible is the Straw Man fallacy. The "paper pope" charge and the "mechanical dictation" allegation are cases in point. Few, if any, knowledgeable evangelical theologians in the history of the church held to mechanical dictation. To be sure, some used bad illustrations that, if taken to their logical conclusion, may have yielded that result. But none of them really did this, and all of them would have denied the charge of mechanical dictation.

For example, Augustine: "When they write that He has taught and said, it should not be asserted that he did not write it, since the members only put down what they had come to know at the dictation [*dictis*] of the Head. Therefore, whatever He wanted us to read concerning His words and deeds, He commanded His disciples, His hands, to write."

This may be an unfortunate illustration, but it does not prove Augustine held the mechanical dictation theory. We use the word "dictate" in the same nonmechanical sense today when we say that the laws we choose to obey came by the dictates of the legislature. Likewise, other earlier Fathers who spoke of the human authors of the Bible as flutes God played on did not mean that this be taken any more literally than Jesus intended when he said "I am the gate" (John 10:9).

The Neo-Orthodox View of Scripture Is Practically Unfruitful

While the neo-orthodox view sounds better than the liberal view, it reduces to the same fatal flaw: that the Bible is not the infallible Word of God but only the fallible words of men about God. How can one entrust his eternal destiny to fallible human teaching known to be riddled with errors?

The neo-orthodox illustration of the dog listening to his master's voice through a distorted record misses the point; it is a false analogy, for there is a big difference between a person listening to a good recording of a true message from an actual long-lost loved one and listening to a false, scratchy message from an impostor. Unlike adherents to liberalism (see chapter 20) and neo-orthodoxy, evangelicals make an important distinction between ***divine adaptation to finitude*** (which involves some background noise on the record) and ***divine accommodation to error*** (which distorts the very message itself).

The doctrine of analogy (see chapter 9) demands that when an infinite God expresses truth to a finite mind, some form of ***adaptation*** is necessary, whether in negation, figures of speech, metaphors, similes, or anthropomorphism. However, the liberal and neo-orthodox views involve the position that the Bible teaches error, not just that there are "noises" on the record that gives us the truth. To be sure, too much noise could distort the truth, but this is precisely what the doctrine of analogy (see chapter 9) assures, namely, that finitude does not necessitate error. Or, in biblical terms, the "image of God" (Gen. 1:27), even in fallen man (Gen. 9:6), assures us that truth can be expressed in finite terms without distorting its truthfulness.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The neo-orthodox view of Scripture has much to commend it, including its rejection of mechanical dictation, its stress on the centrality of Christ, its rejection of bibliolatry, its emphasis on personal encounter with God, its focus on revelation as acts of God, and the need for illumination. Nonetheless, there are serious flaws in the view that cause it to fall far short of an adequate explanation of all the data. On careful examination, neo-orthodoxy has been found to be biblically unfounded, historically unsupported, philosophically

inconsistent, Christologically incoherent, axiologically misplaced, logically fallacious, and practically unfruitful.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

NEO-EVANGELICALS ON THE BIBLE

The new evangelical view is so named because it is a deviation from the longstanding evangelical teaching on Scripture (see chapters 13–18). It may also be called neo-Reformed, since it comes mainly from theologians in the Reformed tradition, but since other evangelicals have adopted similar views, it is appropriate to call it neo-evangelical. The most important proponent of this view is the Dutch theologian G. C. Berkouwer. His follower, American theologian Jack Rogers of Fuller Seminary, holds substantially the same position.

G. C. BERKOUWER (1903–1996)

The influence of European neo-orthodoxy made a marked effect on G. C. Berkouwer. While broadly remaining within the evangelical tradition, his subtle but significant alterations on the doctrine of Scripture have had a wide influence in the United States and elsewhere.

Berkouwer revealed a significant influence from the neo-orthodox view of Karl Barth in his handling of the question of whether the Bible is the Word of God. His answer is a dialectical yes and no.

Distinction Between the Word of God and the Words of Men

Berkouwer wrote,

> We have frequently come across the characterization of Scripture as the Word of God and the words of men. Reliability, of course, was always discussed in direct relationship to this, particularly in view of the truly human aspect of Scripture.

He continued,

> We do not merely have in mind the general consideration that error belongs to human nature. We have in mind above all the contrast noted frequently in Scripture between the Word of God and the words of men, between relying on God and relying on man. (*HS*, 240.)

Like Barth, Berkouwer believed that the voice of God could be heard within Scripture—a confession that falls short of the clear orthodox proclamation that the Bible ***is*** the Word of God. He declared,

> This "is" is not a postulate of our longings for certainty which cannot withstand the assaults of the human. Rather, it is truly a confession that continues to be filled with expectation in listening to the many voices within the one voice in this Scripture (ibid., 168).

The Bible Is Understood Non-Supernaturally

Berkouwer believed it is a misunderstanding to think of the Bible as a supernatural work of God. "This can be understood if one does not initially misunderstand the glory of God and does not wish to interpret the God-breathed character in an abstract supernaturalistic and 'miraculous' manner" (ibid., 170). Leaning on his strong Calvinistic orientation, Berkouwer thought of Scripture more as a result of the sovereignty of God:

> In reading Scripture we encounter some of the questions aroused in men related to … becoming bearers of God's Word. Moses does not deem himself "eloquent" (

Ex. 4:10
), and Isaiah exclaims “Woe is me” because he is a man of unclean lips (
Isa. 6:5
).... [Thus] this divine taking-into-service has an aspect of triumph and sovereignty, yet it does not erase the weakness of the human word nor its limitations. Time and again we note a vivid awareness of God’s using weak human “instruments” (ibid., 206).

Even prophecy was thought of nonsupernaturally, for “the speech of men in prophecy is the way of the reliable testimony of God” (ibid., 146).

Inspiration Is Organic, Not Verbal and Plenary

Contrary to the orthodox view, Berkouwer held that inspiration is organic[1] but not verbal and plenary:

> We are reminded, by way of background, of what is called—even in catechism books—the transition from a more “mechanical” to a more “organic” view of Scripture. It is clear that this too will determine the nature of one’s account (ibid., 11).

Tracing his roots to his Dutch predecessor, Herman Bavinck (1854–1921), Berkouwer declared that “to Bavinck … organic inspiration [is] the unfolding and application of the central fact of revelation, the incarnation of the Word” (ibid., 199). He rejected the orthodox view:

> Every book of [the Bible], every chapter of it, every word of it, every syllable of it, every letter of it, is the direct utterance of the Most High, [claiming that] this statement … disregards all nuances of Scripture (consider the Psalms, Job, Ecclesiastes), as though it were a string of divine or supernaturally revealed statements, ignoring the fact that God’s Word has passed through humanity and has incorporated its service (ibid., 23–24).

Inspiration Is Found in Intention

Embracing an intentionalist view of truth (see chapter 7), Berkouwer affirmed,

> At issue is whether and in what way faith is related to the gospel promised in Holy Scripture. Scripture is central because of its nature and intent. For this Scripture is only referred to because its sense and intent is the divine message of salvation (ibid., 147).

Like Herman Ridderbos, Berkouwer believed that "the evangelists did not intend to give 'a historical narrative of Jesus' words and works' but a portrayal of Jesus as the Christ. That is the character of our gospel, or, expressed in other terms, not report but witness" (ibid., 247). Thus the Bible is inspired only in what it intended to convey, and this, supposedly, did not always include matters of history and science.

Human Limitations of Scripture

Berkouwer implies that the limitations of the Bible seem to include error, like any other human writing:

> It is explicitly referred to in Bavinck's words: "Christ became flesh, a servant without form or comeliness, the most despised among men … and so also the Word, the revelation of God entered creation, in the life and history of men and people in every form of dream and vision, of research and meditation, even as far as the humanly weak and ignoble; the Word became Scripture and as *Scripture subjected itself to the fate of all writing*" (ibid., 199, emphasis added).

But the fate of all human writings is to contain error.

Indeed, Berkouwer chided fundamentalism[2] for not admitting the full humanity of Scripture.

> Fundamentalism greatly obscures the contexts in which God himself gave us Scripture. Back of fundamentalism lies something of an unconscious wish not to have God's Word enter the creaturely realm—or, to use Bavinck's words, "into the humanly weak and despised and base"—and the wish that Scripture should

not subject itself “as writing to the fate of all writings” (ibid., 25).

He added,

> I believe that I am judging no one unfairly when I say that fundamentalism, in its eagerness to maintain Holy Scripture’s divinity, does not fully realize the significance of Holy Scripture as a prophetic-apostolic, and consequently human, testimony (ibid., 22).

Since for Berkouwer the Bible is not equated with the Word of God but possesses limitations to the point of error, he must adopt a form of divine accommodationism to human error rather than the standard orthodox view of divine adaptation to human finitude without error. This is evident in a number of statements on the limitations and human errors in Scripture.

Cultural Accommodations

For example,

> Paul, in contrast, did not in the least render timeless propositions concerning womanhood. Rather, he wrote various testimonies and prescriptions applicable to particular—and to a certain degree transparent—situations against a background of specific morals and customs of that period. [Consequently,] this realization has increasingly penetrated even to areas where there has been no hesitation to affirm Scripture as the Word of God (ibid., 187).

Citing American theologian Bernard Ramm (1916–1992), who is noted for leaning in a neo-evangelical direction in his later years, Berkouwer said,

> Ramm wrote rightly … that the Holy Spirit “did not give to the writers the secrets of modern science.” Various excessive examples (including even nuclear theories) are in his opinion “a misunderstanding of the nature of inspiration,” for they do not take into account that Scripture came to us “in terms of the culture in which the writers wrote” (ibid., 189).

Scientific Accommodations

For Berkouwer,

> The problem of the God-breathed character of Scripture and continuity gained renewed interest in its connection with the author’s level of knowledge in a certain period (
>
> Ex. 20:4
>
> ,
>
> Ps. 24:2
>
> , [
>
> 3
>
> , Eng. text];
>
> 2 Sam. 22:8
>
> ;
>
> Ps. 136:6
>
> ;
>
> Job 26:5
>
> ;
>
> Ps. 46:3
>
> [
>
> 2
>
> , Eng. text];
>
> Ps. 148:4
>
>). [Of course,] this does not mean a capitulation to science as an institution opposed to God’s Word, with the additional conclusions that Scripture is unreliable and its witness untrustworthy. [Rather,] it means a greater degree of naturalness in speaking of Scripture, with a view to its nature and purpose. Corrections of various conceptions of the world—its composition and its place in the universe—are not at all needed then to guarantee the full and clear message of Scripture. [Thus,] formal problems of correctness (inerrancy alongside infallibility) disintegrate with such a naturalness (ibid., 182).

Historical Accommodations

According to Berkouwer,

> He who demands that all conceptions occurring in Scripture be precisely correct on the basis of the God-breathed character of Scripture starts with the presupposition that the voice of God can only then be reliable and that the

> biblical authors cannot be witnesses and instruments of the God-breathed Scripture when they use certain time-bound conceptions in their writings. [Hence,] this notion of “inerrancy” can quickly lead to the idea that the “correctness” of all these conceptions anticipates later scientific discovery (ibid., 183).

Berkouwer denied the inerrancy of the Bible, claiming,

> The concept of error in the sense of incorrectness is obviously being used on the same level as the concept of erring in the sense of sin and deception. The distinction is left rather vague.

As a consequence of this,

> Limited historical perception within a certain cultural and scientific situation is, without further stipulation, put on a par with erring in the sense of lying, the opposite of truth. If erring is formalized in such a way, it cannot later be related to truth in a biblical sense, but it continues to function as a formal structure of exactness and correctness.

Thus,

> We are quite far removed from the serious manner with which erring is dealt in Scripture. For there what is meant is not the result of a limited degree of knowledge, but it is a swerving from the truth and upsetting the faith (2 Tim. 2:18) (ibid., 181).

As to the Gospels, Berkouwer concluded,

> One will never solve the problem of the Gospels by indiscriminately operating with the concept of “historical reliability,” precisely because then one leaves the impression that no further questions need to be answered. As a consequence, all further reflection on this point is subject to suspicion from the start (ibid., 251).

He added, “It was pointed out by many that it was impossible to write a ‘biography’ of Jesus based on the Gospels, not even by adding up the data from the Gospels so that one would complement another” (ibid., 247).

Worldview Limitations

In the paradigm of Berkouwer, the Bible is fallible even in the worldview it expresses:

> This is illustrated in Jan Ridderbos' words: "Moreover Scripture bears the marks of the period and of the milieu in which it was written and it shares in part these marks with the culture which in many ways was interrelated to that of Israel. This is true for writing, language, style, literary genre, ideas, conceptions, [and] world view (cf. the three-decker universe in Ex. 20:4)" (ibid., 182).

He also unconvincingly said, "It was pointed out that the authority of Scripture is in no way diminished because an ancient world view occurs in it; for it was not the purpose of Scripture to offer revealing information on that level" (ibid., 181).

Myths in Scripture

Berkouwer went so far as to claim there are myths in the Bible, arguing that we "cannot directly take up a position against Bultmann's theological concern with demythologizing by means of a text such as 2 Peter 1:15" [the retelling of Balaam being rebuked by the donkey, citing K. H. Schelke, *Die Petrusbriefe* (1961)] (ibid., 198):

> By "myth" Bultmann does not mean those myths that are rejected as fabrications and are opposed to the truth as *mythoi*. He means rather an imagery connected with a mythical world view. This world view is characterized by the presence of three levels—heaven, earth, and the underworld—so that earth is considered to be the "scene of the supernatural activity of God" [from Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology" in *Kerygma and Myth*] (ibid., 254).

As to whether the Gospel writers were reporting or creating the words and

events of Jesus, Berkouwer concluded, “If we are dealing with a penetration of story and interpretation, should we not accept a creativity of the evangelists from which ‘fantasy’ could be distinguished only with great difficulty?” (ibid., 248).

Biblical Criticism

Berkouwer believed that the Bible was not beyond critique:

> For various reasons students of Scripture began to wonder more and more whether Holy Scripture as God’s Word was truly beyond all criticism as the indubitable *vox Dei*, as a book—however human—of indisputably divine signature.... Frequently, too little attention is paid to the possibility and legitimacy of biblical research. A supernaturalistic view of revelation would consider any human “research” puzzling and inconceivable (ibid., 13, 358).

JACK ROGERS (1934–)

As documented in Harold Lindsell’s book ***The Battle for the Bible***, Fuller Seminary has been a leader in the move to a neo-evangelical view of Scripture. The movement began in the 1960s when the faculty split over the inerrancy of the Bible, after the school eliminated it from its doctrinal position. Those who opposed this move left the seminary, including notable evangelicals such as Harold Lindsell, Carl Henry, Charles Woodbridge, Wilbur Smith, and Gleason Archer. The movement against inerrancy was championed by Daniel Fuller, George Ladd, Paul Jewett, and the president of the seminary, David Hubbard. The most significant work defending the neo-evangelical view was subsequently produced by faculty member Jack Rogers, titled ***The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible.***

The Origin of Scripture

As to the origin of Scripture, Rogers holds that “evangelicals believe the Bible is the authoritative word of God” (***BA***, 17). Albeit, accommodation to human finitude and even error is involved in this process, for “in order to communicate effectively with human beings, God condescended, humbled, and accommodated himself to human categories of thought and speech” (***AIB***, 10).
Thus, following Berkouwer, the nature of inspiration is not verbal and plenary; rather, it is organic, meaning that the Bible is inspired as a whole, but not necessarily in all its parts.

Organic Inspiration

According to Rogers,

> The basic interpretative principle of the Reformation had been stated in several ways: the analogy of faith, or Scripture as its own interpreter. The meaning of these phrases was that each part of the Bible was to be understood in relationship to the overall saving message of Scripture.... Bavinck attempted to express this relationship of the parts to the whole through the image of the human body. Bavinck’s concept, which he called “organic inspiration,” drew attention to the fact that there is a center and a periphery to Scripture (ibid., 391).

Unerring Only in Purpose

Rogers was willing to speak of the inerrancy of the Bible, but he redefined it in terms of his nontraditional view of truth (see chapter 7) as intentionality, not correspondence. That is to say, the Bible is without error in what it intends to accomplish, not in all it actually affirms.

> It is no doubt possible to define the meaning of biblical inerrancy according to the Bible’s saving purpose and taking into account the human forms through which God condescended to reveal himself. (*BA*, 45.)

Factual Errors

This inerrancy-of-intent-but-not-fact view leaves the Bible with historical and

scientific errors.

> It is historically irresponsible to claim that for two thousand years Christians have believed that the authority of the Bible entails a modern concept of inerrancy in scientific and historical details (ibid., 44).

Therefore, Rogers insists:

> To confuse "error" in the sense of technical accuracy with the biblical notion of error as willful deception diverts us from the serious intent of Scripture. The purpose of the Bible is not to substitute for human science. [Hence,] the purpose of the Bible is to warn against human sin and offer us God's salvation in Christ. Scripture infallibly achieves that purpose. We are called, not to argue Scripture's scientific accuracy, but to accept its saving message (ibid., 46).

The Purpose of Scripture

Once inerrancy was defined in terms of intention or purpose and not in terms of correspondence to fact, the neo-evangelical could speak of the saving purpose of Scripture being hermeneutically definitive in terms of what is meant by inspiration. Rogers writes in this connection:

> Scripture could be interpreted by a regenerate mind in light of its purpose of bringing us to salvation in Christ.... Scripture was not to be used as a source of information in the sciences to refute what the scholars were discovering (ibid., 34).

Reinterpreting history in the light of his new definition of inspiration and inerrancy, Rogers claimed:

> For the Westminster divines, the final judge in controversies of religion was not just the bare word of Scripture interpreted by human logic, but the Spirit of Christ leading us in Scripture to its central saving witness to him (ibid., 35).

That is to say, purpose determines meaning, and since the purpose of the Bible is judged to be unilaterally salvific (2 Tim. 3:15), one must overlook minor factual

errors of history and science in favor of its central saving purpose.

Higher Criticism and the Bible

With the focus on purpose, not fact, Rogers is able to accommodate modern negative criticism of the Bible. In his words,

> By distinguishing between the center and the periphery in Scripture, [Abraham] Kuyper and [Herman] Bavinck's tradition freed their followers from scholarship and for scholarship. The central saving message of Scripture could be received in faith without waiting for scholarly reasons. The supporting material of Scripture, the human forms of culture and language, were open to scholarly investigation. (*AIB*, 393.)

Rogers believes,

> Biblical criticism became a problem, according to Bavinck, only when the critics lost sight of the purpose of Scripture. That purpose, goal, or "destination" of Scripture was "none other than that it should make us wise to salvation."

From Bavinck's perspective, Scripture was not meant to give us technically correct scientific information (***BA***, 43).

Rogers clearly rejected the traditional orthodox view of B. B. Warfield (1851–1921) on inerrancy—that the Bible is factually inerrant in the original manuscripts as an unprovable assumption: "Thus errorlessness was confined to the original (lost) manuscripts of the Bible. Since the original texts were not available, Warfield seemed to have an unassailable apologetic stance" (ibid., 39).

Rogers' Revision of Church History

Rejecting the orthodoxy of Charles Hodge (1797–1878), B. B. Warfield, and the Princetonian school, based as it was, he believed, on outmoded aristotelian logic,

Rogers proceeded in his revisionist philosophy of church history to reinterpret the past in favor of his new evangelical view. He insisted,

> Augustine, Calvin, Rutherford, and Bavinck, for example, all specifically deny that the Bible should be looked to as an authority in matters of science. To claim them in support of a modern inerrancy theory is to trivialize their central concern that the Bible is our sole authority on salvation and the living of a Christian life (ibid., 44).

Rogers wrote, “It is equally irresponsible to claim that the old Princeton theology of Alexander, Hodge, and Warfield is the only legitimate evangelical, or Reformed, theological tradition in America” (ibid., 45).

In summary, the neo-evangelical view differentiates between the Word of God (divine content) and the words of the human authors (human form) of Scripture. The former is infallible, but the latter is not; hence, the Bible is not infallibly divine words but only reliable human words. Like adherents to neo-orthodoxy (see chapter 21), neo-evangelicals hold that the Bible is a human witness to divine revelation. The church confesses it as the Word of God, but the Bible does not express eternal truths about science, history, or even human relations (such as male/female roles).

Further, it sees the evangelical view of Scripture (which it calls “fundamentalism”) as holding to mechanical dictation, and this caricature is rejected in favor of an “organic” inspiration, which maintains that there are myths and obsolete scientific views reflected in Scripture. The Bible, like all other human books, is subject to mistakes, and thus must be judged critically.

C. S. LEWIS

For those most familiar with C. S. Lewis’s strong and eloquent defense of many of the basic tenets of historic Christianity, his view of Scripture comes as a great surprise. Indeed, his perspective almost defies categorization, since it combines seemingly contradictory elements of the orthodox, liberal, neo-orthodox, and neo-evangelical views. Some have called it “liberal evangelical.” Since it is clearly neither an evangelical nor a liberal model, it is listed here with neo-evangelical views, though it has much in common with liberalism, particularly on the Old Testament.

Like those who maintain neo-orthodoxy, Lewis believed that the voice of God

could be heard through the errant record of the Old Testament. The origin of the message was divine, but the human pipeline by which it got here was often terribly polluted.

The Voice of God Through Human Distortion

Lewis wrote,

> Certainly it seems to me that from having had to reach what is really the Voice of God in the cursing Psalms through all the horrible distortions of the human medium, I have gained something I might not have gained from a flawless, ethical exposition. (*RP*, 114.)

He added, “Though hideously distorted by the human instrument, something of the Divine voice can be heard in these passages” (ibid., 32).

Divine Elevation of Human Genius

Lewis seemed to adopt a theistic evolutionary view of the origin of Scripture (see ***CR***, 115), believing that the human body develops gradually and naturally until God infuses a human soul in it, thus stamping His image on it. Scripture was produced in a similar way:

> For we are taught that the Incarnation itself proceeded “not by the conversion of the godhead into flesh, but by taking of [the] manhood into God”; in it human life becomes the vehicle of Divine life. If the Scriptures proceed not by conversion of God’s word into a literature but by taking up of a literature to be the vehicle of God’s word, this is not anomalous. (*RP*, 116.)

This is true because

> If the Old Testament is a literature thus “taken up,” made the vehicle of what is more than human, we can of course set no limit to the weight or multiplicity of meanings which may have been laid upon it. If any writer may say more than

> he knows and mean more than he meant, then these writers will be especially likely to do so. And not by accident (ibid., 117).

There was, according to Lewis, a constant divine/human conflict in the formation of Scripture, for "we read [about] the whole Jewish experience of God's gradual and graded self-revelation [so as] to feel the very contentions between the Word and the human material through which it works" (ibid., 114).

Divine Superintendence

For Lewis, Scripture resulted more from God's providence than from His supernatural intervention:

> I take it that the whole Old Testament consists of the same sort of material as any other literature—chronicle (some of it obviously pretty accurate), poems, moral and political diatribes, romances, and what not; but all taken into the service of God's word. Not all, I suppose, in the same way.

Thus,

> There are prophets who write with the clearest awareness that Divine compulsion is upon them. There are chroniclers whose intention may have been merely to record. There are poets like those in the Song of Songs who probably never dreamed of any but a secular and natural purpose in what they composed.

Also,

> There is (and it is no less important) the work first of the Jewish and then of the Christian Church in preserving and canonizing just these books. There is the work of redactors and editors in modifying them. On all of these I suppose a Divine pressure; of which not by any means all need have been conscious (ibid., 111).

Lewis's belief in the divine authority of Scripture was severely modified by his

acceptance of negative literary criticism of it. The result was that he concluded that there were many errors and contradictions in the Bible.

The Errant Nature of the Bible

Lewis believed,

> Whatever view we hold of the divine authority of Scripture must make room for the following facts. (1) The distinction which St. Paul makes in 1 Cor. 7 between [not I but the Lord] (v. 10) and [I speak, not the Lord] (v. 12). (2) The apparent inconsistencies between the genealogies in Matt. 1 and Luke 3; with the accounts of the death of Judas in Matt. 27:5 and Acts 1:18–19. (3) St. Luke's own account of how he obtained his matter (1:1–4). (4) The universally admitted un-historicity (I do not say, of course, falsity) of a least some narratives in Scripture (the parables), which may well extend also to Jonah and Job. (5) If every good and perfect gift comes from the Father of lights, then all true and edifying writings, whether in Scripture or not, must be in some sense inspired. (6) Inspiration may operate in a wicked man without his knowing it, and he can then utter the untruth he intends … as well as truth he does not intend (see John 11:49–52). (Cited by Christensen, *CSLS*, 98–99.)[3]

Lewis said,

> Some people find the miraculous so hard to believe that they cannot imagine any reason for my acceptance of it other than a prior belief that every sentence of the Old Testament has historical or scientific truth. [But] this I do not hold, any

> more than St. Jerome did when he said that Moses described Creation "after the manner of a popular poet" (as we should say, mythically) or than Calvin did when he doubted whether the story of Job were history or fiction. (*RP*, 109.)

Myths in the Old Testament

Generally speaking, Lewis's view of the New Testament is more orthodox than that of the Old Testament, particularly his view of its historicity. This is due in part to his unique view of myths, namely, that God first reveals Himself in myth and then in history (***M***, 139).

Lewis found no difficulty in accepting the long-held liberal view that the story of Adam and Eve was mythological. He said, "I have therefore no difficulty in accepting, say, the view of those scholars who tell us that the account of Creation in Genesis is derived from earlier Semitic stories which were Pagan and mythical" (***RP***, 110).

> When a series of such re-telling turns a creation story which at first had almost no religious or metaphysical significance into a story which achieves the idea of true Creation and of a transcendent Creator (as Genesis does), then nothing will make me believe that some of the re-tellers, or some one of them, has not been guided by God. [Thus,] something originally merely natural—the kind of myth that is found among most nations—will have been raised by God above itself, qualified by Him and compelled by Him to serve purposes which of itself it would not have served (ibid., 110).

Likewise, wrote Lewis,

> The Book of Job appears to me unhistorical because it begins about a man quite unconnected with all history or even legend, with no genealogy, living in a country of which the Bible elsewhere has hardly anything to say; because … the author quite obviously writes as a storyteller, not as a chronicler (ibid., 110).

Also,

> The question about Jonah and the great fish does not turn simply on intrinsic probability. The point is that the whole Book of Jonah has to me the air of being a moral romance, a quite different kind of thing from, say the account of King

> David or the New Testament narratives, not pegged like them into any historical situation. In what sense does the Bible "present" the Jonah story "as historical"?

Lewis answers, "Of course, it doesn't say 'This is fiction,' but then neither does our Lord say that the Unjust Judge, Good Samaritan, or Prodigal Son are fiction. (I would put Esther in the same category as Jonah for the same reason)" (Christensen, ***CSLS***, 96–97).

Historical Errors in the Bible

In like manner, Lewis had no difficulty accepting that there were historical errors in the Bible:

> It seems to me that 2 and 4 [see page 399, under "The Errant Nature of the Bible"] rule out the view that every statement in Scripture must be historical truth. And 1, 3, 5, and 6 rule out the view that inspiration is a single thing in the sense that, if present at all, it is always present in the same mode and the same degree.

Therefore,

> I think, rule out the view that any one passage taken in isolation can be assumed to be inerrant in exactly the same sense as any other: e.g., that the numbers of O.T. armies (which in view of the size of the country, if true, involve continuous miracle) are statistically correct.... That the overall operation of Scripture is to convey God's Word to the reader (he also needs his inspiration) who reads it in the right spirit, I fully believe. That it also gives true answers to all the questions (often religiously irrelevant) which he might ask, I don't. The very kind of truth we are often demanding was, in my opinion, not even envisaged by the ancients. (*RP*, 199.)

For Lewis,

> The human qualities of the raw materials show through. Naivety, error,

> contradiction, even (as in the cursing Psalms) wickedness are not removed. The total result is not “the Word of God” in the sense that every passage, in itself, gives impeccable science or history (ibid., 111–112).

Antireligious Portions of Scripture

Unlike many neo-evangelicals, Lewis did not limit the errancy of Scripture to nonreligious matters. He wrote,

> Nor would I (now) willingly spare from my Bible something in itself so anti-religious as the nihilism of Ecclesiastes. We get there a clear, cold picture of man’s life without God. That statement is itself part of God’s word (ibid., 115).

Likewise,

> We shall find in the Psalms expressions of a cruelty more vindictive and a self-righteousness more complete than anything in the classics. If we ignore such passages and read only a few selected favourite Psalms, we miss the point. [For] the point is precisely this: that these same fanatic and homicidal Hebrews, and not the more enlightened peoples, again and again—for brief moments—reach a Christian level of spirituality. (*CR*, 116.)

Some of the psalms Lewis believed were contemptible and even devilish:

> One way of dealing with these terrible or (dare we say?) contemptible Psalms is simply to leave them alone. But unfortunately the bad parts will not “come away clean”; they may, as we have noticed, be intertwined with the most exquisite things. (*RP*, 21–22.)

He added,

> It is monstrously simple-minded to read the cursings in the Psalms with no feeling except one of horror at the uncharity of the poets. They are indeed devilish.... Even more devilish in one verse is the otherwise beautiful 137, where a blessing is pronounced on anyone who will snatch up a Babylonian baby and beat its brains out against the pavement (ibid., 25, 20–21).

Orthodox View of Inspiration Rejected

C. S. Lewis clearly rejected the orthodox view of Scripture, saying,

> One can respect, and at moments envy, both the Fundamentalist's view of the Bible and the Roman Catholic's view of the Church. But there is one argument which we should beware of using for either position: God must have done what is best, this is best, therefore God has done this. For we are mortals and do not know what is best for us, and it is dangerous to prescribe what God must have done—especially when we cannot for the life of us see that He has after all done it (ibid., 112).

He went on,

> We are not fundamentalists. We think that different elements in this sort of theology have different degrees of strength. The nearer it sticks to mere textual criticism, of the old sort … the more we are disposed to believe in it (ibid., 163).

Negative Criticism of Scripture

Lewis rejected the traditional authorship of certain sections of the Old Testament, including the Psalms, even though doing so conflicted with his view of Christ (cf. Matt. 22:43–45). "How old the Psalms, as we now have them, really are is a question for the scholars. I am told there is one [Psalm 18] which might really have come down from the age of David himself; that is, from the tenth century B.C. Most of them," however, "are said to be 'post exilic' "; the book was put together "when the Hebrews, long exiled in Babylonia, were repatriated by that enlightened ruler, Cyrus of Persia. This would bring us down to the sixth century. How much earlier material the book took in is uncertain" (***CR***, 114).

Rejection of Old Testament Miracles

It comes as a great disappointment to those who know of Lewis's strong defense of supernaturalism in his otherwise excellent book on ***Miracles*** to hear him deny many Old Testament miracles: "A consideration of the Old Testament miracles is beyond the scope of this book and would require many kinds of knowledge which I do not possess." Nonetheless, he adds, "***My present view***—which is tentative and liable to any amount of correction[4]—would be that just as, on the factual side, a long preparation culminates in God's becoming incarnate as Man, so, on the documentary side, truth first appears in mythical form and then by a long process of condensing or focusing finally becomes incarnate as History." Of course,

> This involves the belief that Myth in general is not merely misunderstood history (as Euhemerus thought) nor diabolical illusion (as some of the Fathers thought) nor priestly lying (as the philosophers of the Enlightenment thought) but, at its best, a real though unfocused gleam of divine truth falling on human imagination. The Hebrews, like other people, had mythology: but as they were the chosen people so their mythology was the chosen mythology—the mythology chosen by God to be the vehicle of the earliest sacred truths, the first step in that process which ends in the New Testament where truth has become completely historical.

Lewis added,

> Whether we can ever say with certainty where, in this process of crystallization, any particular Old Testament story falls, is another matter. [Thus,] I take it that the memoirs of David's court come at one end of the scale and are scarcely less historical than St. Mark or Acts; and that the Book of Jonah is at the opposite end. (*M*, 139.)

Nevertheless, Lewis believed that "the resurrection of Christ is a historical and very important event, but the value of other events (e.g., the fate of Lot's wife) hardly matter at all. And the ones whose historicity matters are, as God's will, those where it is plain" (cited by Kilby, ***CWCSL***, 153). Elsewhere Lewis explained.

> A theology which denies the historicity of nearly everything in the Gospels … which either denies the miraculous altogether or, more strangely, after swallowing the camel of the Resurrection strains at such gnats as the feeding of the multitudes—if offered to the uneducated man can produce only one or

> the other of two effects. It will make him a Roman Catholic or an atheist. (*CR*, 153.)

Theistic Evolution Accepted

Although there is some evidence of later modification of his view, Lewis embraced theistic evolution in direct contradiction with a literal interpretation of the text (see volume 2, part 2): "For long centuries God perfected the animal form which was to become the vehicle of humanity and the image of Himself' (***RP***, 65):

> The creature may have existed for ages in this stage before it became man: it may even have been clever enough to make things which a modern archaeologist would accept as proof of its humanity. But it was only an animal because all its physical and psychical processes were directed to purely material and natural ends. [Then,] in the fullness of time, God caused to descend upon this organism, both on its psychology and physiology, a new kind of consciousness which could say "I" and "me," which could look upon itself as an object, which knew God, which could make judgments of truth, beauty, and goodness, and which was so far above time that it could perceive time flowing past (ibid).

AN EVALUATION OF THE NEO-EVANGELICAL VIEWS OF SCRIPTURE

With the exception of C. S. Lewis's more liberal and neo-orthodox thoughts on Scripture, which were critiqued under those titles (see chapters 20–21), the neo-evangelical view of Scripture is distinctive in contrast to the standard evangelical view from which it deviates:

Evangelical View of Bible	Neo-Evangelical View of Bible
True as whole and in all parts	True as whole but not in all parts
True spiritually and scientifically	True spiritually but not always scientifically

True in what it intends and affirms	True in what it intends, not in all it affirms
Truth is found in correspondence	Truth is found in intention

Like other deviant views of Scripture, the neo-evangelical position has both positive and negative dimensions. Some positive characteristics include the following:

It Emphasizes the Organic Whole of Scripture

Since God is the ultimate author of Scripture, it ***is*** an organic whole. Each part must be understood in the light of the whole, and our understanding of the whole is based on each part. To understand this systemic relationship between whole and part is crucial to a proper understanding of Scripture. In this sense, the stress on the organic wholeness of Scripture is a positive contribution of neo-evangelicalism.

Further, the flip side of this is the rejection of a mechanical view of verbal dictation, which is rightly disowned. Meaning, including the meaning of the Bible, is not found in atomistically revealed parts. Words have meaning as parts of sentences, and sentences as part of paragraphs, and paragraphs in the light of the broader literary unit of the book, and so on. No isolated parts are hermeneutical islands unto themselves (see chapter 6).

It Warns Against Alien Philosophical Views

While particular philosophical points of view can be disputed, there is no disagreement on the need to examine carefully the philosophical presuppositions brought to an understanding of the inspiration of the Bible, whether they spring from ancient philosophers or modern ones. Neo-evangelicals are correct in pointing out that one must be careful not to cast the doctrines of inspiration and

inerrancy in the mold of philosophical perspectives that are alien to the teaching of Scripture.

It Takes Seriously the Human Nature of Scripture

Like two of its mentors, liberalism and neo-orthodoxy, neo-evangelicalism is right in stressing the human side of the Bible. Like Christ, the Bible is both divine and human, and a denial of either leads to substantial error. With regard to Scripture, a denial of its full humanity is a form of biblical docetism; here too neo-evangelicalism has rendered a worthwhile service.[5]

It Highlights the Need for Divine Adaptation

Neo-evangelicals are also to be commended for emphasizing the need for adaptation by God to the human situation in the communication of truth in Scripture. After all, God is infinite, and the Bible is finite. In fact, everything about the Bible is finite, including the persons who wrote it, the languages it is written in, and the cultures through which it was expressed. Thus, whenever an infinite Mind wishes to communicate with finite minds, there must of necessity be an adaptation of the former to the latter. Hence, the doctrine of divine adaptation stressed by neo-evangelicals is crucial to any proper understanding of the inspiration of Scripture.

It Interacts With Contemporary Biblical Criticism

Since biblical criticism is a part of our culture, one must interact with it in order to give full recognition to the humanness of the Bible. To ignore facts brought forward in this discipline is to show disrespect for God’s truth in general revelation in an attempt to preserve His truth in special revelation (see chapters 4

and 26). Facts are facts, and all must be accounted for in an adequate theory of inspiration. Therefore, evangelicals must interact with the data of biblical criticism, whether it is lower criticism (of the text) or higher criticism (of the source of the text). Again, the neo-evangelical emphasis is helpful.
All of this is not to say that there are no serious problems with the neo-evangelical view of Scripture; there are many. Some of the more significant ones will be briefly examined.

It Is Contrary to the Claims of Scripture

First and foremost, for anyone claiming legitimate use of the name "evangelical," his view is contrary to the very book claimed to be of divine authority. Since this point has already been supported by extensive biblical data (see chapters 13–16, 26), it will not be repeated here. It is sufficient to note the biblical claims:

(1) God cannot err in anything He affirms (cf. Heb. 6:18; Titus 1:2).
(2) The Bible is the Word of God.
So it follows necessarily (and contrary to neo-evangelicalism) that
(3) The Bible cannot err in anything it affirms (including history and science).

To claim otherwise is to deny either one or both of two well-established biblical teachings.

It Is Contrary to the Teachings of the Fathers and Reformers

Since this point also has been addressed extensively (see chapters 17–18), it will not be reemphasized. It is sufficient to give only the conclusion, which is that in the long history of the Christian church there is scarcely a single significant voice that denied the orthodox view that the Bible is the divinely inspired,

absolutely authoritative, and factually inerrant written Word of God. This flatly contradicts the neo-evangelical position.

It Is Based on a Fallacious View of Truth

The neo-evangelical view of G. C. Berkouwer, Jack Rogers, and others is based on a mistaken view of truth, the position that truth is what is intended by the author. Although this has been completely refuted elsewhere (see chapter 19), it is important to note here its central errors.

First, it is contrary to the biblical use of the word "truth," which clearly implies the correspondence view (see chapter 7)—truth is what corresponds to its object (cf. Gen. 42:16; 1 Kings 22:16–22; Acts 5:1–4; 24:8–11).

Second, the biblical use of the word "err" does not support the intentionalist theory of truth, since it is also used of unintentional "errors" (cf. Lev. 4:2, 27, etc.). Certain acts were wrong (i.e., "errors"), whether the trespassers intended to commit them or not, and hence a guilt offering was called for to atone for their "error" (see chapter 7).

Third, if what is intended is true, then all statements ever made with good intentions were true, even those that were clearly false. This is absurd.

Fourth, even the intentionalist theory depends on the correspondence view of truth. The intentionalist theory claims something is true only if the accomplishments correspond to the intentions. Therefore, without correspondence of intentions and accomplished facts there is no truth.

Fifth, noncorrespondence views of truth are self-defeating, for all non-correspondence views of truth imply a correspondence view of truth in their very attempt to deny the correspondence view. For instance, the claim that "the noncorrespondence view is true" implies that this view corresponds to reality. The noncorrespondence view cannot even express itself without using the correspondence view of truth.

It Undermines the Divine Authority of the Bible

Anti-inerrantist professor Paul Jewett is a case in point. In his book ***Man as Male and Female*** he argued that the apostle Paul affirmed that the man was the head of his wife, but then went on to claim that Paul was wrong! Regardless of what Paul was affirming, the point is the same, and it is this: If the Bible affirms anything, and the Bible is wrong, then the Bible is not the Word of God, since God cannot be wrong (cf. Rom. 3:4; Heb. 6:18; Titus 1:2). In other words, if what the author of Scripture affirms is not what God affirms, then nothing in the Bible has divine authority. In such a case, no matter what the author says is true, we do not know what God is affirming; we are forever locked out of any objective way to determine from the text what God is teaching. In this way, the neo-evangelical way undermines the divine authority of any teaching in Scripture by putting a wedge between what the author affirms is true and what God affirms is true. Thus, in this regard, the neo-evangelical view of the Bible is not better than the liberal view (see chapter 20); the neo-evangelical just makes it ***seem*** better.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Despite its claim to the name, the new evangelical view of the Bible is neither new nor evangelical. It is not new, since to the degree that it deviates from the historical evangelical view, it adopts older forms of liberalism or neo-orthodoxy. And it is not orthodox, since it denies the historical orthodox view that the Bible is the verbally inspired and factually inerrant Word of God. Furthermore, it is unbiblical and is based on a self-defeating view of truth. In short, the neo-evangelical view of Scripture is biblically ungrounded, theologically unsound, and philosophically incoherent.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

EVANGELICALS ON THE BIBLE

The evangelical view of Scripture is a continuation of the historical orthodox view as expressed in the Bible (see chapters 13–16), the church Fathers (see chapter 17), and the Reformers and post-Reformers up to nearly the twentieth century (see chapters 18–19).

Even during the rise of liberalism and after, there was a continuously held orthodox position on Scripture from Jonathan Edwards through the Old Princetonians and on up to the International Conference on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI) at the end of the twentieth century. This continues into the present century through the fast-growing cross-denominational Evangelical Theological Society (ETS).

It is clear from the evidence presented thus far (chapters 13–22) that the continuous, consistent, orthodox view on Scripture of the Christian church is continued by modern evangelicals who affirm the full inspiration and factual inerrancy of Holy Writ. In the United States, this was true from the very beginning.

FRANCIS TURRETIN

Reformed theologian Francis Turretin (1623–1687) was a professor at Geneva,

and his great ***Institutes of Elenctic Theology*** is a classic of reformed scholasticism. In his section on Scripture he summarized and set forth the historical orthodox view on the nature and extent of Scripture in clear, concise, and categorical terms.

The Origin of Scripture

According to Turretin, "the authority of the Scriptures depends on their origin. Just because they are from God, they must be authentic and divine" (***IET***, 62). Thus "Christians should consider as an incontrovertible truth the fact that the Scriptures are inspired of God (***theopneuston***) as the primary foundation of faith" (ibid.).

The Nature of Scripture

Infallibility of the Bible

Turretin also held that the Bible is both infallible and inerrant: "The divine and infallible truth of these books (which have God as their author) is the foundation because he has the highest right to bind men to faith and duty" (ibid.).

Inerrancy of the Bible

Turretin asked, "Do real contradictions occur in Scripture? Or are there any inexplicable (***alyta***) passages which cannot be explained and made to harmonize?" His answer: "We deny" (ibid., 70). Why? Because "when the divinity of the Scriptures is proved, its infallibility necessarily follows" (ibid.). There are not even small errors in the Bible.

> Some think that they can get rid of all difficulties by saying that the sacred writers could slip in memory or err in smaller things; [those such as] Socinus … Castellio … and others. But instead of being a defense against the atheists, this is a base abandonment of the cause (ibid).

"The contradictions (***antilogia***) found in Scripture are apparent, not real; they are to be understood only with respect to us who cannot comprehend and perceive the agreement everywhere, but not in the thing itself" (ibid., 72).

Turretin offered two basic reasons the Bible cannot err:

> (1) The Scriptures are inspired of God (*theopneustos*, 2 Tim. 3:16). The word of God cannot lie (Ps. 19:8–9; Heb. 6:18); cannot pass away and be destroyed (Matt. 5:18); shall endure forever (1 Peter 1:25); and is truth itself (John 17:17). For how could such things be predicated of it, if it contained dangerous contradictions, and if God suffered either the sacred writers to err and to slip in memory, or incurable blemishes to creep into it?
>
> (2) Unless unimpaired integrity characterize the Scriptures, they could not be regarded as the sole rule of faith and practice, and the door would be thrown wide open to atheists, libertarians, enthusiasts and other profane persons like them for destroying its authenticity and overthrowing the foundation of salvation. For since nothing false can be an object of faith, how could the Scriptures be held as authentic and reckoned divine if liable to contradictions and corruptions? (ibid., 71).

Only the Original Text Is Inerrant

The original Hebrew and Greek texts are without error.

> Whatever the men of God wrote, they wrote under the influence of the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21), who, to keep them from error, dictated not only the matter but also the words which cannot be said of any version. They [the Hebrew and Greek texts] are the standard and rule to which all the versions should be applied (ibid., 114).

The Exclusive Authority of Scripture (*Sola Scriptura*)

Not only are the Scriptures the final authority, they are the only written authority for believers: “Do the Scriptures so perfectly contain all things necessary to salvation that there is no need of unwritten (Gr: ***agraphois***) traditions after it?” Turretin’s response: “We affirm against the papists” (ibid., 134).
Again, as to

> whether the Scriptures (or God speaking in them) are the supreme and infallible judge of controversies and the interpreter of Scripture, or whether the church or the Roman pontiff is, we affirm the former and deny the latter against the papists (ibid., 154).

In brief, “The Scriptures alone are the supreme judge of controversy” (ibid., 155).

The Preservation of Scriptures

According to Turretin, God would not inspire what He did not preserve. So the copies, while not inerrant, are providentially preserved.

Providential Preservation of Scripture

Turretin wrote,

> Nor can we readily believe that God, who dictated and inspired each and every word to these inspired men, would not take care of their entire preservation, [for] if men use the utmost care diligently to preserve their words (especially if they are of any importance, as for example a testament or contract) in order that it may not be corrupted, how much more, [must we suppose,] would God take care of his word which he intended as a testament and seal of his covenant with us, so that it might not be corrupted; especially when he could easily foresee and prevent such corruptions in order to establish the faith of his church? (ibid., 71).

The Copies Are Not Inspired

This does not mean that the copies are perfect:

> Although we give to the Scriptures absolute integrity, we do not therefore think that the copyist and printers were inspired (*theopneustous*), but only that the providence of God watched over the copying of the sacred books, so that although many errors might have crept in, it has not so happened (or they have not so crept into the manuscripts) but that they can be easily corrected by a collation of others (or with the Scriptures themselves) (ibid., 72–73).

Thus "it was not necessary therefore to render all the scribes infallible, but only so to direct them that the true reading may always be found out." Nevertheless, "this book far surpasses all others in purity" (ibid., 73).
However, the present Hebrew and Greek texts are authoritative:

> Is the present Hebrew text in things as well as words so authentic and inspired in such a sense that all the extant versions are to be referred to as a rule and, wherever they vary, to be corrected by it? … We affirm (ibid., 116).

[1]

JONATHAN EDWARDS

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) stood out among the Puritan theologians and was a significant figure in the Great Awakening of the eighteenth century.

The Origin of Scripture

Edwards believed that the Bible was the very Word of God:

> Moses was so intimately conversant with God and so continually under the divine conduct, it can't be thought that when he wrote the history of the creation and fall of man, and the history of the church from the creation, that he should not be under the divine direction in such an affair. Doubtless he wrote by God's direction, as we are informed that he wrote the law and the history of the Israelitish Church. (*M*, 352.)

Indeed,

> that the prophets after they had once had intercourse with God by immediate revelation from God gained acquaintance with [him] so as afterwards to know him; as it were to know his voice or know what was indeed a revelation from God is confirmed by
>
> 1 Samuel 3:7
>
> . (*M*, 1144.)

In brief, for Edwards the Bible is God's Word:

> God may reveal things in Scripture, which way he pleases. If by what he there reveals the thing is any way clearly discovered to be the understanding or eye of the mind, it is our duty to receive it as his revelation. (*M*, 1426.)

So for Edwards as well as for Turretin, whatever the Bible says, God says.

Edwards believed that "ministers are not to preach those things which their own wisdom or reason suggest, but the things that are already dictated to them by the superior wisdom and knowledge of God" ("OMB," 27). He occasionally spoke of "dictation" and the biblical writers as "penmen" of the Holy Spirit. However, by this he did not believe in what is commonly called "mechanical dictation" of the Scriptures.

The Human Element in Scripture

Edwards believed that the Bible was also a human book. In reference to Solomon, for example, Edwards wrote,

> God's Spirit made use of his loving inclination, joined with his musing philosophical disposition, and so directed and conducted it in this train of imagination as to represent the love that there is between Christ and his spouse. God saw it very needful and exceedingly useful that there should be some representation of it. (*M*, 303.)

So the “dictation” mentioned by Edwards actually refers to the divinely authoritative product of inspiration and not to the human means by which it was produced.

THE OLD PRINCETONIANS (1812–1936)

George Whitefield (1714–1770) was also closely associated with the Great Awakening in the American colonies but was unable to assume his post at Princeton. There his successors would establish a conservative bastion when a general seminary for the denomination was established at Princeton in 1812. The first professor in the seminary was Archibald Alexander (1772–1851); he and Charles Hodge (1797–1878), his pupil and colleague, became founders of the Princeton theology and the architects of Reformed confessionalism at the seminary. Sidney Ahlstrom noted:

> The Princeton Seminary … shaped a new conservatism and created a fortress that held its ground for a century. Regarding the free-ranging intellect of Edwards with suspicion and viewing revivalism as insubstantial, it chose biblical inerrancy and strict confessionalism as its means of defense. [So] to support this strategy Princeton marshaled great dialectical skill, massive theological efforts, and much impressive erudition. It provided shelter whither revivalists and Fundamentalists could flee when the ideas of Darwin or Wellhausen endangered their tents and tabernacles. [Thus] they taught theological responsibility to anti-intellectuals in many denominations where learning had been held in disrepute. (*TA*, 251.)

These men were succeeded in turn by the efforts of Archibald Alexander Hodge (1823–1886), Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield (1851–1921), and J. Gresham Machen (1881–1937), who “maintained the institution’s reputation for unbending but erudite conservatism down to 1929–1936, when both the seminary and the denomination were disrupted by conservative secessions.”

Charles Hodge (1797–1878)

Charles Hodge's thinking reflects the central Princetonian position on the inspiration and authority of Scripture. His view was expressed with clarity and conciseness.

The Origin of the Bible

In his discussion of "The Protestant Rule of Faith," Hodge argued that "all Protestants agree in teaching that 'the word of God, as contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only infallible rule of faith and practice' " (***ST***, 1:151). He cited with approval the ***Smalcald Articles*** and the ***Form of Concord*** of the Lutheran tradition and the various symbols of the Reformed churches that teach the same "doctrine" before drawing his conclusion, which asserts,

> From these statements it appears that Protestants hold (1) That the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and are therefore infallible, and of divine authority in all things pertaining to faith and practice, and consequently free from all error whether of doctrine, fact, or precept. (2) That they contain all the extant supernatural revelations of God designed to be a rule of faith and practice to his Church. (3) That they are sufficiently perspicuous to be understood by the people, in the use of ordinary means and by the aid of the Holy Spirit, in all things necessary to faith or practice, without the need of any infallible interpreter (ibid., 151–52).

The Nature of Scripture

Hodge affirmed that "the Scriptures are infallible, i.e., given by inspiration of God," where he states that "the infallibility and divine authority of the Scriptures are due to the fact that they are the word of God; and they are the word of God because they were given by inspiration of the Holy Ghost." He first discusses "The Nature of Inspiration—definition," which becomes the basis of his extended treatment of the whole subject. He wrote, "The nature of inspiration is to be learnt from the Scriptures; from their didactic statements, and from their phenomena. There are certain general facts or principles that underlie the Bible, which are assumed in all its teachings, and which therefore must be assumed in its interpretation." Hence, we must, for example, assume:

(1)

That God is not the unconscious ground of all things; nor an unintelligent force; nor a name for the moral order of the universe; nor mere causality; but a Spirit—a self-conscious, intelligent, voluntary agent, possessing all the attributes of our spirits without limitation, and to an infinite degree. [We must also assume:]

(2)

That He is the creator of the world, and extra-mundane, existing before, and independently of it; not its soul, life, or animating principle; but its maker, preserver, and ruler. [Further, we assume:]

(3)

That as a spirit He is everywhere present and everywhere active, preserving and governing all His creatures and all their actions. [Also, we assume:]

(4)

That while both in the external world and in the world of the mind He generally acts according to fixed laws and through secondary causes, He is free to act, and often does act immediately, or without the intervention of such causes, as in creation, regeneration, and miracles. [Too, we assume:]

(5)

That the Bible contains a divine, or supernatural, revelation. The present question is not whether the Bible is what it claims to be; but what does it teach as to the nature and effects of the influence under which it is written?

Hodge concluded,

> On this subject the common doctrine of the Church is, and ever has been, that inspiration was an influence of the Holy Spirit on the minds of certain select men, which rendered them the organs of God for the infallible communication of His mind and will. They were in such a sense the organs of God, and what they said God said (ibid., 153–54).

Opposition to Evolution

Hodge realized the impact Darwinian evolution would have on orthodoxy and wrote a penetrating book entitled ***What Is Darwinism?*** As we saw earlier, his answer was insightful and to the point:

> What is Darwinism? It is Atheism. This does not mean that Mr. Darwin himself and all who adopt his views are atheists; but it means that his theory is atheistic,

> that the exclusion of design from nature is … tantamount to atheism" (*WD*, 177).

As discussed previously (in chapter 19), the belief in naturalistic evolution was to have a devastating influence on the historicity and authority of the Bible. Hodge was trying to head it off at the pass.

Archibald Alexander Hodge and Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield

In the wake of Darwin's ***On the Origin of Species*** (1859) and the establishment of the higher critical theories following the lead of Karl H. Graf (1815–1869), Abraham Kuenen (1828–1891), and Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918), orthodox Christians found leaders for their cause in the son of Charles Hodge, A. A. Hodge (1823–1866), and in B. B. Warfield (1851–1921). Their document titled ***Inspiration*** became something of a normative statement for most conservative Christians since the time it was first published in 1881.

The Origin of the Bible

In contrast to those who were beginning to espouse the notion that the Bible ***contains*** the Word of God, Hodge and Warfield affirmed that the Bible ***is*** the Word of God, saying,

> The New Testament continually asserts of the Scriptures of the Old Testament, and of the several books which constitute it, that they ARE THE WORD OF GOD. What their writers said, God said. (*I*, 29, emphasis original.)

For Hodge and Warfield, it is not merely the thoughts but the very words of Scripture that are infallible:

> Every element of Scripture, whether doctrine or history, of which God has guaranteed the infallibility, must be infallible in its verbal expression. No matter

> how in other respects generated, the Scriptures are a product of human thought, and every process of human thought involves language....

Besides this,

> The Scriptures are a record of divine revelations, and as such consist of words.... Infallible thought must be definite thought, and definite thought implies words. ... Whatever discrepancies or other human limitations may attach to the sacred record, *the line* (of inspired or not inspired, of fallible or infallible) *can never rationally be drawn between the thoughts and the words of Scripture* (ibid., 21–23, parenthesis and emphasis original).

The Human Element in Scripture

Hodge and Warfield argued with regard to the Holy Scriptures:

> The result of the cooperation, in various ways, of the human agency, both in the histories out of which the Scriptures sprang, and their immediate composition and inscription, is everywhere apparent, and gives substance and form to the entire collection of writings (ibid., 12).

They go on to assert that they do not wish to

> deny an everywhere-present human element in the Scriptures. No mark of the effect of this human element, therefore, in style of thought or wording can be urged against inspiration unless it can be shown to result in untruth (ibid., 42).

The obvious humanness of Scripture eliminates any notion of a “mechanical” or “verbal dictation” view of inspiration, because

> each sacred writer was by God specially formed, endowed, educated, providentially conditioned, and then supplied with knowledge naturally, supernaturally or spiritually conveyed, so that he, and he alone, could, and freely would, produce his allotted part (ibid., 14–15).

The Nature of Scripture

For Hodge and Warfield, the nature of Scripture is not only one of full and complete verbal inspiration, but also of absolute errorlessness in all it affirms.

The Verbal Plenary Nature of Inspiration

According to Hodge and Warfield, what biblical writers produced by the inspiration of Scripture is a verbal, plenary, infallible, and inerrant book, the Bible. They indicate this in their definition of ***plenary***, as they write, "the word simply means 'full,' 'complete,' perfectly adequate for the attainment of the end designed, whatever that might have been" (ibid., 18).

The Factual Inerrancy of Scripture

For Hodge and Warfield, "the expression ***verbal inspiration*** does not hold that what the sacred writers ***do not affirm*** is infallibly true, but only that what ***they do affirm*** is infallibly true" (ibid., 80). This is so because

> throughout the whole of his work the Holy Spirit was present, causing his energies to flow into the spontaneous exercises of the writer's faculties, elevating and directing where need be, and everywhere securing the errorless expression in language of the thought designed by God. This last element is what we call "Inspiration" (ibid., 16).

Not every copy of Scripture is inerrant, according to Hodge and Warfield; they say, for example, "We do not assert that the common text, but only that the original autographic text, was inspired" (ibid., 42).

> In view of all the facts known to us, we affirm that a candid inspection of all the ascertained phenomena of the original text of Scripture will leave unmodified the ancient faith of the Church. In all their real affirmations these books are without error (ibid., 27).

A Response to Negative Biblical Criticism

In response to the rise of destructive higher criticism, ushered in by Graf, Kuenen, Wellhausen, and others, Hodge and Warfield declared that they

> admit freely that the traditional belief as to the dates and origin of the several books may be brought into question without involving any doubt as to their inspiration, [yet they] confidently affirm that any theories of the origin or authorship of any book of either Testament which ascribe to them a purely naturalistic genesis, or dates or authors inconsistent with either their own natural claims or the assertions of other Scripture, are plainly inconsistent with the doctrine of inspiration taught by the Church (ibid., 39).

In addition to their joint work, B. B. Warfield produced several decisive tomes in defense of the full plenary inspiration and factual inerrancy of Scripture. Two are especially worthy of mention: ***The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*** and ***Limited Inspiration*** (another term for inerrancy).
The position of Hodge and Warfield is consistent with the basic orthodox teaching about Scripture that had been held from the first century onward. It is also the position espoused by J. Gresham Machen and others into the present setting.

The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI)

The position of Hodge and Warfield is essentially the same as that held by leading evangelicals in November 1978 as defined by the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy. That body drafted a short statement and a longer one. First, the short statement:

1. God, who is Himself Truth and speaks the truth only, has inspired Holy Scripture in order thereby to reveal Himself to lost mankind through Jesus Christ as Creator and Lord, Redeemer and Judge. Holy Scripture is God's witness to Himself.
2. Holy Scripture, being God's own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches: it is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it affirms; obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; embraced, as God's pledge, in

all that it promises.

3. The Holy Spirit, Scripture's divine Author, both authenticates it to us by His inward witness and opens our minds to understand its meaning.
4. Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God's acts in creation, about events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God's saving grace in individual lives.
5. The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded, or made relative to a view of truth contrary to the Bible's own; and such lapses bring serious loss to both the individual and the Church.

In the "Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy" (1978), there are nineteen articles, all worth pondering. This longer statement has become a standard among evangelicals to this day:

ARTICLES OF AFFIRMATION AND DENIAL

Article I

We affirm that the Holy Scriptures are to be received as the authoritative Word of God.
We deny that the Scriptures receive their authority from the Church, tradition, or any other human source.

Article II

We affirm that the Scriptures are the supreme written norm by which God binds the conscience, and that the authority of the Church is subordinate to that of Scripture.
We deny that Church creeds, councils, or declarations have authority greater than or equal to the authority of the Bible.

Article III

We affirm that the written Word in its entirety is revelation given by God.
We deny that the Bible is merely a witness to revelation, or only becomes revelation in encounter, or depends on the responses of men for its validity.

Article IV

We affirm that God who made mankind in His image has used language as a means of revelation.
We deny that human language is so limited by our creatureliness that it is rendered inadequate as a vehicle for divine revelation. We further deny that the corruption of human culture and language through sin has thwarted God's work of inspiration.

Article V

We affirm that God's revelation in the Holy Scriptures was progressive.
We deny that later revelation, which may fulfill earlier revelation, ever corrects or contradicts it. We further deny that any normative revelation has been given since the completion of the New Testament writings.

Article VI

We affirm that the whole of Scripture and all its parts, down to the very words of the original, were given by divine inspiration.
We deny that the inspiration of Scripture can rightly be affirmed of the whole without the parts, or of some parts but not the whole.

Article VII

We affirm that inspiration was the work in which God by His Spirit, through human writers, gave us His Word. The origin of Scripture is divine. The mode of divine inspiration remains largely a mystery to us.
We deny that inspiration can be reduced to human insight, or to heightened states of consciousness of any kind.

Article VIII

We affirm that God in His Work of inspiration utilized the distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers whom He had chosen and prepared.
We deny that God, in causing these writers to use the very words that He chose, overrode their personalities.

Article IX

We affirm that inspiration, though not conferring omniscience, guaranteed true and trustworthy utterance on all matters of which the Biblical authors were moved to speak and write.
We deny that the finitude or fallenness of these writers, by necessity or otherwise, introduced distortion or falsehood into God's Word.

Article X

We affirm that inspiration, strictly speaking, applies only to the autographic text of Scripture, which in the providence of God can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy. We further affirm that copies and translations of Scripture are the Word of God to the extent that they faithfully represent the original.

We deny that any essential element of the Christian faith is affected by the absence of the autographs. We further deny that this absence renders the assertion of Biblical inerrancy invalid or irrelevant.

Article XI

We affirm that Scripture, having been given by divine inspiration, is infallible, so that, far from misleading us, it is true and reliable in all the matters it addresses.

We deny that it is possible for the Bible to be at the same time infallible and errant in its assertions. Infallibility and inerrancy may be distinguished, but not separated.

Article XII

We affirm that Scripture in its entirety is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit.

We deny that Biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science. We further deny that scientific hypotheses about earth history may properly be used to overturn the teaching of Scripture on creation and the flood.

Article XIII

We affirm the propriety of using inerrancy as a theological term with reference to the complete truthfulness of Scripture.

We deny that it is proper to evaluate Scripture according to standards of truth and error that are alien to its usage or purpose. We further deny that inerrancy is negated by Biblical phenomena such as a lack of modern technical precision, irregularities of grammar or spelling, observational descriptions of nature, the reporting of falsehoods, the use of hyperbole and round numbers, the topical arrangement of material, variant selections of material in parallel accounts, or the use of free citations.

Article XIV

We affirm the unity and internal consistency of Scripture.

We deny that alleged errors and discrepancies that have not yet been resolved vitiate the truth claims of the Bible.

Article XV

We affirm that the doctrine of inerrancy is grounded in the teaching of the Bible about inspiration.
We deny that Jesus' teaching about Scripture may be dismissed by appeals to accommodation or to any natural limitation of His humanity.

Article XVI

We affirm that the doctrine of inerrancy has been integral to the Church's faith throughout its history.
We deny that inerrancy is a doctrine invented by Scholastic Protestantism, or is a reactionary position postulated in response to negative higher criticism.

Article XVII

We affirm that the Holy Spirit bears witness to the Scriptures, assuring believers of the truthfulness of God's written Word.
We deny that this witness of the Holy Spirit operates in isolation from or against Scripture.

Article XVIII

We affirm that the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis; taking account of its literary forms and devices, and that Scripture is to interpret Scripture.
We deny the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teaching, or rejecting its claims to authorship.

Article XIX

We affirm that a confession of the full authority, infallibility, and inerrancy of Scripture is vital to a sound understanding of the whole of the Christian faith. We further affirm that such confession should lead to increasing conformity to the image of Christ.
We deny that such confession is necessary for salvation. However, we further deny that inerrancy can be rejected without grave consequences, both to the individual and to the Church.

In addition to the long statement, the ICBI also produced a commentary on the

nineteen articles so that there would be no misunderstanding as to their meaning.[2]

Thus, the orthodox doctrine that the Bible is the infallible, inerrant Word of God in its original manuscripts has maintained itself from the first century to the present. This position holds that the Bible is without error in everything that it affirms.

Indeed, according to the traditional teaching of the Christian church, what the Bible says, God Himself says. That includes all matters of history and science and any other element on which it touches. Any results of higher criticism that are contrary to this teaching are incompatible with the traditional doctrine of the inspiration and authority of Scripture as it has been held throughout church history.

The Evangelical Theological Society (1950–present)

One of the largest theological societies in the world is a cross-denominational group of conservative scholars founded on the statement that "the Bible alone and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written, and therefore inerrant in the autographs." With this firm doctrinal commitment, the ETS has continued its growth to more than three thousand scholars. While the ETS has not officially defined inerrancy in great detail, an understanding of the view of its founding fathers, as well as the discipline it has exercised over deviations, leads to the firm conclusion that what the statement means is in direct line with that of the Hodge-Warfield and ICBI position which, in turn, is the consistent orthodox view of the Christian church from the very beginning.

AN EVALUATION OF THE EVANGELICAL VIEW OF SCRIPTURE

The evangelical view of Scripture has been attacked by liberalism (see chapters 19–20), neo-orthodoxy (chapter 21), and neo-evangelicalism (chapter 22). Since these objections have already been addressed, it is unnecessary to reply here. It

is sufficient to say that without imbibing false antisupernatural and philosophical premises, there is no real foundation for these objections. The testimony of Scripture, the historical church, and good reasoning unite to defend the orthodox view of Scripture. Both the historicity (see chapters 25–26) and full inerrancy (see chapter 27) of Scripture are firmly supported.

There are two basic reasons the long-standing orthodox view of the full inspiration and factual inerrancy of Scripture have often been rejected in modern times: ***First***, the unnecessary and unjustified acceptance of anti-supernaturalism; ***second***, the uncritical and unsubstantiated acceptance of alien philosophical presuppositions.

Acceptance of Antisupernaturalism

Since the unfounded acceptance of antisupernaturalism has already been treated at length (see chapter 3), it will only be summarized here. There are two major points to make. ***First***, philosophically, if one accepts theism, miracles are possible, for if the world was created from nothing (the biggest miracle of all), as the scientific and philosophical evidence shows (see chapter 2), then not only is there a supernatural Being who can intervene in the world, but it is a fact that He has already demonstrated that power by creating the world. In brief: if God, then miracles.

Second, historically, the rejection of the orthodox view of inspiration fell hard on the heels of the denial of supernatural intervention. The first negative critics, like Thomas Hobbes and Benedict Spinoza, make a direct connection between the two, as did many other critics to follow, from David Strauss to Rudolph Bultmann (see chapter 19). Hence, once the antisupernaturalism on which negative criticism was built is shown to be false, as it has been (see chapter 3), then this negative criticism crumbles with it.

To be sure, latter critics found literary and other grounds for rejecting the orthodox view of Scripture, but all of these are based, as we shall see, on unjustified philosophical premises.

Acceptance of Alien Philosophical Views

Ironically, during the same time period that destructive critical views of Scripture began to flourish, namely the late 1800s and early 1900s and following, the greatest factual evidence for the historicity of the biblical text was also emerging. It was during this time that archaeology as a science began to unearth thousands of finds that supported the general historicity of the Bible and in many cases even hundreds of minute details (see chapters 25–26).

Baseless Philosophical Premises

Former critic of Scripture and noted archaeologist William F. Albright (1891–1971) summed up his own journey from a more liberal to a more conservative view of the historicity of the Bible:

> "Authority of Scripture" is a valid theological principle, whereas the "School of Wellhausen" is only one of many ideological systems built on arbitrary philosophical postulates and baseless historical presuppositions. ("TMCV" in *CT*, [360] 4.)

The admonition of Paul the apostle is well taken: "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ" (Col. 2:8). The failure to heed this admonition has led many astray from the historical evangelical view of Scripture. Since these were already discussed earlier (see chapter 19), they will only be briefly noted here.

Philosophical presuppositions lay at the root of the modern rejection of the historical orthodox view of Scripture. These include the antisupernaturalism of Spinoza and Hume, the inductivism of Bacon, the materialism of Hobbes, the rationalism of Spinoza, the skepticism of Hume, the agnosticism of Kant, the positivism of Comte and Mill, the romanticism of Rousseau, the pietism of Schleiermacher, the deism of Paine, and the evolutionism of Spencer and Darwin. In addition, one could add the conventionalism of Wittgenstein, the progressivism of Hegel, the existentialism of Kierkegaard, and the processism of Whitehead (see chapter 19 for discussion of these). Let's review a few examples of how these undermine a high view of Scripture.

Antisupernaturalism

Common to almost all forms of negative criticism, at least in their origin, is antisupernaturalism. The denial of miracles in the Bible began with Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), was systematically treated by Benedict Spinoza (1632–1677), and was widely extended through David Hume (1711–1776). Once it became a generally accepted procedure for approaching Scripture, it was only a

matter of time before it attacked the very foundations for an orthodox view of Scripture, for the very historicity of the documents became suspect when the numerous miracles they record could no longer be accepted.

Evolutionism

Any grammatical-historical analysis of Genesis, as well as hundreds of other verses on Creation (see Geisler, ***KTAC***, 149–51), reveals that God created the cosmos, the first human beings, and all basic forms of life. However, if the Darwinian hypothesis is right, then Genesis must be wrong. Since Darwin's view was widely accepted beginning with 1860 and following, it is no surprise that, at the same time, the historicity of the Bible became more and more rejected, and thus the need to respond to the apostle's warning and beware of the philosophy of evolutionism.

The sad fact is that what Darwin called "the theory of evolution" is neither factually nor philosophically necessary. As Darwin himself said in the introduction to his ***On the Origin of Species:***

> For I am well aware that scarcely a single point is discussed in this volume on which facts cannot be adduced, often apparently leading to conclusions directly opposite to those at which I have arrived.

He added, "A fair result can be obtained only by fully stating and balancing the facts and arguments on both sides of each question; and this is here impossible."

Many other evolutionists have admitted that the general theory of macroevolution (large-scale change between species) is really a tautology—that is, an empty statement that cannot be falsified.

Again, one thing is certain: Macroevolution is neither philosophically nor factually necessary; an alternative view is logically possible. Indeed, as the current intelligent design movement has demonstrated, without the aid of a naturalistic philosophical presupposition that methodologically demands that all true scientific explanations be naturalistic, the so-called factual basis for macroevolution crumbles (see volume 2). At any rate, if there is no need to accept evolution, which is contrary to Genesis and the rest of Scripture, then there is no reason to reject the historicity of these passages because of the theory of evolution.

Progressivism

Much of modern biblical scholarship was sucked into the philosophy of historicism in the wake of the developmental pantheism of G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831). In his massive work ***The Phenomenology of Spirit*** and his later

Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Hegel spelled out his historical progressivism in what became known through the misinterpretation of Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814) as a dialectic of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. Nonetheless, Hegel did affirm that history is the unfolding of Absolute Spirit in a developmental dialectic.

The results of this so-called "Hegelianism" for biblical scholarship were disastrous. F. C. Baur's (1792–1860) Tubingen School contended that the gospel of John must be viewed as second-century synthesis of the earlier thesis/antithesis conflict of Peter and Paul. This conclusion was arrived at with almost total disregard for the internal and external evidence for an earlier first-century date for John. The so-called "exegetical" conclusions, however massive and scholarly, were largely determined by a prevailing Zeitgeist. Once again, the biblical exegete should have heeded the warning to "beware of philosophy."

Existentialism

The father of modern existentialism was not a twentieth-century French atheist (Jean-Paul Sartre) but a Danish Christian named Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) who believed that, on the whole, the doctrine as it is taught in the church was entirely sound. Nonetheless, few have done more undermining of the church from within; remember that it was his philosophical son, Karl Barth (1886–1968), who gave rise to neo-orthodoxy. Kierkegaard concluded that even if we assume that the defenders of Christianity have succeeded in proving about the Bible everything they could wish, no one has come to faith in that process. Kierkegaard then argued that even if we assume that Christianity's opponents have proved what ***they*** desire to demonstrate about the Bible, the Christian faith has not been damaged in the slightest. Kierkegaard's assertion is not true, in either regard.

When considering damage, we need only mention the Kierkegaardian beliefs:

(1) Religious truth is located in personal encounter (subjectivity).
(2) Propositional truth is not essential to the faith.
(3) Destructive higher criticism is not harmful to Christianity.
(4) God is "wholly other" and essentially unknowable, even through biblical revelation.

These give further significance to the Pauline warning to "beware of

philosophy."

There are many other philosophical positions which, wittingly or unwittingly, have been imbibed by modern biblical scholars to the detriment of their view of Scripture. They have been detailed and discussed elsewhere (see Geisler, "BPWBE" in ***JETS***, 1999) and include aristotelianism, platonism, nominalism, agnosticism, and anthropological monism. The truth is that any philosophy alien to biblical theism will undermine our confidence in Scripture.

RESTATING A DEFENSE FOR THE EVANGELICAL VIEW

Biblical Defense

The biblical basis for the evangelical view of Scripture is sound (see chapters 13–16). Whatever one says about the truth or falsity of what the Bible teaches about itself, this seems inescapable; namely, it affirms that it is the God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:16), imperishable (Matt. 5:17–18), absolutely true (John 17:17), and unbreakable Word of God (John 10:35).

Historical Defense

The historical defense of the orthodox view of Scripture is also very strong. It has been shown to be the dominant, if not exclusive, view of every major Father and Reformer of the Christian church for nearly nineteen hundred years (see chapters 17–18). Deviations were considered unorthodox, and the major ones are late and philosophically unjustified (see chapters 19–22).

Philosophical Defense

Negatively, no philosophical premises that undermine the evangelical view of Scripture are necessary, and all are refutable. Positively, a realistic theism, for which there is good philosophical justification (see chapters 1–11), wards off all major attacks on the evangelical view of Scripture.

Practical Defense

If one believes, as both history and personal experience confirm, that ideas have consequences, then it is not difficult to defend the thesis that modern negative criticism of the Bible has left the non-evangelical segments of the church without an objective divine authority for faith and practice. The results of this are manifest in the life of the church on both a personal and social level. One need not recite the litany of moral decay we have experienced since (and logically, because of) the undermining of an objective divine authority. As the psalmist said, "When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?" (Ps. 11:3).

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CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

FUNDAMENTALISM ON THE BIBLE

The term “fundamentalism” covers a wide variety of beliefs regarding inspiration. Many contemporary theologians who would call themselves fundamentalists accept the same view as expressed in the “evangelical” position (see chapter 23). Both groups, evangelical and fundamentalist, trace their roots back to Charles Hodge, A. A. Hodge, B. B. Warfield, and J. Gresham Machen, who were part of a group in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries called historic fundamentalists. Among the rest who call themselves fundamentalists there are at least two main views: the verbal dictation position and the Inspired-King-James-Version position.

Historic Fundamentalism

Historic fundamentalism, which arose out of the controversy between conservatives and liberals in the Presbyterian Church and their seminary at Princeton, held the standard orthodox view of Scripture, the view of the Fathers and Reformers of the church (see chapters 17–18). Their position is substantially the same as the one described as “evangelical” (in chapter 23): The Bible is the inspired, infallible, and inerrant written Word of God, and inspiration is both

verbal and plenary. In brief, the Bible is both God's Word and man's words. Errors exist only in copies, not in the originals. Everything the Bible affirms, whether in theology or in science and history, is without error.

Contemporary Fundamentalism

Those who are currently called "fundamentalist" (by themselves or by evangelicals) do not hold a monolithic view of Scripture. They range in belief from the standard evangelical view to a verbal dictation position and even beyond to a "King-James-only" view.

THE VERBAL DICTATION VIEW

The typical charge by non-evangelicals against most forms of contemporary fundamentalism is not accurate. No knowledgeable proponent under the label "fundamentalist" confesses to believe in "mechanical dictation," which implies an Islam-like[1] view of God dictating word-for-word to biblical writers who served as mere secretaries and recorded precisely what they received. Even those few fundamentalists who are favorable to the term "***verbal*** dictation" refuse to call it "***mechanical*** dictation."

The Basis for the False Charge of Mechanical Dictation

The basis for this false charge springs from several non-evangelical misunderstandings, the ***first*** of which is a semantic issue. All fundamentalists and most evangelicals believe that the very words of the Bible are inspired: "All ***scripture*** [the writing] is God-breathed" (2 Tim. 3:16). Thus, each word (as part of a sentence and within its literary context) is the very word that God affirmed concurrently with the human author of Scripture (see chapters 13–15). That is to say, that each word is inspired of God ***holistically***, insofar as it is a part of the

literary unit of which it is a part. Unfortunately, the fundamentalist claim is often understood as each word being inspired ***atomistically***—in and of itself. However, since words do not have meaning in and of themselves (see chapter 6) but are only a part of a sentence, which is the smallest unit of meaning, there are no such things as inspired words in the individual, atomistic sense. Words have potential meaning and can be put together into meaningful sentences, but individually and alone they do not have meaning.

Second, non-evangelicals often point to statements by the Fathers and Reformers (see chapters 17–18) that use the word ***dictation*** in regard to the Scriptures. However, their statements are often taken out of context: The Latin word *dictus*, translated "dictate" or "dictation," like the English word ***dictates***, does not always mean a word-for-word dictation. To rephrase an earlier example, when we say that a given law comes to us at the dictates of the Congress, this does not necessarily mean that we possess the word-for-word rendition of it but simply that by the authority of Congress a law has been established of which we have a summary.

Or, to put the matter another way, if evangelicals are to be charged with believing in verbal "dictation" in some sense of the term, then by the same token the Fathers and Reformers must be charged with the same view. But in this event, because of the clear testimony of the Fathers and Reformers, it is not a mechanical word-for-word kind of dictation that ignores the personality and vocabulary of the biblical authors (see chapter 15).

Third, the early Fathers of the church often used less-than-ideal illustrations of the biblical writers as used by the Holy Spirit to produce Scripture. By describing them as a musical instrument through which God brought the message, one can easily misunderstand it in the sense of a ***mere*** mechanical tool used by God to produce a word-for-word product. While the illustration may be unfortunate, its meaning is not to be construed as denying the human nature of Scripture. Like illustrations (parables) used by Jesus (cf. Luke 18), we should look for the main point being made and not try to make it walk on all fours.

The fact of the matter is that almost all fundamentalists deny the mechanical dictation view of Scripture, and very few even speak of any kind of verbal dictation. The famous American evangelist John R. Rice was an exception.

The Verbal Dictation View of John R. Rice

John R. Rice (1895–1980) is a key example of a fundamentalist who embraced a view he called "verbal dictation." " 'All Scripture is God-breathed,' that is, the Scripture itself is breathed out from God." And, he inquires, "if God gave all the words in the Bible, then is not that dictation?" (***OGBB***, 286).

However, Rice hastened to say that it was not ***mechanical*** dictation; it was simply ***verbal*** dictation. His response to identifying these two positions into one was to say,

> This charge of "mechanical dictation" against fundamental Bible believers is dishonest pretense. [After all,] a secretary is not ashamed to take dictation from a man. Why should a prophet be ashamed to take dictation from God? (ibid., 265, 287).

According to Rice, saying the Bible is verbally dictated does not mean it has no human dimension. "Certainly we admit gladly that there is a 'human side of the Bible in its style, language, composition, history and culture' " (ibid., 141). Just how did God get a word-for-word, verbal dictation recorded and yet use the different styles of the biblical writers?

> God planned all that so that each one was chosen before he was born and fitted to be the instrument God wanted to use. The varying styles are all God's styles in the Bible. God made the men and made the styles, and used them according to plan (ibid., 206).

Rightly, then, "the Bible does not simply in some places 'contain the Word of God'; the Bible is the Word of God." This means the Bible is "absolutely correct when it speaks on matters of history or geography." Inerrancy does not extend to every copy of the Bible: "The original autographs of the Scriptures were infallibly correct" (ibid., 88). Thus Rice rejected all higher criticism of the Bible, saying, "Higher criticism tends to sit in judgment on the Bible and let poor, sinning, frail, ignorant, mortal men pass judgment on the Word of God" (ibid., 136). Instead of a fallible, mutilated divine message, Rice held to a verbally dictated, inerrant Book—the Bible.

THE INSPIRED-KING-JAMES-VERSION VIEW

Most fundamentalists were reared on the King James Version of the Bible. Indeed, after nearly four hundred years it is still one of the most popular translations in the world, and this is no accident. In 1611, when it was translated, the English language was at its zenith. The King James translators used the beauty, rhythm, cadence, and descriptive power possible through this

Elizabethan style to produce an enduring and endearing rendition of the Word of God. Those who have been accustomed to the King James Version understandably revere its majestic expression of God's truth.

The Inspired-King-James Claim

However, some have taken things too far by idolizing this aesthetically pleasing translation. In fact, they have frozen the truth of the original Hebrew and Greek texts of the Bible in this seventeenth-century book as time has passed them by. In so doing, they have lost the true meaning of God's Word as they cling to language that has lost much of its meaning to a twenty-first-century reader.

The most noted proponent of this position is Peter Ruckman, who has produced several works on the topic, including ***The Christian's Handbook of Manuscript Evidence*** and ***Why I Believe the King James Version Is the Word of God.*** The central thesis of this view is that "The King James Bible Alone = the Word of God Alone" (White, ***KJOC***, 3).

Other popular books defending the KJV-only models and castigating other translations as demonic are Gail Riplinger's ***New Age Bible Versions*** and ***Which Bible Is God's Word?*** Few scholars, even among evangelicals, take these views seriously; James White has produced an excellent critique in ***The King James Only Controversy.***

Peter Ruckman even goes so far as to affirm that the Greek text must be corrected by the King James Version (***CHME***, 115–38). Noteworthy is his statement that "mistakes in the A.V. 1611 [King James Version] are advanced revelation." Thus, he adds, "in exceptional cases, where the majority of Greek manuscripts stand against the A.V. 1611, put them in file 13"[2] (ibid., 126, 130). Ruckman appears to believe that the English text of the King James is an inerrant, "re-inspired" version. Armed with this presupposition, adherents of this view speak of other translations of the Bible as "perverted Bibles" and those who use them as "Bible haters."

A Critique of the Inspired-King-James-Version Claim

There are many reasons for rejecting the claims of the King-James-Version-only group. Among them the following are noteworthy.

First, the choice of versions is arbitrary. Why a Bible in English rather than one in German, French, Spanish, Russian, or Chinese? Further, why the King James Version when there are many other faithful English translations of the Bible? Some twelve hundred different versions of the Bible (in whole or in part) have been published in English (Geisler and Nix, ***GIB***, 605–35).

Second, why choose only this English Bible as inspired? Certainly not because it is the most popular—the NIV is now more widely used. Nor because it has lasted longer, for the Greek text is older, and the Latin Vulgate has endured for longer than the King James Version, namely, for more than a thousand years.

Third, why a recent edition of the KJV? Why not the original one? The KJV has gone through numerous editorial changes; the original edition had innumerable errors. For example, in Matthew 26:36 the name "Judas" was used instead of "Jesus." In the second edition, twenty words are repeated in Exodus 14:10. Even the two editions issued in 1611 differ from each other (Lewis, ***EB***, 37).

Later printings of the KJV produced the so-called "Wicked Bible," which left out the "not" in "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Ex. 20:14). Intentional changes were made in the 1612 and 1613 editions (ibid., 38). In 1659 William Kilburne claimed to find ***twenty thousand*** errors that had crept into six different editions in the 1650s. In 1769 Benjamin Blayney changed spelling and punctuation. Words like Hierusalem, Marie, assone, Foorth, shalbe, et, creeple, fift, sixt, ioy, middes, and charet were no longer used. A study of all these changes was made by F. H. Scrivener in ***The Authorized Edition of the English Bible*** (1611).

Fourth, the original KJV had the apocryphal books in it. They were not taken out until a 1629 edition, but this did not become general until the nineteenth century (Lewis, ***EB***, 38). If the original KJV was inspired, then why did it contain the Apocrypha? All fundamentalists reject these books as not being inspired.

Fifth, to hold to the KJV as an inspired translation is to confess that many things in it are meaningless and/or false. Many English words have not only lost their meaning since 1611, but some have even reversed in meaning.

"We do you to wit" (2 Cor. 8:1 KJV) is not commonly understood today—it means, "We want you to know." Also, "I trow not" (Luke 17:9 KJV) is senseless to modern readers; hence, it needs to be retranslated into, today's English as "I

think not" (NKJV).
In a classic example, one word has reversed its meaning since the seventeenth century. The King James Version says (in 2 Thess. 2:7), "He who now letteth, will let." At that time the word ***let*** meant to "hinder"; today it means to "permit." Another example is the word ***prevent*** (cf. 1 Thess. 4:15; Amos 9:10), which meant "precede" in 1611. Thus, those who cling to the King James have actually reversed the meaning of inspired Scripture in these cases and misconstrued it in many others.
It is one thing to embrace, as the author does, the beauty and majesty of the King James Version, but it is quite another to claim it is the inspired original against which all other translations should be measured. As Jack Lewis correctly noted, "Those who feel they can escape the problem of translations by retreating into the citadel of the KJV have a zeal for God that is not in accord with knowledge" (***EB***, 67).[2]

THE FAILURE OF EXTREME FUNDAMENTALISM'S VIEW OF SCRIPTURE

In general, fundamentalism's view of Scripture can be faulted on many levels, and two faults are prominent: It diminishes the human nature of Scripture, and it fails to engage the culture. While not all the following criticism applies to all who call themselves fundamentalists (since some of them hold an evangelical view of Scripture), many are subject to one or more of the following criticisms.

The Charge of Biblical Docetism—Diminishing Scripture's Humanity

One charge properly laid at the door of an extreme fundamentalist view of Scripture is that of biblical docetism. Docetism was an early heresy that, while affirming Christ's full deity, denied His full humanity—Christ was ***truly*** God, but only ***apparently*** human. So biblical docetism is an unorthodox view of Scripture, since it too diminishes the Bible's human side. Sometimes this is not done in principle but only in practice, yet it is done nonetheless (see chapter 15).

Diminishing the human side of the Bible is done in many ways, one of which is simply to neglect it. Another is to hold things inconsistent with it. In terms of specifics, as we saw in chapter 15, denying biblical humanity is a failure to recognize one or more of the following human characteristics of Scripture:

First, like all other human books, the Bible has human authors, some forty in all, including Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, and Peter.

Second, the Bible was written in human languages: Hebrew in the Old Testament (with some Aramaic) and Greek in the New Testament, the common trade language of the first century.

Third, the Bible also utilizes different literary styles, from the down-to-earth language of a farmer from southern Israel (Amos) to the exalted poetry of Isaiah and Luke's sophisticated training in the Greek culture.

Fourth, the Bible uses different human literary forms. These different human forms of speech include narrative (as in Samuel and Kings), poetry (as in Job and Psalms), parables (as in the Synoptic Gospels), some allegory (as in Galatians 4), and the use of symbols (as in the Revelation). Metaphors and similes abound in Scripture (cf. James 1–2), and even satire (Matt. 19:24) and hyperbole are found (Col. 1:23).

Fifth, the Bible reflects different human perspectives, from that of a shepherd (Psalm 23) to a prophet (Daniel) to a pastor (2 Tim.) to a chronicler (1 Chron.) to a historian (cf. Luke 1:1–4). Also, as we have seen, biblical writers speak from an observer's perspective, such as when writing of the sun rising or setting (Josh. 1:15; cf. 10:13), and even round numbers are used (Josh. 3:4; 4:13; 2 Chron. 4:2).

Sixth, the Bible reveals human thought patterns and processes, including human reasoning. Romans, for example, is a tightly knit logical treatise that has been used to demonstrate the principles and processes of rational thought (cf. Acts 17:2); Scripture even records a memory lapse (1 Cor. 1:14–16).

Seventh, the Bible reveals human emotions, including great sorrow (Rom. 9:2), anger (Gal. 3:1), and melancholy and loneliness (2 Tim. 4:9–16), along with joy (Phil. 1:4) and many others.

Eighth, the Bible manifests specific human interests. Luke had a medical interest, as indicated by his use of medical terms. Hosea had a rural interest, David a shepherd's viewpoint. The presentation of the material in each biblical book is colored by the experiences and interests of the author.

Ninth, as we have demonstrated, the Bible expresses human culture, basically

Semitic. This included the common means of greeting by a kiss (1 Thess. 5:26). Likewise, a woman's veil as a sign of her respect for her husband is a manifestation of human culture (1 Cor. 11:5). Numerous other Near Eastern cultural practices are indicated, including washing feet upon entering a home (Luke 7:44; cf. John 13), shaking off the dust from one's feet as a sign of condemnation (Luke 10:11), and reclining (not sitting) at meals (John 13:23). *Tenth*, the Bible utilizes other written human sources, including the Book of Jashar (Josh. 10:13), The Books of the Wars of the Lord (Num. 21:14), and the records of Samuel the seer … Nathan the prophet … Gad the seer (1 Chron. 29:29). It even quotes non-Christian poets three times (Acts 17:28; 1 Cor. 15:33; Titus 1:12), and Jude cited material from the non-canonical books of the Assumption of Moses and the Book of Enoch (Jude 9, 14).

The failure to take seriously these and other human traits in the Bible is a characteristic of many fundamentalists' views of Scripture. In addition to its divine source, the Bible comes to us through completely human instruments. To deny or neglect this is a docetic trait found in much of fundamentalism.

The Charge of Failing to Engage the Intellectual Culture

The extreme fundamentalist view of the Bible also tends to be anti-intellectual; it fails to study carefully and respond insightfully to the current culture. Out of fear of compromising, it moves toward the opposite extreme of isolating, which manifests itself in an ignorance of the opposing philosophies and ideologies set against Christianity in our intellectual milieu. Unlike the apostle Paul, who engaged with success the anti-Christian philosophers of his day (see Acts 17), many contemporary fundamentalists are content with a "Bible only" mentality that not only neglects God's general revelation but also believes wrongly that one can preach the Word effectively without understanding the world to whom they preach it. They focus on the message but neglect their surroundings. This often leads to a fortress mentality and increasing irrelevance in the eyes of the very people it needs to reach with the Gospel.

CONCLUSION

The more moderate fundamentalists have adopted an evangelical view of Scripture not unlike that of the historic fundamentalists from the turn of the twentieth century. However, more extreme fundamentalists have either adopted a verbal dictation view or else canonized the King James Version of the Bible. Their extreme separatism has led them to become more isolated from the culture and from intellectually engaging the ideologies that undermine their conservative view of Scripture. Further, they tend in the direction of a biblical docetism, downplaying the human elements of Scripture and stressing the divine side.

In summation, liberals claim that the Bible came by human intuition through natural processes, while liberal evangelicals insist that a divine elevation of human literature explains the source of Scripture. At the same time, adherents to neo-orthodoxy see Scripture as a fallible human record of revelational events, whereas neo-evangelicals see inspiration of only redemptive truth or purpose. Extreme fundamentalists go toward the opposite end of the spectrum, claiming that the Bible is verbally dictated. Between these extremes is the historic, orthodox, evangelical view that affirms both the full divinity and full humanity of Scripture in concurrence with the words of God and the words of the human authors He moved upon (2 Peter 1:20–21) to produce a God-breathed product (2 Tim. 3:16).

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SECTION THREE

THEOLOGICAL

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

THE HISTORICITY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Christianity is a historical religion, and the main events on which it is based, such as Creation and the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, claim to be space-time events in the objective world. Also, the New Testament assumes the historicity of the Old; many of its most crucial teachings are based on it. Hence, the integrity of the two covenants is tied together.

Jesus referred to many of the most disputed passages of the Old Testament as historical, including the creation of Adam and Eve (Matt. 19:4–5), Jonah and the great fish (Matt. 12:40–41), and the Flood of Noah (Matt. 24:37–39). Indeed, He and the New Testament writers refer to persons or events from every chapter of Genesis 1–22 and many others in the rest of the Old Testament (see chapter 16). The historicity of the Old Testament is based on two major factors: The reliability of the Old Testament text, and the reliability of those who put the text together.

THE RELIABILITY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPTS

The reliability of Old Testament manuscripts is based on three factors: the

abundance of the manuscripts, the dating of the manuscripts, and the accuracy of the manuscripts. Accuracy is based in part on the reputation of the Jewish scribes for their meticulous work and for their ability to crosscheck their work by internal and external means.[1]

The Abundance of Old Testament Manuscripts

Considering the paucity of manuscripts for other works of antiquity, even before modern discoveries there were a substantial number of Old Testament manuscripts. For example, most works from antiquity survive on a mere handful of manuscripts: There are only seven for Plato, eight for Thucydides, eight for Herodotus, ten of Caesar's ***Gallic Wars***, and twenty for the works of Tacitus. Only Demosthenes' and Homer's works have numbers into the hundreds.[2] Yet as early as the late 1700s Benjamin Kennicott published 615 Old Testament manuscripts, and a few years later Giovanni de Rossi published 731 manuscripts (Geisler and Nix, ***GIB***, 408).
Further, beginning around 1890 some ten thousand Old Testament manuscripts were found in the Cairo Geniza, and since 1947 caves by the Dead Sea at Qumran have produced over six hundred Old Testament manuscripts. The largest collection of manuscripts in the world, the Second Firkowitch Collection in Leningrad, contains 1,582 items of Bible and Masora[3] on parchment, plus twelve hundred Hebrew fragments (ibid., 257–58).

The Dating of the Old Testament Manuscripts

Not only the abundance but also the dating of these manuscripts vouches for their accuracy. Whereas conservatives place the last book of the Old Testament around 400 B.C. (and liberals put Daniel at c. 165 B.C.), some Old Testament manuscripts are even earlier than the liberal date. For example, certain Dead Sea Scrolls go back as far as the third century B.C., and the Nash Papyrus is dated

between the second century B.C. and the first century A.D.[4]
While most Old Testament manuscripts are dated from A.D. 800–1100, nonetheless, with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls the overall accuracy of the later manuscripts has been attested. These Old Testament manuscripts include great documents like Oriental 4445 (of most of the Pentateuch), Codex Cairensis (most of the rest of the Old Testament), Codex Leningradensis (of the whole Old Testament), the Babylonian Codex (of the latter Prophets), the Reuchlin Codex (of the Prophets), the ten thousand manuscripts of the Cairo Geniza, and over six hundred in the Dead Sea Scrolls, which include parts of every Old Testament book except Esther (ibid., 358–65).

The Accuracy of the Old Testament Manuscripts

The accuracy of these multitudinous manuscripts is known from both internal and external evidence. The external evidence comes from the Dead Sea Scrolls, which provide a cross-check on how accurately manuscripts were copied during a thousand-year period, since the Dead Sea manuscripts were a millennium earlier than the previous (Masoretic) manuscripts (ibid., 380–82).
First, Jewish reverence for Scripture led to careful transmission of the Old Testament. The Talmud reveals the scrupulous rules Jewish scribes followed, including the counting of all the letters and lines to make sure they matched. Manuscripts that contained even one mistake were discarded (ibid.).
Second, there are many duplicate passages in the Old Testament. Some Psalms occur twice (e.g., 14 and 53); much of Isaiah 36–39 is found in 2 Kings 18–20; Isaiah 2:2–4 and Micah 4:1–3 are almost identical; and Jeremiah 52 is a repeat of 2 Kings 25. An examination of these passages shows not only substantial agreement but an almost word-for-word identity, revealing how accurately they were copied down through the centuries.
Third, the Hebrew Old Testament was translated into Greek beginning about 250 B.C. This translation, known as the Septuagint (LXX, or “seventy”), is also a cross-check on the accuracy with which the Old Testament was transmitted. With the exception of minor variants that do not affect the overall message of the Old Testament, there is substantial agreement between the Hebrew and Greek translations of the Old Testament. Indeed, most of the New Testament citations

of the Old Testament are from the Greek LXX.

Fourth, with regard to the Five Books of Moses, the Samaritan Pentateuch provides substantial support for the Hebrew Old Testament. While there are many minor variants, in chapter after chapter and verse after verse, the Samaritan Pentateuch is a confirmation of the general text of the Hebrew Old Testament.

Fifth, by far and away the most important cross-check on the accuracy of the transmission of the Hebrew Old Testament through the centuries is the Dead Sea Scrolls, for they provide manuscripts that are one thousand years earlier than most that were used to establish the Hebrew text. Comparative studies have been made, and the results reveal a word-for-word identity in some 95 percent of the text; the minor variants consist mostly of slips of the pen or spelling.

To be specific, the Isaiah Scroll led the translators of the Old Testament in the Revised Standard Version originally to make only thirteen small changes in the whole book, eight of which were known from other ancient sources. On further, subsequent examination, these have collapsed down into only ***three*** (Kaiser, ***OTDATR***, 46). Even more specifically, to use Isaiah 53 as an example, other than a few spelling and stylistic changes, there is only one word ("light" in v. 11) of difference in the entire text. In brief, ***there were no changes in meaning after a thousand years of copying and relatively few changes in words!*** (Geisler and Nix, ***GIB***, 382).

Professor Walter Kaiser, citing Douglas Stuart, summarized it well:

> It is fair to say that the verses, chapters, and books of the Bible would read largely the same, and would leave the same impression with the reader, even if one adopted virtually every possible *alternative* reading to those now serving as the basis for current English translations. (*OTDATR*, 48.)

THE RELIABILITY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT AUTHORS

In addition to the reliability of the Old Testament manuscripts, there is strong evidence for the reliability of the Old Testament writers, and their historical accounts have found increasing acceptance by scholars.

The Historicity of Particular Sections of the Old Testament

As to the historicity of the Old Testament in general, world-renowned archaeologist William F. Albright (1891–1971) wrote, “There can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of the Old Testament tradition” (***ARI***, 176). He added,

> As critical study of the Bible is more and more influenced by the rich new material from the ancient Near East we shall see a steady rise in respect for the historical significance of now neglected or despised passages and details in the Old and New Testaments. (*FSAC*, 81.)

Even usually liberal sources are now admitting the overall historical reliability of the Old Testament. Excerpting from his book ***Is the Bible True?*** Jeffery L. Sheler notes for ***U.S. News & World Report.***

> In extraordinary ways, modern archaeology has affirmed the historical core of the Old Testament—corroborating key portions of the stories of Israel’s patriarchs, the Exodus, the Davidic monarchy, and the life and times of Jesus. (October 25, 1999, 52.)

The Historicity of Adam and Eve (Genesis 1–3)

Many critical scholars consider the first chapters of Genesis to be myth, not history. They point to the poetic nature of the text, the parallel between the early chapters of Genesis and ancient myths, the alleged contradiction of the text with science, and the late date for Adam in the Bible, which is opposed to scientific dating that places the first humans much earlier.

Evidence for the Historicity of Adam and Eve

However, the Bible presents Adam and Eve as literal people who had real children from whom the rest of the human race came (cf. Gen. 5:1f.). There are good reasons to believe that Adam and Eve were real historical persons. *First*, Genesis 1–2 presents them as actual persons and even narrates the

important events in their lives.
Second, they gave birth to literal children who did the same (Gen. 4:1, 25; 5:1f.).
Third, the phrase "this is the account of," used to record later history in Genesis (6:9; 10:1, 32; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 19, etc.), is used of the Creation account (2:4) and of Adam and Eve and their descendants (Gen. 5:1).
Fourth, later Old Testament chronology of historical persons places Adam at the top of the list (1 Chron. 1:1).
Fifth, the New Testament places Adam at the beginning of Jesus' literal ancestors (Luke 3:38).
Sixth, Jesus referred to Adam and Eve as the first actual "male and female," making their physical union the basis for His teaching on marriage (Matt. 19:4–5).
Seventh, the book of Romans declares that literal death was brought into the world by a literal "Adam" (Rom. 5:12–14).
Eighth, the comparison of Adam (the "first Adam") with Christ (the "last Adam") in 1 Corinthians 15:45 manifests that Adam was understood as being historical.
Ninth, Paul's declaration that "Adam was first formed, then Eve" (1 Tim. 2:13–14) reveals that he speaks of actual persons.
Tenth, logically there had to be a first real set of human beings, male and female, or the race would have had no way to get going. The Bible calls this literal couple "Adam and Eve," and there is no reason to doubt their true existence.

Answering Some Objections to Adam's Historicity

The objections to the historicity of Adam and Eve fall far short of the mark. Each one will be addressed in turn.

The Alleged Poetic Nature of Genesis 1

Many reasons can be given for rejecting the assertion that the Creation record of Genesis 1–2 is poetical:
First, even though there is some possible parallelism of ideas between the first three and last three days, Genesis 1 is not in the typical form of Hebrew poetry, which involves couplets set in parallel form. A comparison with Psalms or Proverbs readily shows the difference.

Second, Genesis 2 is part of the Creation record, and it has no poetic parallelism.
Third, the Creation account is a straightforward narration like any historical narration in the Old Testament.
Fourth, the Creation account is introduced like all the other historical accounts in Genesis—with the phrase "This is the account of …" (Gen. 2:4; 5:1).
Fifth, both Jesus and the New Testament writers refer to the Creation events as historical (cf. Matt. 19:4; Rom. 5:14; 1 Cor. 15:45; 1 Tim. 2:13–14).

Sixth, the Ebla tablets[5] have confirmed the Genesis account of a monotheistic *ex nihilo* creation. They read, "Lord of heaven and earth: the earth was not, you created it; the light of day was not, you created it; the morning light you had not [yet] made exist" (***Ebla Archives***, 259).
Seventh, by comparison with ancient myths, the Genesis account reveals it is the original, since it is simpler and unembellished. As noted Old Testament scholar Kenneth A. Kitchen observed:

> The common assumption that the Hebrew account is simply a purged and simplified version of the Babylonian legend is … fallacious on methodological grounds. In the ancient Near East, the rule is that simple accounts or traditions may give rise (by accretion and embellishment) to elaborate legends, but not vice versa. In the ancient Orient, legends were not simplified or turned into pseudo-history (historicized) as has been assumed for early Genesis. (*AOOT*, 89.)

The Alleged Contradiction with Science

The Genesis Creation account is contradictory to macroevolution in many ways (see volume 2, part 2).[6]
First, it speaks of the creation of Adam from the dust of the ground, not his evolution from other animals (Gen. 2:7).
Second, it speaks of direct immediate creation at God's command, not long natural processes (cf. Gen. 1:1, 3, 6, 9, 21, 27).
Third, according to Genesis, Eve was created from Adam; she did not evolve separately.
Fourth, Adam was an intelligent being who could speak a language, study and name animals, and engage in life-sustaining activity. He was not an ignorant, half ape-like creature.

However, granted that the Genesis record conflicts with macro-evolution, it begs the question to affirm Genesis is wrong and evolution is right. In fact, there is substantial scientific evidence to show that macro-evolution is wrong (see volume 2, part 2).

The Alleged Late Date for Adam's Creation

According to this objection, the supposed biblical date for the creation of Adam (c. 4000 B.C.) is much too late to fit the fossil evidence for early man, which ranges from tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands of years. Since the early date for humankind is based on scientific evidence, the historicity of the Genesis record, supposedly, must be rejected.

However, there are several false or challengeable assumptions in this objection. *First*, it is assumed that one can simply add all the genealogical records of Genesis 5 and 11 and arrive at an approximate biblical date of 4000 B.C. for Adam's creation. But this is based on the false assumption that there are no gaps in these tables, which there are (see Geisler, "G, OC" in ***BECA***). Three generations, for instance, are missing from Matthew 1:8–9 (cf. 1 Chron. 3:11–14), and at least one is missing from Genesis 11:12, since the name Canaan is not there (as it is in Luke 3:35–36).

Second, it is assumed that the dating method for early humanlike fossil finds is accurate; however, these dating methods are subject to many variables, including the change in atmospheric conditions, contamination of the sample, and changes of rates of decay.

Third, it is assumed that early (pre-10,000 B.C.) humanlike fossil finds were really human beings created in the image of God. But this also is a questionable assumption on several counts. For one thing, many of these finds are fragmentary and their reconstruction is highly speculative. The so-called "Nebraska Man" turned out to be an extinct pig's tooth, and "Piltdown Man" was proven to be a complete fraud. Again, identifying a creature from bones, especially a fragment of a bone, is extremely questionable (see Lubenow, ***BC***). Ninety-nine percent of what is known about a creature comes through its soft biological tissue, which is not preserved in the rocks. Further, it is wrongly assumed that creatures that were morphologically similar to human beings must have been human beings created in the image of God. But bone structure cannot prove there was an immortal soul made in God's image inside the body. Also, it

is incorrectly assumed that evidence for simple toolmaking proves the creature was human. Some animals (such as apes, seals, and birds) are known to use simple tools.

Fourth, it is assumed that the "days" of Genesis were twenty-four-hour solar days, rather than long periods of time. But this is not certain, since the word ***day*** in Genesis is used of all six days (cf. Gen. 1:1–2:3), and Day Seven, on which God rested, is still going on many thousands of years later, since God is still in His Sabbath rest from Creation (cf. Heb. 4:4–10). In addition, there are other indications that the "days" of Genesis may be long periods of time (see volume 2, part 2).

In view of all these unproven, questionable, or false assumptions, it is impossible to affirm that Genesis is not historical. In fact, given the history of "scientific" misinterpretation of early humanlike fossils and the mistaken assumption that there are no gaps in the biblical genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11, the arguments against the historicity of Adam and Eve fail. What is more, there are substantial arguments that Genesis 1–11, like the rest of the Old Testament, is historical.

The Historicity of Noah and the Flood (Genesis 6–9)

The record of the Flood in Genesis 6–9 has raised several serious questions in the minds of Bible critics. Many of them have long believed the story is just a legend, but there is ample evidence to the contrary.

The Arguments for the Historicity of Noah's Flood

First, the account presents itself as historical, not mythological. It mentions viable names of people (Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth) and an identifiable location, Mt. Ararat (Gen. 8:4).

Second, it is part of a broader historical account, being linked by such literary connectives as "this is the account of Noah" (Gen. 6:9) and "this is the account of Shem, Ham and Japheth" (Gen. 10:1).

Third, it is immediately followed by a listing of nations and cities known to come from that area of the world, including Assyria, Nineveh, and Babylon (Gen. 10:9–12).

Fourth, Noah and his sons are listed in a later genealogical record in the historical book of 1 Chronicles (1:3–4).
Fifth, Isaiah the prophet referred to Noah and the Flood as historical (Isa. 54:9).
Sixth, during the time of Ezekiel the prophet, Noah was still considered one of the great figures in Jewish history (Ezek. 14:14, 20).
Seventh, Jesus affirmed that Noah, the Flood, and details surrounding the Flood were historical (Matt. 24:37–38).
Eighth, the writer of Hebrews places Noah in its great Hall of Faith, along with other historical figures like Abraham, Moses, and David (Heb. 11:7).
Ninth, the apostle Peter twice refers to Noah and the Flood as a literal person and event (1 Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 2:5), even comparing it with the literal destruction of the world by fire in the end times (2 Peter 3:5–13).
Tenth, there is abundant scientific evidence that water once covered the entire earth, including mountains and the poles, because of the remains of aquatic and nonpolar life that have been discovered all over the world.
Eleventh, the worldwide existence of Flood stories in diverse cultures and countries is also testimony to the historicity of Noah and the Flood.
Taking Genesis 6–9 historically has occasioned a number of criticisms. For one thing, how could this small ark hold hundreds of thousands of species? Further, how could a wooden ship survive such a violent storm? Also, how could Noah and all the animals survive so long in the ark?

The Problem of the Capacity of the Ark

The first problem deals with how such a small ark could hold all the animal species on earth. On the widely held belief that a cubit was about eighteen inches, Noah's ark was only forty-five feet high, seventy-five feet wide, and four hundred and fifty feet long (Gen. 6:15). Noah was told to take two of every kind of unclean animal and seven of every kind of clean animal (Gen. 6:19–21; 7:2–3), but scientists inform us that there are between one half billion and over a billion species of animals.
Biblical scholars have offered two solutions to this view. Some hold that the Flood was only local; if so, then Noah only had to take the main animals from that area for eating, for sacrificing, and for repopulating that local area when the Flood was over.
The Local Flood Theory. According to this view the Genesis Flood did not cover

the whole earth; hence, Noah did not have to take all the species of the whole world into the ark. As evidence that the Flood was not universal the following arguments are offered.[7]

First, the universal language of Genesis 6–9 is used elsewhere of something less than the whole world. For example, the people on the Day of Pentecost were said to be "from every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5), and yet it lists the nations, which do not include any from North or South America or Australia, or even China. Likewise, Paul said in Colossians 1:23, "This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to ***every creature under heaven***" when his trips in Acts show that he only went to the Mediterranean area (Acts 13–28).

Second, the silt deposits that a flood like Noah's would have left are found only in the Mesopotamian valley, not over the whole world.

Third, there would have been astronomical problems with the rotation of the earth had there been water deep enough to cover all the mountains. Yet this is what Genesis (7:20) seems to say happened.

The Universal Flood Theory. Many Old Testament scholars believe the Flood was universal, pointing to several things to support their view.

First, the language of Genesis is more intense than that of the citations used to support the local flood theory (cf Gen. 6:17; 7:23). Also, other parts of the Bible make it clear that the world was inundated and that only eight people were saved (cf. 2 Peter. 3:5–7).

Second, God's command to take animals of every kind does not make sense if the Flood was only local. Animals could have migrated in from other areas after a local flood. Further, if the Flood is recent, then the now commonly accepted view of continental drift could account for the disbursement of animals.

Third, since all the water of the Flood was already in the air (as a vapor canopy) or under the earth (in the "fountains of the deep"), there would have been no massive weight increase to cause an astronomical catastrophe.

Fourth, Genesis 10:32 declares that after the Flood the whole world was populated from the eight who were in Noah's ark. This would not have been true if there were others outside that local area who had not drowned. Peter confirms this fact (2 Peter 2:5).

Fifth, there is geological evidence to support a worldwide flood. Partial skeletons of recent animals are found in deep fissures in several parts of the world, and the Flood seems to be the best explanation for these. This would also explain how these fissures occur even in hills of considerable height—they

extend from one hundred forty feet to three hundred feet. Since no skeleton is complete, it is safe to conclude that none of these animals (mammoths, bears, wolves, oxen, hyenas, rhinoceroses, aurochs, deer, and many smaller mammals) fell into these fissures alive, nor were they rolled there by streams. Because of the calcite cementing of these diverse bones together, they must have been deposited underwater. This is exactly the kind of evidence that a brief but violent episode like the Flood would be expected to show within the short span of one year.

Even assuming the Flood was universal, the solution as to how Noah could get all the animals in the ark is not as difficult as it may seem.

First, Noah's ark was the size of a modern ocean liner; furthermore, it had three stories (Gen. 6:13–16) and over 1.5 million cubic feet.

Second, the modern concept of "species" is not the same as a "kind" in the Bible. There may have been only several hundred different "kinds" of land animals, which the ark could easily have contained. The sea animals stayed in the sea, and many species could have survived in egg form.

Third, Noah could have taken younger or smaller varieties of some larger animals. Given all these factors, there would have been plenty of room for all the animals, food, and humans aboard.

The Problem of a Wooden Ark Surviving a Violent Flood

Since the ark was only made of wood and carried a heavy load of cargo, it would appear that a worldwide flood would have produced violent waters that would have broken it into pieces (cf. Gen 7:4, 11). In response, Bible scholars have made several points:

First, the Ark was made of a strong and flexible material (gopher wood) that "gives" without breaking.

Second, the heavy load was an advantage that gave stability to the ark.

Third, naval architects have established that a long floating boxcar, such as the ark was, is the most stable kind of craft in turbulent waters. Using the four basic standards for stability of naval architecture and the U.S. Coast Guard, a former naval architect concluded: "Noah's Ark was extremely stable; more stable in fact, than modern shipping."[8] Indeed, modern ocean liners follow the same basic dimensions or proportions of Noah's ark. However, their stability is

lessened by the need to streamline for faster movement. So there is no reason Noah's ark could not have survived the tempestuous seas of a gigantic, even worldwide, flood.

The Problem of Surviving This Long Duration

There is some question as to just how long the Flood lasted. Genesis (7:24; 8:3) speaks of the Flood waters lasting for 150 days, but other verses seem to say it was only forty days (Gen. 7:4, 12, 17), and one verse indicates that it was over a year (Gen. 8:13–14; cf. Gen. 7:6). These are easily reconciled, since the numbers refer to different things.

Forty days refers to how long it ***rained*** (Gen. 7:12), and 150 days speaks of how long the floodwaters ***prevailed*** (Gen. 8:3 cf. 7:24). It was not until the fifth month after the rain began that the ark rested on Mount Ararat (Gen. 8:4), then about eleven months after the rain began the waters dried up (Gen. 8:13). Exactly one year and ten days after the Flood began, Noah and his family emerged on dry ground (Gen. 8:14).

But how could all these animals and humans last over one year coupled up on a boat? The answer is that living things can do almost anything they must to survive as long as they have enough food and water. Many animals could have gone into hibernation or semi-hibernation, and, as was just shown, Noah had plenty of room to store food in his million-and-a-half-cubic-foot floating zoo. As for water, Noah had more than he needed to tap into from forty days of abundant rain, to say nothing of the fresh water streams created by the rain and the "fountains of the deep" that existed on the outside.

The Issue of Ancient Mythology

Some critics claim the Flood story in Genesis 6–9 bears similarity to other ancient flood myths. This is used to suppose that it too is mythological. However, there are not only strong differences between them, but the other flood stories also show evidence that they are mythological developments of the original Flood story recorded in Genesis.

As with the Creation accounts, the Flood narrative proves to be realistic and nonmythological as compared to the other ancient versions. The superficial similarities do not point toward plagiarism by Genesis but toward an historical

core of events accurately recorded by Genesis and distorted by other ancient accounts. While the names may change (Noah is called Ziusudra by the Sumerians and Utnapishtim by the Babylonians), the basic story is similar: A man is told to build a ship to specific dimensions because God (or gods) is going to flood the world. He does it, rides out the storm, and offers sacrifice upon exiting the boat. The Deity (or deities) responds with remorse over the destruction of life and makes a covenant with the man. These core events point to the historical basis of the Genesis account.

Similar flood accounts are found all over the world. The Flood story is told by the Greeks, Hindus, Chinese, Mexicans, Algonquins, and Hawaiians. Also, one list of Sumerian kings treats the Flood as a real event—after naming eight kings who lived extraordinarily long lives (tens of thousands of years), this sentence interrupts the list: "[Then] the Flood swept over [the earth] and when kingship was lowered [again] from heaven, kingship was [first] in Kish" (Pritchard, ***ANET***, 265).

There are good reasons to believe that Genesis gives the original story.

First, the other versions contain elaborations that display corruption.

Second, only in Genesis is the year of the Flood given, as well as dates for the whole chronology relative to Noah's life. In fact, Genesis reads almost like a diary or a ship's log of the events.

Third, the cubical Babylonian ship could not have saved anyone from the Flood. The raging waters would be constantly turning it over on every side. However, the biblical ark is rectangular—long, wide, and low (the same proportion as modern ocean liners)—so that it would ride the rough seas well.

Fourth, the duration of the rainfall in the pagan accounts (seven days) is not enough time for the devastation they describe. The waters would have to rise at least above most mountains, to a height of over 17,000 feet, and it is more reasonable to assume a longer rainfall to do this. The idea that all of the flood waters subsided in one day is equally absurd.

Fifth, another striking difference between Genesis and the other versions is that in the pagan accounts the hero is granted immortality and exalted, while in the Bible we see that Noah sinned. Only a version that seeks to tell the truth would include this realistic admission.

Sixth, the physical evidence (noted above) shows that there was indeed a universal flood.

In summation, if the Flood was local, there is no problem with taking it literally. And even if it was universal there are no insurmountable difficulties with the

historicity of a worldwide flood as described in Genesis 6–9. In fact, taken as universal it fits with both the known historical and geological facts of the time, as well as with the rest of Scripture (cf. 2 Peter 3:5–7).

The Historicity of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11)

Genesis 11:1–4 states,

> The whole world had one language and a common speech.... They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens."

The Sumerian archaeological finds of this area support the historicity of this text. As for the Tower of Babel, archaeology has revealed that Ur-Nammu, King of Ur from about 2044 to 2007 B.C., supposedly received orders to build a great ziggurat (temple tower) as an act of worship to the moon god Nannat. A stele (monument) about five feet across and ten feet high reveals Ur-Nammu's activities. One panel has him setting out with a mortar basket to begin construction of the great tower, thus showing his allegiance to the gods by taking his place as a humble workman. Another clay tablet states that the erection of the tower offended the gods, so they threw down what the men had built, scattered them abroad, and made their speech strange. This is remarkably similar to the record in the Bible.[9]

The Problem of Writing in This Early Period

Early critical views held that there were no written languages in this period and, hence, no one could have written down these events. But it is now widely accepted that written languages go back as far as about 3500 B.C. As to who first recorded them and when, there are two possibilities.

The first is that God could have revealed them later directly to Moses, the author of Genesis. Just as God can reveal the future by prophetic revelation, He can reveal the past by retrospective revelation. The denial of this possibility is based on an unjustified rejection of theism and miracles (see chapters 2–3).

It is more likely, however, that Moses only compiled and edited earlier records of these events. This is not contrary to biblical practice; many scholars believe the author of Luke may have done the same in his gospel (Luke 1:1–4). Indeed, there are many other historical records referenced in the Old Testament that may have been sources of information to the biblical writers.[10]

P. J. Wiseman has argued persuasively that the history of Genesis was originally written on clay tablets and passed on from one generation to the next with each "clan leader" being responsible for keeping them edited and up to date (***ARSG***, 74). The main biblical clue that Wiseman found for this is the periodic repetition of words and phrases, especially the phrase "This is the generation of …" (cf. Gen. 2:4; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; etc.). Many ancient tablets were kept in order by making the first words of a new tablet a repetition of the last words of the previous stone. A literary evaluation of Genesis compared to other ancient literature indicates that it was compiled no later than the time of Moses, and it is quite possible that Genesis is a family history recorded by the patriarchs themselves and edited into its final form by Moses.

The Historicity of the Patriarchs (Genesis 12–50)

William F. Albright (1891–1971) wrote,

> Thanks to modern research we now recognize its [the Bible's] substantial historicity. The narratives of the patriarchs, of Moses and the exodus, of the conquest of Canaan, of the judges, the monarchy, exile and restoration, have all been confirmed and illustrated to an extent that I should have thought impossible forty years ago. (*CC*, 1329.)

Law codes have been found from the time of Abraham that show why the Patriarch would have been hesitant to throw Hagar out of his camp, for he was legally bound to support her. Only when a higher law came from God was Abraham willing to expel her.

The discovery of the Mari letters[11] reveals such names as Abam-ram (Abraham), Jacob-el, and Benjamites. Though these do not refer to the biblical people, they at least show that the names were in use.

These letters also support the record of a war in Genesis 14, where five kings fought against four kings. The names of these kings seem to fit with the prominent nations of the day; for example, Genesis 14:1 mentions an Amorite king Arioch; the Mari documents render the king's name Ariwwuk. All of this evidence leads to the conclusion that the source material of Genesis came from the firsthand accounts of someone who lived during Abraham's time.
As to the patriarchal history, Albright said,

> Aside from a few die-hards among older scholars, there is scarcely a single biblical historian who has not been impressed by the rapid accumulation of data supporting the substantial historicity of patriarchal tradition. (Albright, *BP*, 1.)

In summation, Albright affirmed,

> Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob no longer seem isolated figures, much less reflections of later Israelite history; they now appear as true children of their age, bearing the same names, moving about over the same territory, visiting the same towns (especially Harran and Nahor), practicing the same customs as their contemporaries. [In other words,] the patriarchal narratives have a historical nucleus throughout, though it is likely that long oral transmission of the original poems and later prose sagas which underlie the present text of Genesis has considerably refracted the original events. (*AP*, 236.)

Walter Kaiser adds,

> The amount of epigraphic material for this period of history is staggering. Much of this material awaits further study and publication. Meanwhile, an increasingly high degree of probability and corroborating evidence continues to mount up from the external evidence to such a point that the case for the genuineness of the patriarchal stories is strong indeed. (*OTDATR*, 96.)

The Historicity of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18–19)

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was thought to be spurious until evidence revealed that all five of the cities mentioned in the Bible were in fact centers of commerce in the area and were geographically situated as the Scriptures say. The biblical description of their demise seems to be no less accurate: Evidence suggests that there was earthquake activity and that the

various layers of the earth were disrupted and hurled high into the air. Bitumen is plentiful there, and a good pictorial description would be to say that brimstone (bituminous pitch) was hurled down on those cities that had rejected God. There is further evidence that the layers of sedimentary rock were molded together by intense heat; evidence of such burning has been found on the top of Jebel Usdum (Mount Sodom). This is permanent residue from the great conflagration that took place in the long-distant past, possibly when an oil basin beneath the Dead Sea ignited and erupted. Such an explanation in no way subtracts from the special providential quality of the event, for God is certainly in control of natural causes as well. The timing of the event, in the context of warnings and visitation by angels, reveals its overall divine origin.

THE HISTORICITY OF THE MOSAIC PERIOD (EXODUS–DEUTERONOMY)

As for the critics' allegation that Moses could not have written the accounts attributed to him, William F. Albright contended,

> "Authority of Scripture" is a valid theological principle, whereas the "School of Wellhausen" is only one of many ideological systems built on arbitrary philosophical postulates and baseless historical presuppositions. (Albright, "WFATMCV" in *CT*, 36.)

He added,

> The contents of our Pentateuch are, in general, very much older than the date at which they were finally edited; new discoveries continue to confirm the historical accuracy or the literary antiquity of detail after detail in it. [Thus] even when it is necessary to assume later additions to the original nucleus of Mosaic tradition, these additions reflect the normal growth of ancient institutions and practices, or the effort made by later scribes to save as much as possible of extant traditions about Moses. [Accordingly,] it is … sheer hypercriticism to deny the substantially Mosaic character of the Pentateuchal tradition. (*AP*, 225.)

The Dating of the Exodus (Exodus 12)

While most scholars do not doubt that the nation of Israel came out of Egypt and into Palestine, many do not agree with the biblical statements as to when this happened. The generally accepted date for the entrance into Canaan is about 1230–1220 B.C.; the Scriptures, on the other hand, teach in four different places (Ex. 12:40; 1 Kings 6:1; Judg. 11:26; Acts 13:19–20) that the Exodus occurred in the 1400s B.C. and the entrance into Canaan forty years later. There are several ways that this conflict could be resolved; hence, there is no longer any necessity to accept the 1200s B.C. date as the correct one.

Confusion About Rameses

The first possibility is that the 1200s B.C. date is based on the faulty assumptions that "Rameses" in Exodus 1:11 was named after Rameses the Great, that there were no building projects in the Nile Delta before 1300, and that there was no great civilization in Canaan from the nineteenth century B.C. to the thirteenth. All of these, if true, would make the conditions described in Exodus impossible before 1300 B.C. However, the name Rameses is not an uncommon name in Egyptian history and may have honored an earlier nobleman by that name. Since Rameses the Great is Rameses II, there must have been a Rameses I. Also, in Genesis 47:11, the name Rameses is used to describe the area of the Nile Delta where Jacob and his sons settled. This may be the name that Moses normally used to refer to the area.

Changing the Date of the Middle Bronze Period

Others have argued that moving the date of the Middle Bronze Age would show that the destruction done to the cities of Canaan was done by the Israelites, not the Egyptians. Evidence has come from recent digs that have shown that the last phase of the Middle Bronze period needs more time than originally thought, so that its end is closer to 1400 B.C. than 1550 B.C. The result would be that two events previously separated by centuries are brought together: The fall of Canaan's Second Middle Bronze Age cities becomes the archaeological evidence for the conquest. This would be an almost perfect match between the archaeological evidence and the biblical account.

Revising Traditional Egyptian Chronology

A third possible solution deals with a problem in the traditional view of Egyptian history. The chronology of the whole ancient world is based on the order and dates of the Egyptian kings, which generally was thought to have been fixed. However, Immanuel Velikovsky (1895–1979) and Donovan Courville assert that there are six hundred extra years in that chronology, which throw off the dates for events all around the Near East. Velikovsky's handling of this chronology discredited his theory, but Courville has shown that the lists of Egyptian kings should not be understood as completely consecutive. He argues that some of the "kings" listed were not pharaohs but local rulers or high officials. Historians had assumed that each dynasty followed after the one before it, when in actuality many dynasties list sub-rulers who lived at the same time as the preceding dynasty. Working out this new chronology places the Exodus at about 1440 B.C. and would make the other periods of Israelite history fall into line with the Egyptian kings mentioned.

The evidence is not generally considered to be definitively in favor of one of these views over the other. The important point is that there is no compelling reason to accept the late date for the Exodus and that resolution is possible in explaining the biblical date in the 1400s B.C.

Mosaic Authorship of Deuteronomy

The late date many critics assign to Deuteronomy (seventh century B.C.) has been thoroughly discredited by the excellent scholarship of Meredith Kline in his landmark work on ***The Treaty of the Great King***,[12] in which he demonstrated that Deuteronomy follows the typical suzerainty treaty of the Hittites in the second millennium century B.C.—the very time in which tradition informs us Moses wrote Deuteronomy.

Joshua and Jericho (Joshua 6)

Joshua 6 records the conquest and destruction of the city of Jericho. If the account of this monumental event is accurate, it would seem that modern archaeological excavations would have turned up evidence. However, critics insist that no such evidence from Joshua's time has been unearthed.

For many years the prevailing view of critical scholars has been that there was no city of Jericho at the time Joshua was supposed to have entered Canaan. Although earlier investigations by the notable British archaeologist Kathleen Kenyon confirmed the existence of the ancient city of Jericho, as well as its sudden destruction, her findings led her to conclude that the city could have existed no later than c. 1550 B.C., a date much too early for Joshua and the children of Israel to have been party to its demise.

However, recent reexamination of these earlier findings, and a closer look at current evidence, indicates that not only was there a city that fits the biblical chronology, but that its remains coincide with the biblical account of the destruction of this walled fortress. In an article published in ***Biblical Archaeology Review*** (Mar./Apr. 1990), Bryant G. Wood, visiting professor to the department of Near Eastern Studies at the University of Toronto, presented evidence that the biblical report is accurate. His detailed investigation yielded the following conclusions:

First, the city that once existed on this site was strongly fortified, corresponding to the biblical record in Joshua 2:5, 7, 15; 6:5, 20.

Second, the ruins give evidence that the city was attacked after harvest time in the spring, corresponding to Joshua 2:6; 3:15; 5:10.

Third, as reported in Joshua 6:1, the inhabitants did not have the opportunity to flee with their foodstuffs from the invading army.

Fourth, the siege was short, not allowing the inhabitants to consume the food that was stored in the city, as Joshua 6:15 indicates.

Fifth, the walls were leveled in such a way as to provide access into the city for the invaders, as Joshua 6:20 records.

Sixth, the city was ***not*** plundered[13] by the invaders, according to God's instructions in Joshua 6:17–18.

Seventh, the city was burned after the walls had been destroyed, just as Joshua 6:24 says.

Although some dispute that these clues are from the right time period, their strong similarity would argue that they are. Furthermore, the time periods are not

set with absolute certainty and are subject to revision, which some scholars have suggested. At any rate, the possibility that this is indeed the remains of Joshua's Jericho has not been disproved, and no scientific disproof of the biblical story of Jericho has been established. What is more, even if there were no remaining evidence, it would not prove that the event did not occur. It is possible that the evidence was destroyed or that it is in another place. The argument that "no evidence has been found, therefore, there is none" is tenuous at best, involving the well-known fallacy of the argument from ignorance.

THE HISTORICITY OF THE MONARCHY OF ISRAEL (1 SAMUEL–2 CHRONICLES)

Saul became the first king of Israel, and his fortress at Gibeah has been excavated. One of the more noteworthy finds was that slingshots were one of the most important weapons of the day. This relates not only to David's victory over Goliath but also to the reference of Judges 20:16 that there were seven hundred expert slingers who "could sling a stone at a hair and not miss."

Upon Saul's death, Samuel tells us that Saul's armor was put in the temple of Ashtoreth (a Canaanite fertility goddess) at Beth Shan (1 Sam. 31:10), while Chronicles says that his head was put in the temple of Dagon, the Philistine corn god (1 Chron. 10:10). This was thought to be an error because it seemed unlikely that enemy peoples (Canaanites and Philistines) would have temples in the same place at the same time. However, excavations have found that there are two temples at this site that are separated by a hallway—one for Dagon, and the other for Ashtoreth. It appears that the Philistines had adopted the Canaanite goddess as their own.

One of the key accomplishments of David's reign was the capture of Jerusalem. This was problematic in that the Scriptures say the Israelites entered the city by way of a tunnel that led to the Pool of Siloam. That pool was thought to be ***outside*** the city walls at that time; however, in the 1960s excavations it was finally determined that the wall did indeed extend well past the pool.

Archaeological substantiation has now been found for King David. An inscription from the ninth century speaks of "the House of David," which lays to rest the skeptical contention that David was a legend invented during the Babylonian exile. What adds weight to the evidence is that this inscription was

not written by Hebrew scribes but by the enemies of Israel a little more than a century after David's lifetime (Sheler, ***IBT***, 50–51).

The psalms attributed to David are often said to have been written much later because their inscriptions suggest that there were musicians' guilds (e.g., the sons of Korah), which were not believed to have existed during his era. Such organization has led many to think that these hymns should be dated to about the time of the Maccabeans in the second century B.C. Following the excavations at Ras Shamra, and knowing now that there were such guilds in Syria and Palestine in David's time, it is unreasonable to attribute such psalms to another period.

The time of Solomon has no less corroboration from archaeology. The site of his temple cannot be excavated, because it is near the Muslim holy place, the Dome of the Rock. However, what is known about Philistine temples built in Solomon's time fits well with the design, decoration, and materials described in the Bible. The only piece of evidence from the temple itself is a small ornament, a pomegranate, that sat on the end of a rod and bears the inscription, "Belonging to the Temple of Yahweh." It was first seen in a shop in Jerusalem in 1979, verified in 1984, and was acquired by the Israel Museum in 1988.

The excavation of Gezer in 1969 ran across a massive layer of ash that covered most of the mound. Sifting through the ash yielded pieces of Hebrew, Egyptian, and Philistine artifacts. Apparently all three cultures had been there at the same time, which puzzled researchers greatly until they realized that the Bible told them exactly what they had found.

> Pharaoh king of Egypt had attacked and captured Gezer. He had set it on fire. He killed its Canaanite inhabitants and then gave it as a wedding gift to his daughter, Solomon's wife. (
>
> 1 Kings 9:16
>
>)

The Historicity of the Assyrian Invasion (2 Kings 17)

A great deal is known about the Assyrians because of 26,000 tablets found in the palace of Ashurbanipal, the son of Esarhaddon, who had taken the northern kingdom of Israel into captivity in 722 B.C. These tablets tell of the many conquests of the Assyrian empire and record with honor the cruel and violent punishments that fell upon the conquered.

Several of these records confirm the Bible's accuracy; every reference in the Old

Testament to an Assyrian king has proven correct. Even though Sargon was unknown for some time, when his palace was found and excavated, there was a wall painting of the battle mentioned in Isaiah 20. Also, the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser adds to our knowledge of biblical figures by showing Jehu (or his emissary) bowing down to the king of Assyria.

Kaiser lists a detailed confirmation from this period with point-for-point comparison between archaeological finds and the biblical text. In conclusion he adds,

> The facts, from whatever source, when fully known have consistently provided uncanny confirmation for the details of Old Testament persons, peoples and places by means of the artificial, stratigraphical and epigraphic remains evidence uncovered. (*OTDATR*, 108.)

Among the most interesting finds is Sennacherib's account of the siege of Jerusalem. Thousands of his men died and the rest scattered when he attempted to take the city and, as Isaiah had foretold, he was unable to conquer it. Since he could not boast about his great victory here, Sennacherib found a way to make himself sound good without admitting defeat:

> As to Hezekiah, the Jew, he did not submit to my yoke. I laid siege to 46 of his strong cities, walled forts, and to the countless small villages in their vicinity.... I drove out of them 200,150 people, young and old, male and female, horses, mules, donkeys, camels, big and small cattle beyond counting and considered (them) booty. Himself I made a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage. (Pritchard, *ANET*, 288.)

The Historicity of the Babylonian Captivity (2 Kings 24–25; 2 Chronicles 36)

Various facets of the Old Testament history regarding the Captivity have been confirmed. Records found in Babylon's famous Hanging Gardens have shown that Jehoiachin and his five sons were given a monthly ration and a place to live and were treated well (2 Kings 25:27–30).

The name of Belshazzar (from Daniel 5) had caused problems, because there was not only no mention of him but also no room for him in the list of Babylonian kings. However, it was discovered that Nabodonius, his father, appointed Belshazzar to reign for a few years in his absence. Hence, Nabodonius was still king, but Belshazzar ruled in the capital.

Also, the edict of Cyrus as recorded by Ezra seemed to fit the picture of Isaiah's

prophecies too well to be real, until a cylinder was found that confirmed the decree in all the important details.

In every period of Old Testament history, we find that there is good evidence from archaeology that the Scriptures speak the truth. In many instances, the Bible even reflects firsthand knowledge of the times and customs it describes. While many have doubted the accuracy of the Bible, time and continued research have consistently demonstrated that the Word of God is better informed than its critics.

THE HISTORICITY OF THE POST-CAPTIVITY PERIOD (EZRA–NEHEMIAH)

The biblical books covering this period of time include Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. (The last three were prophets during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah.) The history of this period is well attested, since it overlaps with the height of the Medo-Persian empire; the kings and other figures of that period are well known to ancient historians, such as Cyrus (Ezra 1:2), Darius (Ezra 6:1), Artaxerses (Ezra 7:1), and Sanballat (Neh. 4:1).

Many archaeological finds support the biblical accounts, including the Elephantine Papyri, which mention Johanan the high priest and Sanballat the Samarian governor. Also, the palace at Susa (Shushan), the setting of the book of Esther and King Xerxes (Esther 1:1–2), has been unearthed.[14] The problems of the precise dating of Ezra and Nehemiah do not affect their historicity in this overall time period and have been adequately answered by noted Old Testament scholars like Gleason Archer[15] and John Whitcomb.[16]

CONCLUSION

Negative higher criticism of the Old Testament, based as it is on philosophical presuppositions and not factual data, has crumbled under the facts of archaeological discoveries. Again, as the dean of twentieth-century archaeologists has demonstrated, ***“There can be no doubt that archaeology has***

confirmed the substantial historicity of the Old Testament tradition" (Albright, ***ARI***, 176).

Indeed, while literally thousands of finds have validated the picture presented in the Old Testament, none have refuted it. Noted biblical scholar Donald J. Wiseman affirmed,

> The geography of Bible lands and visible remains of antiquity were gradually recorded until today more than 25,000 sites within this region and dating to Old Testament times, in their broadest sense, have been located. ("ACOT" in *RB*, 301–02.)

Finally, Nelson Glueck has boldly asserted:

> As a matter of fact.... it may be stated categorically that *no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference.* Scores of archaeological findings have been made which confirm in clear outline or exact detail historical statements in the Bible. (*RD*, 31, emphasis added.)

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CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

THE HISTORICITY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Few scholars have denied the complete historicity of the New Testament.[1] Even Rudolph Bultmann (1884–1976), in his programmatic demythologization of the New Testament, said, "By no means are we at the mercy of those who doubt or deny that Jesus ever lived" ("SSG" in ***FC***, 60). The reason that so few historians or biblical scholars deny the New Testament's historicity will become clear as the mass of evidence is viewed.

The historicity of the New Testament is basically the historicity of the Gospels, the book of Acts, and the early epistles of Paul, since those documents written after the end of Acts are of no consequence in establishing the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, which is at the heart of the question regarding the historicity of the New Testament.

Most of the negative criticism of the Bible is pre-archaeological, based on unproven philosophical presuppositions that have subsequently been antiquated by archaeology. As with the Old Testament, the positive case for the historical reliability of the New Testament is based on two main points: the reliability of the New Testament manuscripts and the reliability of the New Testament witnesses.

Of course, this whole discussion is predicated on the prior premise that history is knowable, a premise that has come under increasing attack in the contemporary postmodern world. Since the objectivity of history is treated elsewhere (see

chapter 11), it will not be discussed here.

THE RELIABILITY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPTS

There are several lines of evidence that support the reliability of the New Testament manuscripts. These include the number, dating, accuracy, and confirmation of the available manuscripts.

The Number of New Testament Manuscripts

Like the Old Testament, the number of New Testament manuscripts is overwhelming compared with the typical book from antiquity, which has only seven to ten manuscript copies. By contrast, the New Testament has almost 5,700 Greek manuscripts in existence—***this makes it the best textually supported book from antiquity.*** As mentioned previously, the most for any other book is Homer's ***Iliad***, with 643 manuscripts (see Geisler and Nix, ***GIB***, chapter 22).

The Early Date of the New Testament Manuscripts

The earliest undisputed manuscript of a New Testament book is the John Rylands Papyri (P^{52}, dated A.D. 117–138), which survives from within about a generation of the time most scholars believe it was composed (c. A.D. 95). Since it was written in Asia Minor and was found in Egypt, the demand for some circulation time would place the composition of John in the first century. Whole New Testament books (e.g., the Bodmer Papyri) are available from A.D. 200, and most of the New Testament, including all the Gospels, are available in the Chester Beatty Papyri from 150 years after the New Testament was finished (viz., c. A.D. 250).

Noted British manuscript scholar Sir Frederick Kenyon wrote:

> The interval then between the dates of original composition and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. [Thus] both the *authenticity* and the general *integrity* of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established. (*BA*, 288f.)

No other book from the ancient world has as small a time gap (between composition and the earliest manuscript copies) as the New Testament.

The Accuracy of the New Testament Manuscripts

Additionally, not only are there more and earlier manuscripts of the New Testament but they are also more accurately copied than other books from the ancient world. New Testament scholar John A. T. Robinson (1919–1981) said,

> The wealth of manuscripts, and above all the narrow interval of time between the writing and the earliest extant, make it the best attested of any ancient writing in the world. (*CWTNT*, 36.)

Bruce Metzger, the great New Testament scholar and Princeton professor, made a comparison of the ***Iliad*** of Homer, the ***Mahabarata*** of Hinduism, and the New Testament. He found the text of the ***Mahabarata*** to represent 90 percent of the original (10 percent textual corruption), the text of the ***Iliad*** to be 95 percent pure, and the New Testament text to be only one half of one percent in question, or 99.5 percent intact (***CHNTTC***, 144f.). John A. T. Robinson estimated the general concern of textual criticism to be with only a "thousandth part of the entire text" (***ITCNT***, 14). ***This would place the accuracy of the New Testament text at 99.9 percent—again, the best known for any book from the ancient world.***[2]

Further, significant portions of some ancient books are missing; for example, "107 of Livy's 142 books of Roman history have been lost. Of Tacitus's original Histories and Annals, only approximately half remain."[3] Yet ***all*** of the books of the New Testament have been preserved; no significant portion of any New Testament book is missing. Sir Frederick Kenyon noted,

> The number of manuscripts of the New Testament, of early translations from it, and of quotations from it in the oldest writers of the Church, is so large that it is practically certain that the true reading of every doubtful passage is preserved in some one or the other of these ancient authorities. *This can be said of no other ancient book in the world.* (*OBAM*, 55.)

The Confirmation of the New Testament Manuscripts by Early Church Fathers

Speaking of the four Gospels alone, there are some 19,368 citations of the Fathers from the late first century onward. This includes 268 by Justin Martyr, 1,038 by Irenaeus, 1,017 by Clement of Alexandria, 9,231 by Origen, 3,822 by Tertullian, 734 by Hippolytus, and 3,258 by Eusebius (Geisler and Nix, ***GIB***, 431). Even before these men there were citations: Pseudo-Barnabas (A.D. 70–130) cited Matthew, Mark, and Luke; Clement of Rome (c. A.D. 95–97) cited Matthew, John, and 1 Corinthians; Ignatius (c. A.D. 110) referred to six of Paul's epistles; Polycarp (c. A.D. 110–150) quoted all four Gospels, Acts, and most of Paul's epistles; the Shepherd of Hermas (A.D. 115–140) cited Matthew, Mark, Acts, 1 Corinthians, and other books; the Didache (c. A.D. 120–150) referred to Matthew, Luke, 1 Corinthians, and other books; and Papias, companion of Polycarp, who was the disciple of the apostle John, quotes his gospel.

All of this argues powerfully that the Gospels were in existence before they were cited, which would place them well before the end of the first century while some eyewitnesses (like John) were still alive. Further, that some of these Fathers overlapped with the latest book of the New Testament, the gospel of John, which is widely believed to be dated around A.D. 95, virtually eliminates any time gap between the completion of the New Testament and the earliest citations of it.

THE RELIABILITY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT ACCOUNTS

Not only is there an extremely strong manuscript tradition supporting the conclusion that the present text of the New Testament is a highly accurate representation of the original, but there is also abundant evidence that the account of the life of Christ contained therein is also highly reliable history. Since the evidence for the historical reliability of the book of Acts is the strongest, we will begin there.

The Historicity of Acts

The date and authenticity of the book of Acts is crucial to the historicity of early Christianity and, thus, to apologetics in general. If Acts was written before A.D. 70 while the eyewitnesses were still alive, then it has great historical value in informing us of the earliest Christian beliefs. What is more, if Acts was written by Luke, the companion of the apostle Paul, it is placed in the apostolic circle of the earliest disciples of Jesus.

If Acts was written by A.D. 62 (the traditional date), then it was written by a contemporary of Jesus (who died in A.D. 33). And if Acts is shown to be accurate history, then it brings credibility to its reports about the most basic Christian beliefs in the miracles (Acts 2:22), death (Acts 2:23), resurrection (Acts 2:24, 29–32), and ascension of Christ (Acts 1:9–10). Further, if Luke wrote Acts, then his "former treatise" (Acts 1:1), the gospel of Luke, should be extended the same credibility manifested in the book of Acts.

Strong Evidence of an Early Date for Acts

Roman historian Colin Hemer numbers seventeen reasons for accepting the traditional early date of Acts (during the lifetime of the contemporaries of the events). These reasons strongly support the historicity of Acts and, indirectly, the historicity of the gospel of Luke (cf. Luke 1:1–4 and Acts 1:1).

The first five of Hemer's arguments are sufficient to show that Acts was penned by A.D. 62.

(1) There is no mention in Acts of the crucial historical event of the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, which places Acts before that event.
(2) There is no hint of the outbreak of the Jewish War in 66 or of any serious or specific deterioration of relations between Romans and Jews, which implies Acts was written before that time.
(3) There is no hint of the more immediate deterioration of Christian relations with Rome involved in the Neronian persecution of the late 60s.
(4) There is no hint of the death of James at the hands of the Sanhedrin in c. 62, recorded by Josephus (***Antiquities***, 20.9.1.200).
(5) Since the apostle Paul was still alive (Acts 28), it must have been written before his death (c. A.D. 65).

Consider also some of the other arguments:

(1) Primitive formulation of Christian terminology is used in Acts, which reflects an earlier period. (Harnack lists a number of Christological titles: ***Iesous*** [Jesus] and ***ho kurios*** [the Lord] are used often, whereas ***ho Christos*** always designates "the Messiah," and not a proper name, and ***Christos*** is otherwise used only in formal combinations.)
(2) Rackham points to the optimistic tone of Acts, which would not have been there after Judaism had been destroyed and Christians martyred in the Neronian persecutions of the late 60s.
(3) The abrupt ending of the book of Acts is a factor. Surely, if Paul had died by then, for example, that would have been mentioned (cf. 2 Tim. 4:6–8).
(4) The "immediacy" of Acts 27–28 comes into play.
(5) The prevalence of insignificant details of a cultural milieu of an early, even Julio-Claudian, date shows evidence.
(6) There are areas of controversy within Acts that presuppose the relevance of an early Jewish setting while the Temple was still standing (see Colin Hemer, ***The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*** [Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbraun, 1990], 376–87.)

By comparison, claiming that Acts was written after A.D. 62 is like claiming that a book on the life of John F. Kennedy was written after 1963 (when he was assassinated) but never mentions his death; ***if the event had already occurred, it was too important to omit.*** In the same way, any book like Acts that was written after the death of the apostle Paul (c. A.D. 65) or the destruction of Jerusalem (A.D. 70) would surely have mentioned these momentous events.

Evidence That the Author of Acts was a First-Rate Historian

In addition to the arguments for an early date for Acts, Hemer demonstrates that the author was an historian of note. These points include:

(1) items of geographical detail and the like, which may be assumed to have been generally known;

(2) more specialized details, which may still have been widely known to those who possessed relevant experience: titles of governors, army units, major routes, etc., which may have been accessible to those who traveled or were involved in administration, but perhaps not to those without such backgrounds;

(3) specifics of local routes, boundaries, titles of city magistrates, and the like, which may not be closely controllable in date, but are unlikely to have been known except to a writer who had visited the districts;

(4) the correlation of the dates of known kings and governors with the ostensible chronology of the Acts framework;

(5) details appropriate to the date of Paul but not appropriate to the conditions of a date earlier or especially later;

(6) "undesigned coincidences" between Acts and the accepted Pauline Epistles;

(7) latent internal correlations within Acts;

(8) independently attested details that agree with the Alexandrian against the Western text (or the reverse), and may thus relate to stages in the textual tradition of Acts;

(9) matters of common geographical knowledge or the like, mentioned perhaps informally or allusively, with an unstudied accuracy that bespeaks familiarity;

(10) differences in formulation within Acts as a possible indication of

different categories of sources;

(11) peculiarities in the selection of detail, such as the inclusion of details theologically unimportant, but explicable in other ways that may bear on the historical question;

(12) as a particular case of the preceding, details whose "immediacy" suggests the author's reproduction of recent experience and which are less readily explicable as the product of longer-term reflective editing and shaping;

(13) items reflecting culture or idiom that are suggestive of a first-rather than a second-century atmosphere;

(14) interrelated complexes in which two or more kinds of correlation are combined, or where related details each show separate correlations, so that the possibility arises of building a larger fragment of historical reconstruction from a jigsaw of interlocking units;

(15) cases where the progress of discovery and knowledge simply provide new background information of use to the commentator of whatever viewpoint, while not bearing significantly on the issue of historicity;

(16) precise details that lie within the range of contemporary possibilities, but whose particular accuracy we have no means of verifying one way or the other. (***ASHH***, chapter 5.)

In addition to all this, the author of Acts demonstrates detailed knowledge of the historical names, places, persons, and events of the times.

Common Knowledge

The emperor's ***title***, "Augustus," is rendered formally ***Sebastos*** in words attributed to a Roman official (Acts 25:21, 25), whereas "Augustus" as the ***name*** bestowed on the first emperor is transliterated ***Augoustos*** in Luke 2:1.
General facts of navigation and corn supply are exemplified by the voyage of an Alexandrian ship to the Italian port of Puteoli, following the institution of a state system of supply by Claudius, and allowing illustration at many levels.
The limits of the category may be illustrated by noting where Luke thinks it necessary or unnecessary to explain terms to his reader. Thus points of Judaean topography or Semitic nomenclature are glossed over or explained (Acts 1:12, 19, etc.), whereas basic Jewish institutions are not (Acts 1:12 again; 2:1; 4:1;

etc.).

Specialized Knowledge

Acts 1:12, 19; 3:2, 11, etc., show knowledge of the topography of Jerusalem. In Acts 4:6 Annas is pictured as continuing to have great prestige and to bear the title "high priest" after his formal deposition by the Romans and the appointment of Caiaphas (cf. Luke 3:2; cf. Josephus, ***A***, 18.2.2.34–35; 20.9.1.198).
In addition, Luke (in Acts 12:4) gives detail on the organization of a military guard (cf. Vegetius, *de Re Milit* [3.8]); in Acts 13:7 he correctly identifies Cyprus as a proconsular (senatorial) province at this time, with the proconsul resident at Paphos (v. 6); in Acts 16:8ff. he acknowledges the part played by Troas in the system of communication (cf. Section C, 112f. ***ad*** 16:11); in Acts 17:1 Amphipolis and Apollonia are known as stations (and presumably overnight stops) on the Egnatian Way from Philippi to Thessalonica. Chapters 27–28 contain many details in the geography and navigational details of the voyage to Rome, which will be noted more specifically under other headings.

Specific Local Knowledge

In addition, Luke manifests an incredible array of knowledge of local places, names, conditions, customs, and circumstances that befit only an eyewitness contemporary of the time and events. All of these have been confirmed by historical and archaeological research to be true of the persons, times, and places mentioned by Luke. This includes knowledge of:

(1) a natural crossing between correctly named ports 13:4–5);
(2) the proper port (Perga) along the direct destination of a ship crossing from Cyprus (13:13);
(3) the proper location of Lycaonia (14:6);
(4) the unusual but correct declension of the name Lystra (14:6);
(5) the correct language spoken in Lystra (Lycaonian, 14:11);
(6) two gods known to be so associated (Zeus and Hermes, 14:12);
(7) the proper port, Attalia, that returning travelers would use (14:25);
(8) the correct order of approach to Derbe, then Lystra, from Cilician

Gates (16:1);

(9) the proper form of the name Troas (16:8);

(10) the place of a conspicuous sailor's landmark, Samothrace (16:11);

(11) the proper description of Philippi as a Roman colony (16:12);

(12) the right location for the river (Gangites) near Philippi (16:13);

(13) the proper association of Thyatira as a center of dyeing (16:14);

(14) the correct designations for the magistrates and of the colony (16:22);

(15) the proper location (Amphipolis and Apollonia) of where travelers would spend successive nights on this journey (17:1);

(16) the presence of a synagogue in Thessalonica (17:1);

(17) the proper title, "politarchs," used of the magistrates there (17:6);

(18) the correct implication that sea travel is the most convenient way of reaching Athens with favoring east winds of summer sailing (17:14);

(19) the abundant presence of images in Athens (17:16);

(20) the reference to a synagogue in Athens (17:17);

(21) the depiction of the Athenian life of philosophical debate in the Agora (17:17);

(22) the use of the correct Athenian slang word for Paul, ***a spermologos*** (17:18), as well as the court (***areios pagos***);

(23) the proper characterization of the Athenian character (17:21);

(24) an altar to an "unknown god" (17:23);

(25) the proper reaction of Greek philosophers who denied bodily resurrection (17:32);

(26) ***areopagites*** as the correct title for a member of the court (17:34);

(27) a Corinthian synagogue (18:4);

(28) the correct designation of Gallio as proconsul, resident in Corinth (18:12);

(29) the proper positioning of the ***bema***, overlooking Corinth's ***forum*** (18:16f).;

(30) the name "Tyrannus" as attested from Ephesus in first-century inscriptions (19:9);

(31) the well-known shrines and images of Artemis (19:24);

(32) the reference to the well-attested "great goddess Artemis" (19:27);

(33) the Ephesian theater as the meeting-place of the city (19:29);

(34) the use of the correct title, ***grammateus***, for the chief executive magistrate in Ephesus (19:35);

(35) the mention of the proper title of honor, ***neokoros***, authorized by the Romans (19:35);

(36) the correct name to designate the goddess (19:37);

(37) the proper term used for those holding court (19:38);

(38) the use of plural, ***anthupatoi***, which may be a remarkable reference to the fact that ***two*** men were conjointly exercising the functions of proconsul at this time (19:38);

(39) the "regular" assembly as the precise phrase is attested elsewhere (19:39);

(40) the use of precise ethnic designation, ***beroiaios*** (20:4);

(41) the employment of the ethnic term ***Asianos*** (20:4);

(42) the implied recognition of the strategic importance assigned to this city of Troas (20:7f);

(43) the danger of a coastal trip in this location (20:13);

(44) the correct knowledge of sequence of places (20:14–15);

(45) the correct name of the city as a neuter plural (Patara) (21:1);

(46) the appropriate route passing across the open sea south of Cyprus favored by persistent northwest winds (21:3);

(47) the suitable distance between these cities (21:7–8);

(48) this characteristically Jewish act of piety (21:24);

(49) the Jewish law regarding Gentile use of the Temple area (21:28);

(50) the permanent stationing of a Roman cohort at Antonia to suppress any disturbance at festival times (21:31);

(51) the flight of steps used by the guards (21:31, 35);

(52) the common way to obtain Roman citizenship at this time (22:28);

(53) the knowledge that the tribune is impressed with Roman rather than Tarsian citizenship (22:29);

(54) the fact that Ananias is high priest at the time (23:2);

(55) the fact that Felix is governor at this time (23:24);

(56) the natural stopping-point on the way to Caesarea (23:31);

(57) the fact of whose jurisdiction Cilicia was at the time (23:34);

(58) the provincial penal procedure of the time (24:1–9);

(59) the fact that the name "Porcius Festus" agrees precisely with that given by Josephus (24:27);

(60) the right of appeal for Roman citizens (25:11);

(61) the legal formula *de quibus cognoscere volebam* (25:18);

(62) the characteristic form of reference to the emperor at the time

(25:26);

(63) the best shipping lanes at the time (27:4f.);

(64) the common bonding of Cilicia and Pamphylia (27:4);

(65) the principal port to find a ship sailing to Italy (27:5);

(66) the slow passage to Cnidus in the face of the typical northwest wind (27:7);

(67) the right route to sail in view of the winds (27:7);

(68) the locations of Fair Havens and the neighboring site of Lasea (27:8);

(69) the fact that Fair Havens was a poorly sheltered roadstead (27:12);

(70) a noted tendency of a south wind in these climes to back suddenly to a violent northeaster, the well-known ***gregale*** (27:13);

(71) the nature of a square-rigged ancient ship, having no option but to be driven before a gale (27:16–17);

(72) the precise place and name of this island (27:16);

(73) the appropriate maneuvers for the safety of the ship in its particular plight (27:16f.);

(74) the fourteenth night in a remarkable calculation, based inevitably on a compounding of estimates and probabilities, confirmed in the judgment of experienced Mediterranean navigators (27:27);

(75) the proper term of the time for the Adriatic (27:27);

(76) the precise term (***bolisantes***) to be used for taking soundings (27:28);

(77) the position that admirably was the probable line of approach of a ship now released again to run before an easterly wind (27:39);

(78) the severe liability on guards who permitted a prisoner to escape (27:42);

(79) the local people and superstitions of the day (28:4–6);

(80) the proper title ***protos (tes nesou)*** (28:7);

(81) Rhegium as a refuge to await a southerly wind to carry them through the strait (28:13);

(82) Appii Forum and Tres Tabernae as correctly placed stopping-places on the Appian Way (28:15);

(83) appropriate means of custody with Roman soldiers (28:16);

(84) the conditions of imprisonment, living “at his own expense” (28:30–31).

Conclusion

The historicity of the book of Acts is confirmed by overwhelming evidence. Nothing like this amount of detailed confirmation exists for any other book from antiquity. Acts is not only a direct confirmation of the earliest Christian belief in the death and resurrection of Christ, but also indirectly of the gospel record, for the same author (Luke) wrote a gospel as well (see below). Further, substantially the same basic events are recorded in two other gospels (Matthew and Mark), and for that matter the gospel of John provides the same picture of the most crucial events, namely, the death and resurrection of Christ. Thus, the historicity of the events most crucial to orthodox Christianity is thereby established. Another noted Roman historian, A. N. Sherwin-White, calls the mythological view "unbelievable" (***RSRLNT***, 189). The reason for this is that the evidence for the book of Acts is much stronger than that for Roman history of that period.

The Historicity of the Gospel Accounts

Since Matthew and Mark provide the same basic data on the life, teaching, death, and resurrection of Christ, what argues for the authenticity of one also argues for the historicity of the other. Thus we will concentrate on Luke, since there are numerous arguments to support its historicity.

The Author of Luke Is Known to Be an Accurate Historian

Dr. Luke, travel companion of the apostle Paul, is widely believed to be the author of the book of Luke for many good reasons. ***First***, the author of Acts

(1) was highly educated, judging by the good Greek he used (cf. Luke 1:1–4);
(2) was not one of the twelve apostles (Luke 1:2);
(3) was a participant in many events himself (Luke 1:3);
(4) was knowledgeable about the apostle Paul;
(5) knew and quoted the Old Testament in Greek;

(6) had a good knowledge of the political and social situation in the first century;
(7) was a traveler with the apostle Paul at times, as indicated by the "we" sections (Acts 16:10–17; 20:5–21:18; 27:1–28:16);
(8) was not Timothy, Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius, Tychicus, or Trophimus, who are excluded by Acts 20:4;
(9) had knowledge of medicine, as indicated by his use of medical terms and references. The only companion of Paul known to fit all these characteristics was "Luke the beloved physician" (Col. 4:14 NKJV).[4]

However, it is not the question of who wrote the book that is important, but whether or not he was a reliable source. As R. T. France noted, "Authorship … is not a major factor in our assessment of the reliability of the Gospels" (***TEJ***, 124).

Second, the same person who wrote Acts also wrote the gospel of Luke, since

(1) both are written to "Theophilus" (cf. Luke 1:3 with Acts 1:1);
(2) both are written in excellent Greek;
(3) both show a medical interest;
(4) Acts refers to a "former account" the author had written about Jesus (Acts 1:1);
(5) there is an unbroken and virtually unchallenged tradition from the era of the early Christian church till modern times attributing it to Dr. Luke.

Third, the author of Acts is known to be a top-notch historian (see above), a fact established by both Sir William Ramsey in ***St. Paul the Traveler and the Roman Citizen***, and more recently by Colin Hemer in ***The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenstic History.***[5] Another noted Roman historian strongly supports the historicity of the Gospels, saying,

> So it is astonishing that while Greco-Roman historians have been growing in confidence, the twentieth-century study of the gospel narratives, starting from no less promising material, have taken so gloomy a turn in the development of form-criticism ... that the historical Christ is unknowable and the history of his mission cannot be written. This seems very curious. (Sherwin-White, *RSRNT*, 187.)

Thus the aforementioned belief that the idea that these accounts are legendary is

simply “unbelievable” (ibid., 188–91).

The Gospel of Luke Was Written by About A.D. 60

From all of this information we can conclude that the gospel of Luke is also an excellent historical work written around A.D. 60. Since Matthew, Mark, and John present the same basic picture of Christ, they too are historically reliable.[6] This conclusion is further supported by the fact that Luke states his historical interest in his prologue (Luke 1:1–4), claiming that

(1) he is aware of other earlier written accounts of Christ’s life;
(2) the gospel of Luke is based on “eyewitness” testimony;
(3) he had “carefully investigated everything from the beginning.”

Furthermore, Luke proves his historical interest by correlating his narration of the life of Christ with secular history and exact dates. He not only tells when Jesus was born (when “Caesar Augustus” was king, Luke 2:1) but also the exact year when Jesus began his ministry, namely, “In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene—during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert” (Luke 3:1–2). All of these check out with secular history of the time.

Also, Colin Hemer has provided strong arguments for Acts being written by A.D. 62 (see page 472), and since Luke was written before Acts (cf. Luke 1:3 with Acts 1:1), it follows that the gospel of Luke comes from around A.D. 60. But this is only twenty-seven years after Christ died and rose from the dead, which means that many of the generation of the eyewitnesses of Christ of which Luke speaks (Luke 1:2) were still alive when he wrote his gospel, a strong indication of its historical reliability.[7]

William F. Albright (1891–1971) on the Historicity of the Gospels

With a lifetime of research under his belt, the dean of twentieth-century archaeologists wrote:

> In short, thanks to the Qumran discoveries, the New Testament proves to be in fact what it was formerly believed to be: the teaching of Christ and his immediate followers between c. a.d. 25 and c. a.d. 80. (*FSAC*, 23.)

More specifically, Albright affirmed:

> I should answer that, in my opinion, *every book of the New Testament was written by a baptized Jew between the forties and the eighties of the first century* a.d. (*very probably sometime between about 50 and 75* a.d.). (*"WATMCV" in CT*, 359, emphasis added.)

He even went so far as to say,

> The evidence from the Qumran community shows that the concepts, terminology, and mindset of the gospel of John is probably early first century. (Davies and Daube, "RDPGSJ" in *BNTIE*.)

Albright also believed:

> Biblical historical data are accurate to an extent far surpassing the ideas of any modern critical students, who have consistently tended, to err on the side of hypercriticism. (*AP*, 229.)

Since Jesus died about A.D. 33, placing some books in the 50s and 60s would mean that ***it was written within twenty to thirty years of the events***—while most

of the eyewitnesses were still alive! That there are multiple records involved (eight or nine authors and twenty-seven books) provides a strong basis for the historicity of their writings.

Confirmation by a Liberal Critic of the New Testament

New Testament scholar John A. T. Robinson was noted for his role in spawning the "Death of God" movement in the twentieth century. Before he died and without recanting his negative views on Scripture, Bishop Robinson wrote a revealing book entitled ***Redating the New Testament.*** In it he places Matthew at c. A.D. 40–60+; Mark at c. A.D. 45–60; Luke at c. A.D. 57–60+; and John at c. A.D. 40–65+ (***RNT***, 352–354). This would mean that ***some gospels could be as early as seven to twelve years after the time Jesus died!*** Even by the outer limits they were all composed within the time frame of the eyewitnesses and contemporaries of the events. This is much too early to deny their basic historicity.

Possible Confirmations by Early Fragments of the Gospels

Jose O'Callahan, a Spanish paleographer, made headlines around the world in 1972 for his identification of a manuscript fragment from Qumran as the earliest known piece of the gospel of Mark. Fragments from cave seven had previously been dated between 50 B.C. and A.D. 50 and listed under "not identified" and classified as "Biblical Texts?" Using the accepted methods of papyrology and paleography, O'Callahan eventually identified several fragments from Qumran as follows:

Mark 4:28 7Q6? A.D. 50
Mark 6:48 7Q15 A.D.?
Mark 6:52, 53 7Q5 A.D. 50
Mark 12:17 7Q7 A.D. 50

Acts 27:38 7Q6? A.D. 60+[8]

Both friends and critics acknowledge that, if valid, O'Callahan's conclusions would revolutionize current New Testament theories. The ***New York Times*** reported:

> If Father O'Callahan's theory is accepted it would prove that at least one of the gospels—that of St. Mark—was written only a few years after the death of Jesus.

The ***UPI*** noted that O'Callahan's findings indicated that "the people closest to the events—Jesus' original followers—found Mark's report accurate and trustworthy, not myth but true history" (Estrada and White, ***FNT***, 137). ***Time*** magazine quoted scholars who claimed that if O'Callahan is correct, "They can make a bonfire of 70 tons of indigestible German scholarship" (ibid.).

The early dates (listed on page 474) are supported by the following lines of evidence:

(1) They were not dated by O'Callahan but by other scholars prior to his identification of them as New Testament texts.

(2) These dates have never been seriously called into question since that time.

(3) It fits with the dates determined for other manuscripts found in the same Qumran area.

(4) The archaeologists who discovered the cave (number seven) attested that it showed no signs of being opened since it was sealed in A.D. 70, and that its contents date from no later than A.D. 60.

(5) The style of writing (in Greek uncials) has been identified as early first century.

Of course, critics have raised objections, but many reasons are given in support of O'Callahan's identification of these texts with the New Testament, especially of the first two.

First, the criteria for identification of these fragments as New Testament are the normal, acceptable ones used by paleographers.

Second, the whole letters used (and most of the partial ones) were identified by other scholars before O'Callahan identified them.

Third, O'Callahan is a reputable paleographer who has made many successful identifications of ancient texts both before and after this time.

Fourth, his identification of the texts fits perfectly with these New Testament passages.
Fifth, no other viable identification of these fragments has been made with any other texts.
Sixth, the odds that these letter sequences represent some other text are incredibly high. Two scholars calculated the odds at 1 in 2.25 times 10^{65}!
If the identification of even some of these fragments is valid, then the implications for the historicity of the New Testament are enormous. First and foremost, it shows that the gospel of Mark and the book of Acts were written within the lifetime of the apostles and other contemporaries of the events. Also, this early date (c. A.D. 50) leaves no time for mythological embellishment of the records; they must be accepted as historical. Furthermore, it argues against a late date for Mark, showing that it was one of the earlier gospels. Finally, since these manuscripts are not originals but copies, it reveals that the New Testament was "published," that is, copied and disseminated during the lifetime of the writers.

The Gospels Are Too Early to Be Mythological

Julius Muller challenged the scholars of his day (c. 1844) to produce even one example where in one generation a myth developed where the most prominent elements are myths (***TM***, 29). No one has ever met the challenge because none exist.
Sherwin-White observed:

> Herodotus enables us to test the tempo of myth-making, and the tests suggest that even two generations are too short a span to allow the mythical tendency to prevail over the hard historic core of the oral tradition. (*RSRLNT*, 190.)

Commenting on this, William Craig noted that this enables us to determine the rate at which legends develop: "The tests show that ***even two generations is too short to allow legendary tendencies to wipe out the hard core of historical fact***" (***KTAR***, 101).

Archaeological Confirmation of the Gospels

Anyone familiar with first-century Jewish culture will recognize immediately that the gospel records breathe this same air. The mention of Pharisees, Sadducees, Jewish traditions, customs, and even the use of Aramaic words (cf. Matt. 27:46; Acts 9:36), along with the cities and topography of the land, are all very familiar to other documentation of first-century Judaism as recorded by Josephus and others.

In addition, the New Testament mentions historical figures like Caesar Augustus (Luke 2:1); Tiberius Caesar (Luke 3:1); Quirinius, governor of Syria (Luke 2:2); King Herod (Matt. 2:3); Pontius Pilate (Matt. 27:2); Annas and Caiphas, the high priests (Luke 3:2); John the Baptist, and others. All of these are known to have existed and operated in the time and place to which the New Testament locates them.

Further, in addition to the overwhelming archaeological support for this overall time period (see above), there are references in the Gospels that are supported by specific archaeological finds, such as the Siloam pool, the pool of Bethesda, the synagogue in Capernaum, the foundation of Herod's temple, Pilate's pratorium, the vicinity of Golgotha, and the Garden Tomb. Likewise, the "Titulus Venetus" helps to illuminate Augustus's census (in Luke 2:1f). A Latin plaque mentions "Pontius Pilatus, Prefect of Judea." Even the bones of a first-century crucifixion victim, Yohanan, support the gruesome presentation of Christ's death. And the Nazareth Decree (found in 1878), perhaps circulated between A.D. 41 and 54, is curious in view of the Jewish claim that Jesus' body had been stolen rather than resurrected (cf. Matt. 28:12–13). Since all previous Roman indictments of this nature involved only a fine, why should such a strong penalty be leveled in Palestine just after Jesus died, was reported to have risen from the tomb, and with His disciples stirring up dissent in Palestine? (see Gary Habermas, ***HJ***, 154). More recently the "James Ossuary" dated A.D. 63 mentions "Jesus".

Like the rest of Scripture, the life of Christ portrayed in the Gospels fits perfectly into the known facts unearthed by the archaeology of this period. Nothing has ever been found to contradict it, and numerous finds have supported it.

The Evidence for the Historicity of Paul's Early Epistles

Even liberal critics who reject the later epistles of Paul are in general agreement that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians and that it was composed around A.D. 55. D. A. Carson summarizes the evidence well:

> There is an inscription recording a rescript of the emperor Claudius to the people of Delphi that mentions Gallio as holding the office of proconsul in Achaia during the period of Claudius's twenty-sixth acclamation as *imperator*—a period known from other inscriptions to cover the first seven months of a.d. 52.... Paul's two-and-a-half-year stint in Ephesus would have taken him to the autumn of 55. (*INT*, 282–83.)

It was in Ephesus that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians some time before Pentecost (16:8). Because of a possible adjustment by one year of the beginning of Gallio's proconsulship, the date of 1 Corinthians may be A.D. 56.

First Corinthians presents the same basic information about Christ found in the Gospels but some five years earlier than Luke. ***This places these documents founding the historicity of Christ's death and resurrection within twenty-two years of the time they happened!*** Paul wrote,

> Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. (1 Cor. 15:1–6)

Several important facts emerge from this text.

First, the essence of the Christian message is the death and resurrection of Christ—the same thing stressed in all four gospels.

Second, Paul said that this message was "handed down" to him, implying that it had come from some time earlier. Some New Testament scholars posit the original message handed to Paul may have been in creedal form, from only a few years after the death of Christ. If so, then it places the central message of the

Gospel beyond any reasonable historical doubt (see "Creeds," page 480).
Third, the evidence for the resurrection of Christ rested on over five hundred eyewitnesses, a fact that places it out of the category of reasonable doubt. Paul speaks of over two hundred and fifty eyewitnesses of the Resurrection that were still alive when he wrote (15:6), including "Cephas" (Peter), who was an apostle as one of the eyewitnesses (15:5), "the twelve" (apostles), and James, the brother of Jesus. And this is good evidence for the early date of 1 Corinthians.
Fourth, the readers of 1 Corinthians were contemporaries of the eyewitnesses of the Resurrection, and Paul gave them an implied challenge of checking out the eyewitnesses for themselves, since Paul added that "most of [them] are still living" (15:6).
Fifth, the internal evidence includes:

(1) the repeated claim of the book to be from Paul (1:1, 12–17; 3:4, 6, 22; 16:21);
(2) the many parallels with the book of Acts;
(3) the ring of authenticity from beginning to end;
(4) the mention of five hundred who had seen Christ, most of whom were still alive and could verify Paul's claims (15:6);
(5) the harmony of the contents with what was known about Corinth at the time.

Likewise, the external evidence is powerful from the first and second centuries on, including:

(1) Clement of Rome's epistle to the Corinthians (chapter 47);
(2) the epistle of Barnabas (chapter 4);
(3) the Didache (chapter 10);
(4) the Shepherd of Hermas (chapter 4).
(5) There are almost six hundred quotations of 1 Corinthians in Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian alone, making it one of the best-attested books from its time period.

Sixth, 1 Corinthians, along with 2 Corinthians, Romans, Galatians, Philippians, and 1 Thessalonians (which are also well attested), not only reveals an historical interest in the events of Jesus' life, but it provides a vast array of details about it

also found in the gospel records. Paul speaks of Jesus'

(1) Jewish ancestry (Gal. 3:16);
(2) Davidic descent (Rom. 1:3);
(3) virgin birth (Gal. 4:4);
(4) life under Jewish law (Gal. 4:4);
(5) brothers (1 Cor. 9:5);
(6) twelve disciples (1 Cor. 15:7),
(7) one of whom was named James (1 Cor. 15:7);
(8) that some had wives (1 Cor. 9:5),
(9) and that Paul knew Peter and James (Gal. 1:18–2:16);
(10) poverty (2 Cor. 8:9);
(11) humility (Phil 2:5–7);
(12) meekness and gentleness (2 Cor. 10:1);
(13) abuse by others (Rom. 15:3);
(14) teachings on divorce and remarriage (1 Cor. 7:10–11);
(15) on paying wages of ministers (1 Cor. 9:14);
(16) on paying taxes (Rom. 13:6–7);
(17) on the duty to love one's neighbors (Rom. 13:9);
(18) on Jewish ceremonial uncleanliness (Rom. 14:14);
(19) on His titles of deity (Rom. 1:3–4; 10:9);
(20) on vigilance in view of Jesus' second coming (1 Thess. 4:15),
(21) which would be like a thief in the night (1 Thess. 5:2–11);
(22) on the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:23–25);
(23) sinless life (2 Cor. 5:21);
(24) death on the cross (Rom. 4:25; 5:8; Gal. 3:13; 1 Cor. 15:3),
(25) specifically by crucifixion (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20),
(26) by Jewish instigation (1 Thess. 2:14–15);
(27) burial (1 Cor. 15:4);
(28) resurrection on the "third day" (1 Cor. 15:4);
(29) post-resurrection appearance to the apostles (1 Cor. 15:5–8),
(30) and to other eyewitnesses (1 Cor. 15:6); and
(31) position now at God's right hand (Rom. 8:34).

Such detail is strong support for the historicity of the Gospels, which present the

same facts.

Seventh, Paul rests the very truth of Christianity on the historicity of the Resurrection (1 Cor. 15:12f), and he gives historical details about Jesus' contemporaries, the apostles (1 Cor. 15:5–8), including his own private encounters with Peter and the others (Gal. 1:18f.; 2:1f.). What is more, he notes that more than two hundred and fifty eyewitnesses were still living when he wrote 1 Corinthians, leaving them with the implicit challenge to verify his claims (1 Cor. 15:6). One could scarcely ask for better evidence for the central historical truth of Christianity than is narrated in the four gospels with great detail.

Confirmation of the New Testament by Early "Creeds" or Traditions

A number of scholars point to evidence in the New Testament of earlier creeds or traditions that point to the historicity of the basic message in the Gospels. Since most people in the first century were illiterate, short memorizable statements about Christ were a good way to transmit truth. These "creeds" point to indicators such as rhythm and repetitive patterns, and even the authors note that it is a tradition. Possible examples are found in Luke 24:34; Acts 2:22–24, 30–32; 3:13–15; 4:10–12; 5:29–32; 10:39–41; 13:37–39; Rom. 1:3–4; 4:25; 10:9; 1 Cor. 11:23f.; 15:3–8; Phil. 2:6–11; 1 Tim. 2:6; 3:16; 6:13; 2 Tim. 2:8; 1 Peter 3:18; and 1 John 4:2.[9]

The most interesting of these is found in 1 Corinthians 15:3–8, which affirms:

> For what *I received* I passed on to you as of first importance: *that* Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, *that* he was buried, *that* he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and *that* he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. (emphasis added)

What is noteworthy here is that this is a teaching that Paul "received" from others—this implies it had been in existence for some time. Habermas notes that numerous critical scholars agree with a surprisingly early date: "Concerning a

more exact time, it is very popular to date this creed in the A.D. mid-30s" (***HJ***, 154). Yet Paul is writing around A.D. 55–56. Again, ***this would place the origin of this teaching about Jesus' death, burial, resurrection, and appearances to hundreds of persons by conservative estimates within a few short years of the time they happened.***

Confirmation for the New Testament From the Basic Facts Position

Professor Habermas argues from what can be called the basic facts position. Beginning with the truths that almost all critical scholars of the New Testament agree upon, he maintains that the best explanation is that Jesus lived, died, and rose from the dead—all of which is at the heart of the historicity of the New Testament. He lists "at least twelve separate facts [that] are agreed to be knowable history" by "practically all critical scholars" (***HJ***, 158). These include:

(1) Jesus died by crucifixion.
(2) Jesus was buried.
(3) His disciples despaired.
(4) The tomb was later found empty.
(5) The disciples believed they later saw literal appearances of Jesus.
(6) They were transformed from doubters to bold proclaimers of His resurrection.
(7) This message was the center of their early preaching.
(8) They preached this in Jerusalem shortly after it happened.
(9) The church was born and grew rapidly.
(10) Sunday was their primary day of worship.
(11) James was converted from skepticism to belief in the resurrection of Jesus.
(12) A few years later Paul was converted, proclaiming that he had seen the resurrected Christ.

On this basis it can be argued that no purely naturalistic theory explains all these facts and that the actual bodily resurrection of Jesus is the best explanation of all

the facts.
Furthermore, taking even four of these facts that are accepted by virtually all critical scholars (1, 5, 6, and 12), the case can still be made that the literal resurrection of Christ is the best explanation for these four facts (***HJ***, 162–64). Habermas concludes,

> These core facts also provide the major positive evidence for Jesus' literal resurrection appearances.... Thus these core historical facts provide positive evidence which further verify the disciples' claims concerning Jesus' literal resurrection, especially in that these arguments have not been accounted for naturalistically. (ibid., 165.)

The Internal Evidence for the Historicity of the Gospels

In addition to the strong external evidence via early dating, archaeological finds, and multiple-eyewitness testimony, there are strong internal evidences for the authenticity of the gospel records. Once the books are dated within the lifetime of Jesus' immediate disciples, the question becomes moot as to who actually wrote them. In fact, there is no good reason not to accept the traditional authorship, well attested in early church history as Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Be that as it may, the documents were composed by first-century disciples of Jesus who were eyewitnesses and contemporaries of the events. This being the case, let's look at the internal evidence for their authenticity.

The Gospel Writers Made No Attempt to Harmonize Their Accounts

Eyewitnesses offering truthful accounts rarely tell the same story word-for-word. Overlaps in testimony on crucial points are expected, but exactness on details is rare. This is exactly what we have in the Gospels; there is unanimity on the central facts about the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, along with significant but reconcilable differences in the details.
Sometimes there is even apparent contradiction from one account to another. For instance, there was one angel at the tomb in Matthew (28:2–3), and two in John (20:12). Matthew 27:5 says Judas hanged himself, but Acts affirms that he fell down and his bowels burst out (Acts 1:18). Matthew (9:27) says Jesus healed

two blind men, and yet Luke (18:35f.) says he cured one. Even something as simple as the inscription on the cross reads four different ways in the four gospels (cf. Matt. 27:37; Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38; John 19:19). Surely no writers in collusion would have allowed all these apparent contradictions in the record. While it has never been demonstrated that these are real contradictions,[10] this much is certain: the writers were not conspiring together to tell a story that was not true.

The Gospel Writers Included Passages That Placed Jesus in a Bad Light

Another internal evidence of authenticity is the fact that the gospel writers did not hesitate to put in the record things that placed Jesus, to whom they were devoted, in poor reflection. Among these are the facts that Jesus was called "a drunkard" (Matt. 11:19), a madman (John 10:20), demon-possessed (John 8:48), and that His brothers did not believe in Him (John 7:5). Surely no one trying to paint a perfect picture or tell a myth would have allowed this in the record of their great hero, to say nothing of the one whom they believed to be the Son of God.

The Gospel Writers Left Difficult Passages in Their Text

Even honest followers of Christ admit that it would be easier to defend Jesus' claims to be the Son of God had the text not contained some things Jesus said that are hard to explain. For example, if Jesus is really God, as the text records that He claimed to be (Mark 14:61–62; John 5:23; 8:58; 10:30; 17:5), then why did they leave in Jesus' statement "The Father is greater than I" (John 14:28), and "No one knows the time, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son" (Matt. 24:36)? Also, why did He rebuke the rich young ruler when he called Jesus "Good Master" and insist that only God was good (from whom He appeared to be disassociating Himself)?

Why also do they leave in the text those difficult passages that agnostics take to make Jesus look unwise, like cursing a fig tree for not having figs when it was not yet the season for figs (Matt. 21:18f.)? Why did they leave in the passages where Christ seems to say He was coming back to earth within a generation when He did not (Matt. 24:34), especially if one accepts, as most critics do, that

this was not written until after the alleged prediction was already known to be false? The most plausible reason is that they were really reporting what He said and not what would make things look better, fit better, or make a better impression. In short, all these things argue for the truthfulness of the gospel writers.

The Gospel Writers Recorded Self-Incriminating Stories

Granted that one or more apostles wrote a gospel (say, Matthew and/or John), or even that they had a strong influence on a gospel writer (like Paul on Luke or Peter on Mark, their companions), then why did they leave self-incriminating things in the record, such as

(1) all the disciples falling asleep when Jesus asked them to pray (Mark 14:32–41);
(2) Peter being called "Satan" by Jesus (Matt. 16:23);
(3) Peter denying the Lord three times (Luke 22:34);
(4) the disciples fleeing when things got really tough (at the Crucifixion, Mark 14:50);
(5) Peter cutting off the ear of the servant of the high priest (Mark 14:47); or,
(6) in spite of repeated teaching that He would rise from the dead (John 2:18, 3:14–18; Matt. 12:39–41; 17:9, 22–23), the disciples being doubtful and disbelieving when they heard of Jesus' resurrection?

Again, the best explanation for these self-incriminating inclusions is that they really happened, and the gospel writers simply reported the truth.

The Gospel Writers Carefully Distinguished Jesus' Word From Their Own

Any literate young adult could take a black and white version of the Gospels and accurately add quotations marks around the words of Jesus, so carefully are they distinguished from the writers' own words. The fact that all red-letter editions of the Bible are virtually identical illustrates how clear this distinction is. But why

should the gospel writers be so careful to distinguish Jesus' words from theirs if they were simply putting words in Jesus' mouth? This distinction demonstrates that, contrary to form and redaction criticism (see chapter 19), they were really reporting, not creating, the words of Jesus.

Likewise, Paul made the same careful distinction in his epistles and in the book of Acts:

> In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

And he said to the Corinthians: "To the married I give this command, (***not I, but the Lord***)." Yet two verses later he wrote, "To the rest I say this (***I, not the Lord***)" (1 Cor. 7:10, 12, emphasis added).[11]

The Gospel Writers Did Not Deny Their Testimony Under Persecution or Threat of Death

One sure-fire way to determine whether a person is telling the truth is to persecute or threaten to kill him unless he changes his view. It is well known that the early Christians, among whom were the gospel writers, were put in this situation repeatedly; Acts 4, 5, 7, and 8 are notable examples of this in the early church. Paul tells of his incredible woes for Christ:

> Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. (2 Cor. 11:24–28)

It is a psychological fact that few, if any, persons would endure these experiences for what they knew to be a lie.

The Gospel Writers Claim They Based Their Record on Eyewitness Testimony

Surely if what the gospel writers said was a fraud, pious or not, someone would have cracked under this pressure and confessed that what they said was not true. But no one did. This in itself is a strong testimony to the truth of the gospel records.

First, there is the clear claim of the gospel of Luke to be historical. Luke 1:1–4 says,

> Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

Furthermore, this is not a mere claim, since the author of Luke has been shown to be an excellent historian (see pages 471–72).

Second, the author of John claims he was witness to the events recorded there: "***This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down.*** We know that his testimony is true" (John 21:24, emphasis added). By the process of elimination, the author appears to be John the apostle, since the author was one of the inner circle of Jesus' disciples (John 13:23–25), which included Peter, James, and John (Matt. 17:1). James died much earlier (Acts 12:2), and Peter is distinguished from the writer by name (cf. 1:41–42; 13:6, 8; 21:20–24). Another New Testament book, written about the same time and in the same style and attributed to John the apostle from earliest times, claimed:

> That which was from the beginning, which *we have heard*, which *we have seen with our eyes*, which *we have looked at and our hands have touched*—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. (1 John 1:1, emphasis added)

Third, the author of 2 Peter[12] claimed to be an eyewitness of Christ:

> *We did not follow cleverly invented stories* when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but *we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.* (2 Peter 1:16, emphasis added)

Fourth, the entire New Testament record contains many indications of an eyewitness account, having a lively immediacy that bespeaks an eyewitness

retelling, reflecting knowledge of first-century places, persons, customs, topography, and geography. There are references to verifiable cities like Bethlehem, Jerusalem, and many other cities of first-century Palestine, along with religious knowledge about Pharisees and Sadducees.

Non-Christian Sources Confirm the Gospel Record

In addition to the biblical data, there are non-Christian sources for the life of Christ, including Tacitus, Suetonius, Thallus, the Jewish Talmud, and Josephus. Citations from them are contained in the excellent work of noted English New Testament Scholar F. F. Bruce (***Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament***) and in Gary Habermas's ***The Historical Jesus.***
Following Habermas, many important things can be ascertained from this text:

(1) Jesus was worshiped by Christians.
(2) Jesus introduced new teachings in the Holy Land.
(3) Jesus was crucified for His teachings. His teachings included
(4) the fellowship of all believers,
(5) the importance of conversion, and
(6) the importance of denying the gods of Greece. The Christians
(7) worshiped Jesus and
(8) lived according to His laws. Further, the followers of Jesus
(9) believed they were immortal and were characterized by
(10) contempt for death,
(11) voluntary self-devotion, and
(12) renunciation of material goods.

Habermas notes that the writings of the earliest non-Christian sources on Christ are approximately twenty to one hundred and fifty years after Jesus' death, which is quite early by the standards of ancient historiography. What is more, "at least seventeen non-Christian writings record more than fifty details concerning the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus, plus details concerning the earliest church" (***HJ***, 150). And if one includes the non-biblical Christian sources as well, then there are some one hundred and twenty-nine facts about the life of Christ listed outside the New Testament (ibid., 243–50). This is a powerful confirmation from early extra-biblical sources for the historicity of the New Testament.

OBJECTIONS TO THE HISTORICITY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

In spite of the overwhelming evidence for the historicity of the New Testament, some continue to cast doubt on its reliability. The most frequently given reasons are two: the impossibility of knowing the past, and the unreliability of miraculous accounts.

Is History Knowable?

Some critical scholars have questioned whether history in general is knowable. This objection from the historical relativists has been answered earlier (see chapter 11).

Are Miraculous Accounts Unreliable?

Since the credibility of miracles has already been addressed (see chapter 3), it will only be addressed briefly here. ***First***, no one has ever offered a definitive argument showing that miracles are impossible (again, see chapter 3). Every attempt simply begs the question by defining miracles as impossible. ***Second***, if a theistic God exists, then miracles are possible, for a miracle is a special act of God, and if a theistic God exists who has performed the supernatural act of creating a world out of nothing, then other miracles are thereby made possible. ***Third***, it follows, then, that the only way to disprove the possibility of miracles is to disprove the existence of God, and despite all attempts to cast doubt on the existence of God, no one has yet provided an absolute (or even convincing) disproof (see Geisler, "G, AD" in ***BECA***).

Furthermore, there is an inconsistency in the critics' arguments. Ancient historians accept the reliability of other ancient accounts of events that contain miracle claims in them. As Habermas notes,

Ancient histories regularly recounted supernatural reports of all sorts, including omens and portents, prophecies, healing miracles, various sorts of divine intervention, as well as demonic activity.

For example,

> In his widely recognized account of Alexander the Great, Plutarch begins by noting Alexander's likely descent from Hercules. Later Alexander talked with a priest who claimed to be the son of the god Ammon and then with Ammon himself. [Indeed,] near the end of his life, Alexander took almost every unusual event to be supernatural, surrounding himself with diviners and others who foretold the future. (*HJ*, 154.)

Inclusion of alleged miracles is also part of the reports of Tacitus and Suetonius, whose accounts are widely accepted by modern historians as containing reliable historical accounts.

Do Unusual Claims Demand Unusual Evidence?

A kindred criticism, though less obvious, is the oft-repeated claim that "Unusual claims demand unusual evidence." The New Testament makes unusual claims; hence, it demands unusual evidence. However, there are several serious flaws with this claim as it bears on the historicity of the New Testament.

First, the word ***unusual*** is ambiguous. Does it mean supernatural? If so, then it begs the question, for it amounts to saying, "A miraculous claim demands miraculous evidence." But if one provided miraculous evidence for that, then the objector would ask miraculous evidence for that, and so on to infinity. In this case, one could never verify anything by a miraculous claim.

Second, if "unusual" simply means merely more than normal, then the New Testament meets the challenge, since there are more manuscripts, earlier ones, more accurately copied ones, with more witnesses, and more corroborated by external evidence for the New Testament than any other book from antiquity.

Third, the word ***unusual*** is imprecise. How unusual does the evidence have to be? Who determines its meaning? What are the objective criteria for

unusualness? Are these applied consistently with other unusual claims in history and other disciplines?

Fourth, many views in modern science that are very unusual have been accepted. The big bang theory is a case in point: By the standards operating in modern science, the explosion of the universe out of nothing was a highly unusual event.[13] Yet only normal scientific evidence has been required to believe it, such as the second law of thermodynamics, an expanding universe, etc. (see chapter 2).

Fifth, many purely natural events are highly unusual; for example, virtually everything in nature contracts as it gets colder, yet when water reaches 32° Fahrenheit, it expands. Scientists do not require highly unusual evidence that this is so—only the regular observation demanded to establish other natural events. In short, the claim that "unusual events demand unusual evidence" is an unusual claim that needs unusual evidence as to why it should be accepted. Thus, it fails to undermine the historicity of the New Testament; there is more than ample evidence for the miraculous claims it contains.

Other objections such as "Is history knowable?" and "Do religious motives negate doing credible history?" have been treated elsewhere (see chapter 11). It is sufficient to mention here that all such objections either beg the question or are self-defeating.

Do We Have the Exact Words of Jesus?

Even granting the general reliability of the New Testament, some insist that we do not have the exact words of Jesus therein, and, in the minds of some, this weakens the case for the historical objectivity of the New Testament. The arguments for this view will be cited and evaluated.

Jesus' Aramaic Words Were Translated Into Greek

The first objection is that Jesus probably spoke in Aramaic, as is indicated by the fact that some words are preserved in that language (cf. Matt. 27:46). But the New Testament was written in Greek; therefore, it is already a translation of

Jesus' words.
In response, several observations are in order.
First, even if Jesus spoke in Aramaic, it does not follow that the gospel writers did not faithfully translate His words.
Second, some scholars argue that since Jesus was at least bilingual, He may have spoken to His disciples in Greek (see Thomas, ***JC***, 367f.), in which case no translation would be necessary.
Third, the fact that Jesus occasionally spoke in Aramaic, as He did a few words from the cross (Matt. 27:46), does not prove that He regularly spoke it in His discourses.
Fourth, even if Jesus gave His discourses in Aramaic, historical reliability does not depend on having those exact words (***ipsissima verba***), as long as the Greek translation preserves the exact meaning (*ipsissima vox*). And, contrary to speculations of the critics, which are based on questionable presuppositions, there is no factual evidence that the meaning of Jesus is not preserved in the gospel records.
Fifth, since the earliest copies of the gospel known are in Greek, and since it was the Greek-written original that was inspired (2 Tim. 3:16), it does not matter if He spoke the words originally in Aramaic. Since the Greek version is inspired, it was thereby preserved from all error (see chapter 27).

Parallel Gospel Accounts Do Not Contain the Exact Same Words

It is also noted by critics that Jesus' words spoken on the same occasion differ from gospel to gospel. Hence, it is argued that these cannot be the exact words He spoke.
In response, this objection also fails to prove its point for a number of reasons.
First, in most (if not all) cases, one account may simply be giving more of His exact words than the other. For example, in Peter's famous confession we may have Matthew recording more than Mark, and Luke less. Matthew recorded: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (16:16); Mark's account gives only part of it, namely, "You are the Christ" (8:29); Luke wrote [You are] "the Christ of God" (9:20).
Second, other differences in the Gospel accounts can be explained by the reasonable assumptions that Jesus said:

(1) similar things on different occasions;
(2) more on a given occasion than what one or even all gospel writers recorded;
(3) the same thing more than one way on the same occasion (cf. Mark 10:23–24).

Third, in any event, the exact words are not necessary to give a historically reliable account, as long as the same meaning is conveyed.

Long Discourses Could Not Have Been Remembered Years Later

There are many long discourses of Jesus recorded in the Gospels, including the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7), the parables (e.g., Matt. 13), the denunciation of the Jewish leaders (Matt. 23), the Mount Olivet, Discourse (Matt. 24–25), the Upper Room Discourse (John 14–17), and the high-priestly prayer (John 17). It is alleged to be very unlikely that these could have been remembered word-for-word a generation or more later, when they were recorded.

In response, the critics overlook some important facts.

First, their dates for the Gospels are too late (see page 474). Evidence places the writings closer to the events than previously thought, even within ten years, according to some (like liberal critic John A. T. Robinson).

Second, memories were more highly developed in this preliterary culture, making it feasible that all of this was memorized.

Third, even today many persons have memorized much more than this, even whole gospels.

Fourth, Matthew, who has most of the long discourses, was a record keeper by vocation. He may have kept records of Jesus' exact words that were then available for others, just as the early Christian writer Papias said he did (see Eusebius, ***EH***, 3.24.6).

Fifth, even if these long discourses were summaries and paraphrases of Jesus' exact words, there is no evidence to indicate that they are not accurate. In fact, as we have seen above, all the evidence is to the contrary.

Sixth, Jesus promised supernatural activation of the disciples' memories, saying, "But the Counselor, ***the Holy Spirit***, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and ***will remind you of everything I have said to you***" (John 14:26).

John Records Jesus Saying Different Things

There is little doubt that the gospel of John records different sayings than the other gospels. Jesus' famous "I am" statements occur only in John (e.g., 4:26; 6:35; 8:12, 58; 10:9, 11; 11:25; 14:6). "Verily, verily" (or "truly, truly") occurs only in John (cf. 1:51; 3:3, 5, 11; 5:19, 24–25; 6:26, 32, 47, 53; 8:34, 51, 58; 10:1, 7; 12:24; 13:16, 20–21, 38; 14:12; 16:20, 23; 21:18). There is also great doubt that this in any way undermines the reliability of the gospel record (see Geisler, "J, GO" in ***BECA***, 388f.).

There are solid reasons for the differences in John. His deviations from the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) can be explained largely by the location (Judean), date (early and later ministry), and nature (many private conversations) of Jesus' sayings. The "I am" claims can be understood as shorter, simpler statements Jesus made to those who did not at first understand Him. Indeed, the fact that John's account is so intimate, so fresh, and so detailed argues strongly for its authenticity.

The "verily, verily" statements have parallels in both Mark and Matthew, who say, "I tell you the truth" (Matt. 26:34; Mark 14:30); the doubling may have been for emphasis (see Blomberg, ***HRG***, 159). Further, when John says Jesus used "verily, verily" he is reporting Jesus' statements on different occasions than events in the Synoptic Gospels. During His ministry Jesus avoided making explicit public claims to be the Messiah, yet He did not hesitate to do so in private to the woman at the well (John 4:25–26).

There are no instances where Jesus said only one "verily" in the Synoptics, and John doubled it as well. Indeed, John's is the only gospel that claims to be written by an eyewitness apostle (John 21:24–25). Carson's conclusion is correct:

> It is altogether plausible that Jesus sometimes spoke in nothing less than what we think of as "Johannine" style, and that John's style was to some degree influenced by Jesus himself. [Thus] when all the evidence is taken together, it is not hard to believe that when we listen to the voice of the Evangelist in his description of what Jesus said, we are listening to the voice of Jesus himself. (*GAJ*, 48.)

In summation, there is no good evidence that the Gospels do not convey to us the same truths that Jesus spoke, even if it could be shown that in some cases His exact words are not reported. What is certain is this: The gospel writers did not ***create*** the teachings and actions of Jesus but rather ***reported*** them. Even if some (or all) were originally spoken in Aramaic and then translated into Greek, they are translated accurately by eyewitnesses and contemporaries of the events whose lives and memories were dramatically impacted and changed by Him and whose memories were super-naturally activated by His Spirit. Further, the

historicity of what they said is corroborated by multiple accounts, by archaeological discoveries, by early manuscript evidence, and by the morality and dedication of the writers. No such combination of evidence exists for any other book from the ancient world.

CONCLUSION

The historicity of the New Testament is based on more solid evidence than that for any other event of its era, for no other event is based on more manuscripts that are more accurately copied or that were written by more people who were eyewitnesses of the events and who wrote down the material within the lifetime of its contemporaries. Were it not for an ungrounded antisupernatural bias of the negative critics (see chapter 3), the gospel accounts would be unquestioned as to their historicity—which indeed they were among Bible scholars for some 1,800 years after the events (see chapters 15–18).

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CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

THE INERRANCY OF THE BIBLE

The doctrine of inerrancy is not directly taught in Scripture, although it is logically implied. Two things, however, ***are*** directly taught:

(1) The Bible is the Word of God (see chapters 13–14).
(2) God cannot err (Heb. 6:18; Titus 1:2; Rom. 3:4).

The logically necessary result of these two premises is that (3) the Bible cannot err.

SOME IMPORTANT DEFINITIONS

The terms ***inspiration, infallibility***, and ***inerrancy*** are all related. ***Inspiration*** means "breathed out by God," "what comes from God Himself" (see 2 Tim. 3:16–17). ***Infallibility*** means "what has divine authority," "what cannot be broken" (John 10:34–35). ***Inerrancy*** means "what is without error," "wholly true."

What is inspired is infallible, since ***inspired*** means to be breathed out by God, and what is God-breathed cannot be in error. Likewise, what is infallible, since it has divine authority, must also be inerrant—a divinely authoritative error is a contradiction in terms.
However, not everything inerrant is divinely authoritative. A phone book could be without error, but it would not thereby have divine authority. Hence, inerrancy is implied in a proper understanding of infallibility, but infallibility does not follow from inerrancy.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR INERRANCY

The biblical basis for inerrancy is clearly taught in the Bible via the aforementioned two premises:

(1) The Bible is the Word of God.
(2) God cannot err.

The Bible Is the Word of God

That the Bible is the Word of God can be discerned from several biblical affirmations:

(1) that it is God-breathed;
(2) that it is a prophetic writing;
(3) that it has divine authority;
(4) that it is what God says;
(5) that it is called "the Word of God" or the like.

The Bible Is God-Breathed

Paul declared that "***All Scripture is God-breathed*** and is useful for teaching,

rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16).
This Word, often translated "inspired" (cf. KJV), means to be spirated—breathed—from God. A kindred idea is found in Jesus' words: "Man does not live on bread alone, but on ***every word that comes from the mouth of God***" (Matt. 4:4).

The Nature of a Prophet

As previously elaborated, the Bible claims to be a prophetic writing (Heb. 1:1; 2 Peter 1:20–21); prophets, as mouthpieces of God, spoke only what God put in their mouths (Deut. 18:18; 2 Sam. 23:2; Isa. 59:21; cf. Deut. 4:2).

The Divine Authority of the Bible

That the Bible is the Word of God can also be determined from the fact that it has divine authority (Matt. 5:17–18); Jesus said it was exalted above all human authority (Matt. 15:3–6).

The Bible Is "What God Says"

Often the words of the authors of Scripture are equated with the words of God. For example, cross-reference Genesis 12:1–3 with Galatians 3:8, and Exodus 9:16 with Romans 9:17—it is verses like these (see chapter 13) that give rise to the statement "What the Bible says, God says."

The Bible Is Called "The Word of God"

This very phrase or its equivalent is used many times of the Bible in part or as a whole. Second Chronicles 34:14 speaks of "The book of the law of the LORD given by the hand of Moses"; Zechariah 7:12 refers to "The words that the LORD Almighty had sent by His Spirit through the earlier prophets." (See also Matthew 15:6, John 10:35, Romans 9:6, and Hebrews 4:12.)

God Cannot Err

There are two lines of evidence that God cannot err: general revelation and special revelation.

The Argument for God's Truthfulness From General Revelation

General revelation is written on human hearts (Romans 2:12–15), and the moral argument for God's existence is based on it (see chapter 2). It reasons:

(1) Every moral law has a Moral Lawgiver.
(2) There is an absolute moral law.
(3) Hence, there is an absolute Moral Lawgiver.

Even the standard argument against God from injustice in the world presupposes that there is a God, for one cannot know what is im-perfect (i.e., not-perfect) unless he knows what is perfect. Hence, an absolute standard of perfection must be posited as a basis for knowing what is imperfect. But all rational moral creatures know intuitively that lying as such is a moral imperfection. Hence, the perfect Moral Lawgiver cannot lie or give information He knows to be false. Yet what if God does not know all things? Then the Bible could have false information in it. From a classical theistic point of view (see chapter 2) this is not possible, for God is omniscient (all-knowing), and an all-knowing God knows everything that is true and everything that is false. Since He is perfect, He would not share with anyone as true what is false.

The Argument for God's Truthfulness From Special Revelation

The Scriptures confirm what general revelation teaches about God's absolute truthfulness, declaring emphatically that "it is impossible for God to lie" (Heb. 6:18). Paul speaks of the "God who does not lie" (Titus 1:2), a God who, even "if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself (2 Tim. 2:13). God is truth (John 14:6), and so is His Word; Jesus said to the Father, "Your word is truth" (John 17:17). The psalmist exclaimed, "All your words are

true" (Ps. 119:160; cf. Rom. 3:4).

Therefore, the Bible Cannot Err

Since the Bible is the Word of God and God cannot err, then it follows that the Bible cannot err. The only way to deny this conclusion is to deny one or both of the premises. But, as shown above, the Bible clearly teaches both premises; hence, it follows that the Bible teaches (by logical implication) that it is inerrant.

Truth Is Correspondence With the Facts

It is important to remember that by "true" is meant that which corresponds with the facts (see chapter 7). Thus, when we speak about the inerrancy (or errorlessness) of the Bible we mean that it is actually and factually correct in whatever it affirms. There are no mistakes or incorrect statements in the Bible. That is to say, whatever the Bible says is true, is true; and whatever the Bible says is false, is false.

The Bible Has No Errors of Any Kind

Some have supposed to avoid the logic of inerrancy by claiming that the Bible is only inerrant in redemptive matters, not in matters such as science and history. But this is not so. First of all, whatever God affirms is true, is true no matter what the subject; He cannot err on any topic. Also, the Bible does make statements about history and the scientific world; thus, all these statements must be true, since God affirms whatever the Bible affirms.

Further, the Bible makes no such separation between redemptive and nonredemptive affirmations. Indeed, the redemptive and the scientific, as well as the redemptive and the historical, are often inseparable. "Christ died for ours sins" is redemptive, but the same passage says He was "buried" and "rose again on the third day," which are historical. Likewise, Jesus' virgin birth was a spiritual "sign" (Isa. 7:14; cf. Matt. 1:23), but it was also a biological fact, since Joseph "had no union with her [Mary, sexually] until she gave birth to a son" (Matt. 1:25). Also, Jesus' resurrection was a great redemptive event without which no one can be saved (Rom. 4:25; 10:9; 1 Cor. 15:14–19), yet the

Resurrection was a literal event of history that left behind an empty tomb (Matt. 28:6; John 20:1–8), and Christ appeared in the same physical body, with nail scars and all (Luke 24:39–43; John 20:27–28).

THEOLOGICAL DEFINITION OF INSPIRATION AND INERRANCY

Many definitions of inspiration and inerrancy have been offered. B. B. Warfield said, “Inspiration is the supernatural influence exerted on the sacred writers by the Holy Spirit of God, by virtue of which their writings are given divine trustworthiness.” In a fuller definition, Louis Gaussen (1790–1863) affirmed:

> Inspiration is that inexplicable power which the Divine Spirit put forth of old on the authors of Holy Scripture in order to give them guidance even in the employment of the words they used, and to preserve them alike from all error and from all omission. (*T*)

The Essential Elements of a Definition

There appear to be at least six crucial elements in a complete definition of the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible:

(1) its divine origin (from God);
(2) its human agency (through men);
(3) its written locus (in words);
(4) its original form (in the autographs or original text);
(5) its final authority, normative (for believers);
(6) its inerrant nature (without errors).

A Suggested Definition

Combining all these elements into one definition, ***the inspiration of Scripture is***

the supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit who, through the different personalities and literary styles of the chosen human authors, invested the very words of the original books of Holy Scripture, alone and in their entirety, as the very Word of God without error in all that they teach (including history and science) and is thereby the infallible rule and final authority for the faith and practice of all believers.

The Extent of Biblical Inerrancy

How far does the inerrancy of the Bible extend? Is it inerrant in every way and on every matter, or only in terms of theology and ethics? Some have suggested that Scripture can always be trusted on moral matters, but it is not always correct on historical matters; they rely on it in the spiritual domain, but not in the sphere of science. If true, however, this would render the Bible ineffective as a divine authority, since the spiritual is often inextricably interwoven with the historical and scientific.

A close examination of Scripture reveals that the scientific (factual) and spiritual truths of Scripture are often inseparable; for example, one cannot separate the spiritual truth of Christ's resurrection from the fact that His body permanently vacated the tomb and later physically appeared (Matt. 28:6; 1 Cor. 15:13–19). Likewise, if Jesus was not born of a biological virgin, then He is no different from the rest of the human race on whom the stigma of Adam's sin rests (Rom. 5:12). Also, the death of Christ for our sins cannot be detached from his shedding literal blood on the cross, for "without the shedding of blood there is no remission" (Heb. 9:22). And, Adam's existence and fall cannot be a myth, for if there were no literal Adam and no actual fall, then the spiritual teachings about inherited sin and eventual or physical death are wrong (Rom. 5:12). Historical reality and the theological doctrine stand or fall together.

Also, the doctrine of the Incarnation is inseparable from the historical truth about Jesus of Nazareth (John 1:1, 14). Further, Jesus' moral teaching about marriage was based on His teaching about God's joining together of a literal Adam and Eve (Matt. 19:4–5). In each of these cases the moral or theological teaching is devoid of its meaning apart from the historical or factual event. If one denies that the literal space-time event occurred, then there is no basis for believing the scriptural doctrine built upon it.

Jesus often directly compared Old Testament events with important spiritual truths, such as His death and resurrection, which were related to Jonah and the great fish (Matt. 12:40), or His second coming, as compared to the days of Noah (Matt. 24:37–39). Both the occasion and the manner of comparison make it clear that Jesus was affirming the historicity of those Old Testament events. Indeed, Jesus questioned Nicodemus, "I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?" (John 3:12). In short, if the Bible does not speak truthfully about the physical world, then it cannot be trusted when it speaks about the spiritual world.

Inspiration includes not only all that the Bible explicitly ***teaches***, but also everything the Bible ***touches.*** Whatever the Bible declares is true, whether it is a major point or a minor point. The Bible is God's Word, and God does not deviate from the truth at any place in it. All the parts are as true as the whole they comprise.

ANSWERING SOME OBJECTIONS TO INERRANCY

Many objections have been leveled against the doctrine of inerrancy; the most important ones are addressed here.

The Objection That Inerrancy Is Not Taught in the Bible

Some critics argue that inerrancy is not taught in Scripture. There are two parts to this allegation.

First, some point out that the term "inerrancy" nowhere appears in the Bible. But this objection misses the point: The term "Trinity" nowhere appears in the Bible, nor does "substitutionary atonement." However, these doctrines are not to be rejected for lack of exact wording; it is not a question of whether the ***term*** inerrancy is used but whether the ***truth*** of inerrancy is taught. Even the word "Bible" does not appear in the Bible!

Second, it is implied that since the doctrine of inerrancy is not explicitly taught that it is not taught at all. It can be granted that inerrancy is not ***formally*** and ***explicitly*** taught in the Bible; however, this is not to say that inerrancy is not ***logically*** and ***implicitly*** taught. The Trinity isn't explicitly taught either, but it is

the necessary logical deduction of what is taught, namely:

(1) There is only one God.
(2) There are three distinct persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) who are God.

From these premises it necessarily follows that

(3) There are three persons in this one God.

Likewise, as shown, inerrancy logically follows from two premises that are clearly taught in Scripture, namely:

(1) God cannot err.
(2) The Bible is the Word of God.
(3) Therefore, the Bible cannot err.

So, like the Trinity, inerrancy is taught implicitly and logically, if not formally and explicitly.

The Objection That Inerrancy Is a Late Invention

Critics of inerrancy claim that it is a late nineteenth-century invention that the Old Princeton theologians (like Charles Hodge and B. B. Warfield) utilized for apologetic purposes to fight a growing liberalism in the orthodox church (see Rogers, ***AIB***).

As a survey of the history of the doctrine of Scripture has shown (see chapters 17 and 18), this charge is without foundation. In fact, the infallibility and inerrancy of the Scripture has been virtually the unanimous teaching of all the great Fathers of the Christian church down through the centuries until modern times.

A few crucial examples long before the time of Warfield will illustrate the point.

Augustine (354–430)

In ***The City of God*** Augustine used such expressions as “Sacred Scripture” (9.5), “the words of God” (10.1), “Infallible Scripture” (11.6), “divine revelation” (13.2), and “Holy Scripture” (15.8). Elsewhere he referred to the Bible as the “oracles of God,” “God’s word,” “divine oracles,” and “divine Scripture.” With his widespread influence throughout the centuries, such a testimony has stood as an outstanding witness to the high regard given to the Scriptures in the church. Speaking of the gospel writers, Augustine said,

> When they write that He has taught and said, it should not be asserted that He did not write it, since the members only put down what they had come to know at the dictation [dictis] of the Head. [Therefore,] whatever He wanted us to read concerning His words and deeds, He commanded His disciples, His hands, to write. Hence, one cannot but receive what he reads in the Gospels, though written by the disciples, as though it were written by the very hand of the Lord Himself. (*HG*, 1.35.54.)

Augustine added, “I have learned to yield this respect and honour only to the canonical books of Scripture: of these alone do I most firmly believe that the authors were completely free from error” (***L***, 82.1.3).

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)

Agreeing with Augustine, Aquinas confessed of Holy Scripture, “I firmly believe that none of their authors have erred in composing them” (***ST***, 1a.1, 8). In this same passage Aquinas referred to Scripture as “unfailing truth.”
He went on, “That God is the author of holy Scripture should be acknowledged.” Again, “The author of holy Scripture is God” (ibid., 1a.1, 10). God spoke through prophets: “Prophecy implies a certain vision of some supernatural truth beyond our reach” (ibid., 2a2ae. 174, 5). Therefore, “a true prophet is always inspired by the spirit of truth” (ibid., 2a2ae. 172, 6, ad 2); thus, his message is perfect. This is possible because of the perfection of the principal or primary Cause (God) working on the imperfect secondary cause.
In his commentary on ***Job***, Aquinas declared, “It is heretical to say that any falsehood whatsoever is contained either in the gospels or in any canonical

Scripture" (***CBJ***, 13, 1). Elsewhere he insisted that "a true prophet is always inspired by the spirit of truth in whom there is no trace of falsehood, and so he never utters untruths" (***ST***, 2a2ae. 172, 6, ad 2). He added, "Nothing false can underlie the literal sense of Scripture" (ibid., 1a.1, 10, ad 3). Consequently, "the truth of prophetic proclamations must needs be the same as that of divine knowledge. And falsity … cannot creep into prophecy" (ibid., 1a. 14, 3).

John Calvin (1509–1564)

John Calvin also affirmed inerrancy, declaring, "For our wisdom ought to consist in embracing with gentle docility, and without any exceptions, all that is delivered in the sacred Scriptures" (***ICR***, 1.18.4). Scripture is "the certain and unerring rule" (***CC***, Ps. 5:11).
Calvin asserted,

> For if we reflect how prone the human mind is to lapse into forgetfulness of God, how readily inclined to every kind of error, how bent every now and then on devising new and fictitious religions, it will be easy to understand how necessary it was to make such a depository of doctrine as would secure it from either perishing by the neglect, vanishing away amid the errors, or being corrupted by the presumptuous audacity of men. (*ICR*, 1.6.3.)
>
> So long as your mind entertains any misgivings as to the certainty of the word of God, its authority will be weak and dubious, or rather will have no authority at all. [Further,] nor is it sufficient to believe that God is true, and cannot lie or deceive, unless you feel firmly persuaded that every word which proceeds from him is sacred, inviolable truth (ibid., 3.2.6).

Martin Luther (1483–1546)

As we have seen, Martin Luther was even more emphatic on the inerrancy of Scripture, insisting,

> When one blasphemously gives the lie to God in a single word, or says it is a minor matter if God is blasphemed or called a liar, one blasphemes the entire God and makes light of all blasphemy. (*WL*, 37:26.)

He added,

> *So the Holy Ghost has had to bear the blame* of not being able to speak correctly but that like a drunkard or a fool He jumbles the whole and uses wild, strange words and phrases. [Thus] it cannot be otherwise, because the Holy Ghost is wise and also makes the prophets wise. But one who is wise must be able to speak correctly; that never fails. But because whoever does not hear well or does not know the language well may think he speaks ill because he hears or understands scarcely half the words. (Reu, *LS*, 44, italics original.)

Luther went so far as to say that inerrancy was an all-or-nothing matter:

> And whoever is so bold that he ventures to accuse God of fraud and deception *in a single word* and does so willfully again and again after he has been warned and instructed once or twice will likewise certainly venture to accuse God of fraud and deception in all His words. [Therefore,] it is true absolutely and without exception, *that everything is believed or nothing is believed.* The Holy Ghost does not suffer Himself to be separated or divided so that He should teach and cause to be believed one doctrine rightly and another falsely (ibid., 33, italics original).

The clear, emphatic, and repeated affirmation of the inerrancy of Holy Scripture by the great Fathers and Reformers refutes the charge that inerrancy is a late nineteenth-century creation; this allegation is totally without foundation (see Woodbridge, ***RMP***).

The Objection That Inerrancy Is Based on Non-Existent Originals

Some object to inerrancy because it affirms that only the original text is inerrant (there being admitted errors in the copies), and the originals are not extant. Hence, all the doctrine of inerrancy provides is a non-existent authority; supposedly, this isn't any different than having no Bible at all.

This allegation is unfounded. First of all, it is not true that we do not possess the original ***text.*** We do possess it in well-preserved copies; it is the original ***manuscripts*** we do not have. We do have an accurate copy of the original text represented in these manuscripts (see Geisler and Nix, ***GIB***, chapter 11); the nearly 5,700 New Testament manuscripts we possess contain all or nearly all of

the original text, and we can reconstruct the original text with over 99 percent accuracy.

Also, there is a difference between the ***text*** and the ***truth*** of the text. While the exact text of the original can only be reconstructed with 99 percent or so accuracy, nevertheless, 100 percent of the truth comes through. For example, recall that if you received notification that "Y#U HAVE WON 10 MILLION DOLLARS," you would have no problem understanding 100 percent of the message, even though the text is nearly 4 percent in error (1 letter out of 26).

To illustrate, were the original U.S. Constitution to be destroyed, we would not lose the constitutional authority for our country, even if all we had were copies with flaws in them. The original could be reconstructed with enough certainty to assure the continuance of our constitutional republic. The same is true of the Bible in our hands. Even though it is based on copies, they are accurate copies that convey to us 100 percent of all essential truths in the original.

In brief, the Bible in our hands is the infallible and inerrant Word of God insofar as it has been copied accurately. And it ***has*** been copied so accurately as to assure us that nothing in the essential message has been lost (see Geisler and Nix, ***GIB***, chapters 22, and 26).

The Objection That Inerrancy Is Unnecessary

The answers to the previous objections lead to another: If errant copies of the original text are sufficient, then why did God have to inspire errorless originals? If a scratched record can convey the music of its master, then an errant Bible can convey to us the truth of the Master.

The response to this is simple. The reason the original text cannot err is that it **was breathed out by God, and God cannot err.** The copies, while demonstrated to have been providentially preserved from substantial error, are not breathed out by God. Hence, there can be errors in the copies.

To demonstrate, all human beings are imperfect copies of Adam, who was directly created by God. Nonetheless, as imperfect a copy as we may be, we are still 100 percent human. Adam was no more human than we are, yet there is a significant difference between Adam as He came fresh from the hand of the Creator, with absolutely no imperfections, and the imperfect copies of the

original Adam that we are. We can no more conceive of God's breathing out an imperfect original text than we can of His breathing the breath of life into an imperfect Adam. What comes directly from the hand (or mouth) of the Creator must be perfect, and only later copies of it can be imperfect. To claim errors in the original Adam or Bible is to allege that there are flaws in the very nature of God.

The Objection That Inerrancy Is an Unfalsifiable View

Some critics insist that inerrantists have placed the bar so high for anyone to prove an error in the Bible that they have made the view unfalsifiable; that the standards for disproof are so high that there is no way to disprove it.
In response to this charge, we must point out several things.
First, the principle of falsifiability itself can be challenged. Is the principle itself falsifiable? If not, then it is self-defeating.
Second, even those who hold the principle often distinguish between what is falsifiable in principle and what is falsifiable in fact (see Flew, "M" in Edwards, ***EP***). For instance, the claim that "there is no intelligent life in outer space" is falsifiable ***in principle***, or it would be, if we could examine every nook and cranny of the cosmos. But since this is not presently possible, this statement is not falsifiable ***in fact.***
Third, the doctrine of inerrancy ***is*** falsifiable in fact. All that is necessary is to either:

(1) find an actual error in an existing but accurate copy of Scripture;
(2) find an original manuscript with an error in it.

Incidentally, since earlier manuscripts (of other works) than the originals (of Scripture) have already been found, it is not beyond possibility to find an original.
Fourth, there is an even more decisive way to falsify evangelical Christianity—find the body of Jesus. If this could be done, according to the Bible itself, we would still be in our sins and our faith would be vain (1 Cor. 15:14–18). The

truth is that it is not the evangelical view of Christianity that is unfalsifiable but the non-evangelical view, for according to non-evangelicals, finding the dead corpse of Jesus in the grave or even an original manuscript with an error would not be against their faith, since they do not believe either in the Resurrection of Christ or the inerrancy of Scripture. If one believes nothing, then nothing in his faith can be disproven.

The Objection That Inerrancy Is Not a Fundamental Doctrine

It has also been objected that the doctrine of inerrancy is not a fundamental truth of the Christian faith; hence, even if true, its importance is overestimated. Being a minor truth, supposedly, it should not be given major importance.

For one thing, by way of response, by almost any count of fundamentals of the faith, the infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture is to be included, as it is the foundation of all other doctrines. Every other fundamental of the Christian faith is based on the Scripture—if it does not have divine authority, then we have no divine authority for any doctrine to which we adhere. As the basis of all other doctrines, the inerrancy of the Bible is a fundamental of the Fundamentals, and if a fundamental of the Fundamentals is not fundamental, then what is fundamental? The answer is: fundamentally nothing.

In addition, the doctrine of inerrancy was not only affirmed by virtually all the great Fathers of the church (see chapters 16 and 17), it is also the foundation of all churches' creeds, councils, and confessions. Inasmuch as the teachings of the church were the basis for what we call orthodoxy, so must be the authority of Scripture, on which the Fathers of the church based their pronouncements.

The Objection That Inerrancy Should Not Be a Test for Orthodoxy

This objection follows from the one before it. If inerrancy is not a major doctrine, then it should not be a test for orthodoxy. However, as shown, it ***is*** a major teaching of Scripture, and, thus, it is a test of orthodoxy.

Of course, inerrancy is not a test of salvation—one can deny inerrancy and still

be saved. Salvation depends on believing certain soteriological truths, such as the death and resurrection of Christ for our sins (see 1 Cor. 15:1–4; Rom. 10:9), and not on accepting all fundamental doctrines (e.g., the inspiration of Scripture and the second coming of Christ). One can be saved without believing in all doctrines essential to orthodoxy, but he cannot be a ***consistent*** evangelical without embracing all of them.

One other distinction is important here. A person can be evangelical or orthodox on all other fundamentals of the faith and still be unorthodox on this one, as inconsistent as it may be. For example, the neo-orthodox theologian Karl Barth affirmed the Virgin Birth, the Trinity, the deity of Christ, and Christ's bodily resurrection, yet he denied the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. Thus, he was orthodox on the rest of these fundamentals but unorthodox on his view of Scripture.

The Objection That Inerrancy Is a Divisive Doctrine

It is not uncommon to hear the charge that inerrancy is a divisive doctrine, unnecessarily dividing one believer from another against the Bible's call for the unity of all believers (Eph. 4:3–6).

Besides the emotional connotation of the word ***divisive***, this allegation should also be rejected for several other reasons.

First, not everything that divides is divisive. A center aisle in a church divides one side from the other, but it is not thereby divisive. Marriage divides a person from all other individuals of the opposite sex, but it does not necessarily make one divisive toward them. Likewise, doctrine divides those who affirm it from those who deny it, but this does not mean it is a divisive doctrine.

Second, even if a doctrine were divisive simply because it divides, those who ***affirm*** the orthodox doctrine should not be considered divisive but rather those who ***deny*** it. For example, it should not be evangelicals who adhere to the deity of Christ who are called divisive, but the Jehovah's Witnesses, who reject it; likewise, it is not those who affirm the Trinity who are divisive but the Oneness Pentecostals (who hold that only Christ is God), who discard it. Let's put the shoe on the right foot.

Third, if taking a stand on a doctrine automatically makes it divisive and thereby wrong, then all stands for any doctrine would be wrong, for there is not an

essential doctrine of the Christian faith that is not denied by some heresy somewhere.

Fourth, when push comes to shove, ***it is better to be divided by truth than to be united by error.*** All truth divides one from error; the real problem is not those who divide by standing for truth but those who divide by falling for error. The ancient dictum applies here: In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; and in all things, charity. But by any measure of consistency, the doctrines of the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture are essential teachings of the Christian faith.

The Objection to the Term "Inerrancy"

Even some who believe in the errorlessness of the Bible object to the term because they believe it is either too negative or too technical. However, both reasons are misdirected.

First of all, while the term ***inerrancy*** can have a technical scientific connotation, it need not. Like most other words, there is a range of usage that must be determined by the context in which it is used.

This is not to say that no other terms are acceptable. One can also speak of the "errorlessness" of the Bible or that Scripture is "without error." The bottom line is not to insist on the ***term*** but on the ***truth*** of the matter.

Also, as to the term being negative (***not***-errant), two things are important to observe. For one, many of the Ten Commandments are negative; surely they should not be rejected for the same reason. Also, many terms for attributes of God are also negative, such as God is in-finite (not-finite) and im-mutable (not-changeable).

For another, negative terms are often more clear than positive ones. Try stating "You shall not commit adultery" in only positive terms. Take the two statements "The Bible is true" and "The Bible is without error." The latter is clearer than the former, since "true" can mean either wholly true or partly true, while "without error" must mean wholly true.

The Objection That Inerrancy Is Contrary to Fact

Finally, some insist that the doctrine of inerrancy is contrary to fact—that there are demonstrable errors in the Bible.
This view, however, makes errors of its own. The fact is that no one has ever demonstrated that there is an error in the original text of the Bible; rather, those who allege errors in the Bible have been found in error. Here is a list of the errors of those who claim to find errors in the Bible (Geisler and Howe, ***WCA***, chapter 1):

Mistake 1: Assuming That the Unexplained Is Not Explainable

No scientist would assume that what is unexplained in nature is unexplainable; rather, they keep on doing research. Neither should any Bible critic assume that what is not yet explained in the Bible never will be explained. Both scientists and biblical scholars should keep looking for an answer.

Mistake 2: Presuming the Bible Guilty Until Proven Innocent

Like an American citizen charged with an offense, the Bible should be presumed innocent until it is proven guilty. This is not asking anything special for the Bible; it is the way we approach all human communication. If we did not, life would not be possible; for example, if we assumed road signs and traffic signals were not telling the truth, we would probably be dead before we could prove they were.

Mistake 3: Confusing Our Fallible Interpretations With God's Infallible Revelation

Human beings, whether scientists or biblical scholars, are finite, and finite beings make mistakes. That is why there are erasers on pencils, correcting fluid for typing, and a "delete" button on keyboards. And even though God's Word is perfect (Ps. 19:7), as long as imperfect human beings exist, there will be misinterpretations of God's Word and false views about His world. None of these prove errors in God's revelations but only errors in our interpretations of

them.

Mistake 4: Failing to Understand the Context of the Passage

Perhaps the most common mistake of critics is to take a text out of its proper context. As the adage goes, “A text out of context is a pretext.” One can prove anything from the Bible by this mistaken procedure. The Bible says, “There is no God” (Ps. 14:1). Of course, the context is that “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ ”

Mistake 5: Neglecting to Interpret Difficult Passages in the Light of Clear Ones

Some passages of Scripture are hard to understand. Sometimes the difficulty is due to obscurity; at other times, it is due to the fact that passages appear to be teaching something contrary to what some other part of Scripture is clearly teaching. For example, James appears to be saying salvation is by works (James 2:14–26), whereas Paul taught clearly that it was by grace (Rom. 4:5; Titus 3:5–7; Eph. 2:8–9). In this case, James should ***not*** be construed so as to contradict Paul—Paul is speaking about justification ***before God*** (which is by faith alone), whereas James is referring to justification ***before men*** (who cannot see our faith, but only our works).

Mistake 6: Basing a Teaching on an Obscure Passage

Some passages in the Bible are difficult because their meaning is obscure, often because the context is not clear. This is true in 1 Corinthians 15:29, where Paul says, “Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them?” Since the context is not clear, one cannot be certain that Paul is ***recommending*** this practice; he may only be ***alluding*** to what some were wrongly doing (cf. the use of “they” rather than “we”). At any rate, since the context is not clear, it is a mistake to assume that Paul is recommending a practice that is against other clear teachings of Scripture, such as salvation by grace alone through faith alone (Rom. 4:5; Eph. 2:8–9; Titus 3:5–7).

Mistake 7: Forgetting That the Bible Is a Human Book With Human Characteristics

In addition to having divine authorship, the Bible was written by human beings, each with their own style and idiosyncrasies. These ***human authors***, about forty in all, sometimes used ***human sources*** for their material (Josh. 10:13; Acts 17:28; 1 Cor. 15:33; Titus 1:12). They manifest different ***human literary styles***, from the mournful meter of Lamentations to the exalted poetry of Isaiah and the simple grammar of John. They also manifest ***human perspectives***, whether a shepherd (David), a lawgiver (Moses), a prophet (Daniel), or a priest (Chronicles). They also reveal ***human thought patterns***, including memory lapses (1 Cor. 1:14–16) and ***emotions*** (Gal. 4:14). The Bible discloses specific ***human interests***, such as rural (Amos), medical (Luke), natural (James), or political (Kings).[1]

However, like Christ the Living Word, the written Word of God is completely human, yet without error. Forgetting the humanity of Scripture can lead to falsely impugning its integrity by expecting a level of expression higher than what is customary to a human document.

Mistake 8: Assuming That a Partial Report Is a False Report

The four gospels relate the same story in different ways to different groups of people and sometimes even quote the same saying with different words. For example, Matthew recorded Peter as saying, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (16:16); Mark wrote, “You are the Christ” (8:29); and Luke said, “The Christ of God” (9:20). These are not contradictory but complementary; each gives part, but none the whole.

Mistake 9: Demanding That New Testament Citations of the Old Testament Always Be Exact Quotations

Critics sometimes mistakenly assume that every New Testament ***citation*** needs to be an exact ***quotation.*** Even today it is an accepted literary practice to quote

the ***essence*** of a statement without using precisely the same ***words.*** The same ***meaning*** can be conveyed without using the same ***verbal expressions.*** Sometimes the New Testament paraphrases or summarizes the Old Testament text (e.g., Matt. 2:6; cf. Mic. 5:2); others blend two texts into one (Matt. 27:9–10, cf. Jer. 32:6–9); occasionally a general truth is mentioned without citing a specific text (Matt. 2:23, cf. Zech. 11:12–13). There are also instances where the New Testament applies a text in a different way than the Old Testament did (Matt. 2:15, cf. Hos. 11:1), but in no case does the New Testament misinterpret or misapply the Old Testament (see Archer, ***OTQNT***).

Mistake 10: Assuming That Divergent Accounts Are False Ones

Critics also err in assuming that because two or more accounts of the same event differ, they are mutually exclusive. For example, Matthew says there was one angel at the tomb after the Resurrection (28:5), whereas John informs us there were two (20:12). These are not contradictory reports. In fact, there is an infallible mathematical rule that easily explains this problem: Wherever there are two, there is always one—it never fails! Matthew did not say there was ***only*** one angel; one has to add the word ”only” to Matthew’s account to make it contradict John’s. If the critic comes to the Bible in order to show it errs, then the error is not in the Bible, but in the critic.

Mistake 11: Presuming That the Bible Approves of All It Records

It is a mistake to assume that everything recorded in the Bible is approved by the Bible. For example, it documents Satan’s words (Gen 3:4; cf. John 8:44) but does not affirm them; it gives a true record that he lied, but it does not imply that these lies are the truth. Likewise, the Bible records David’s adultery (2 Sam. 12) and Solomon’s polygamy (1 Kings 11), but it does not endorse them.

Mistake 12: Forgetting That the Bible Uses Non-Technical, Everyday Language

To be true, a source does not have to use scholarly, technical, or so-called “scientific” terminology. The Bible is written for the common person of every generation, and it therefore uses everyday language. The use of observational,

nonscientific language is not ***un***scientific, it is merely ***pre***scientific. It is no more unscientific to speak of the sun "standing still" (Josh. 10:12) than to refer to the sun "rising" (Josh. 1:15). Contemporary meteorologists still speak daily of the time of "sunrise" and "sunset."

Mistake 13: Assuming That Round Numbers Are False

Another mistake sometimes made by Bible critics is claiming that round numbers are false. Not so. Like most ordinary speech, the Bible uses round numbers (1 Chron. 19:18; 21:5); for example, it refers to the diameter of something as being about one-third of the circumference of something (1 Kings 7:23). This may be imprecise from the standpoint of a contemporary technological society to speak of 3.14159265 … as 3, but it is not incorrect for an ancient, non-technological people. At any rate, 3.14 … rounds off to 3.

Mistake 14: Neglecting to Note That the Bible Uses Different Literary Devices

As a human book, the Bible uses various human literary devices. Several whole books are written in ***poetic*** style (e.g., Job, Psalms, Proverbs); the Synoptic Gospels are filled with ***parables;*** in Galatians 4, Paul utilizes an ***allegory;*** the New Testament abounds with ***metaphors*** (e.g., 2 Cor. 3:2–3; James 3:6) and ***similes*** (cf. Matt. 20:1; James 1:6); ***hyperboles*** may also be found (e.g., Col. 1:23; John 21:25; 2 Cor. 3:2), and possibly even ***poetic figures*** (Job 41:1); Jesus employed ***satire*** (Matt. 19:24 with 23:24); and ***figures of speech*** are common. It is incorrect to assume that all these should be taken literally, thus resulting in contradictions. All of the Bible is literally true, but not all the Bible is true literally (as opposed to figuratively).

Mistake 15: Forgetting That Only the Original Text, Not Every Copy of Scripture, Is Without Error

When critics do come upon a genuine error in a biblical manuscript copy, they make another mistake—they assume it was in the original inspired text of Scripture. They forget that God uttered only the original text of Scripture, not the imperfect copies. Inspiration does not guarantee that every copy of the original is

without error, and, therefore, we are to expect that minor errors will be found in manuscript copies.

When we run into a so-called “error” in the Bible, we must assume one of two things: either the manuscript was not copied correctly, or we have not understood it rightly. What we may not assume is that God made an error in inspiring the original text.

Several things should be observed about these copyist errors.

First, they are errors in the copies, not the originals. No one has ever found an original manuscript with an error in it.

Second, they are minor errors (often in names or numbers) that do not affect any doctrine of the Christian faith.

Third, these copyist errors are relatively few in number.

Fourth, usually by the context, or by another Scripture, we know which one is in error.

Mistake 16: Confusing General Statements With Universal Ones

Critics often jump to the conclusion that unqualified statements admit no exceptions. For instance, proverbial sayings by their very nature offer only general guidance, not universal assurance. Proverbs 16:7 is a case in point—it affirms that “when a man’s ways are pleasing to the LORD, he makes even his enemies live at peace with him.” This obviously was not intended to be a universal truth, for Paul was pleasing to the Lord and his enemies stoned him (Acts 14:19), while Jesus was pleasing to the Lord and His enemies crucified Him. It is a mistake to take a general statement as a necessarily particular one.

Mistake 17: Forgetting That Later Revelation Supersedes Previous Revelation

Sometimes critics of Scripture forget the principle of progressive revelation. God does not reveal everything at once, nor does He always lay down the same conditions for every period of time. Therefore, some of His later revelation will supersede His former statements. But this is a change ***of*** revelation, not a change ***in*** revelation. Bible critics sometimes confuse a ***change*** in revelation with a ***mistake.*** For example, the fact that a parent allows a very small child to eat with his fingers only to tell him later to use a spoon, is not a contradiction. Nor is the parent contradicting himself to suggest later that the child should use a fork, not

a spoon, to eat his vegetables. This is progressive revelation, each command suited to fit the particular circumstance in which the person finds himself. There was a time when God tested the human race by forbidding them to eat of a specific tree in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:16–17). This command is no longer in effect, but the latter revelation does not contradict the former revelation—it simply supersedes it. Also, there was a period (under the Mosaic Law) when God commanded that animals be sacrificed for people's sins. However, since Christ offered the perfect sacrifice for sin (Heb. 10:11–14), this Old Testament command is no longer in effect. Here again, there is no contradiction between the former and the latter commands; there is simply a change of revelation, for new directions are given by which God's people are to live.

Don't forget Augustine's counsel about alleged errors in the Bible:

> If we are perplexed by any apparent contradiction in Scripture, it is not allowable to say, "The author of this book is mistaken"; but either the manuscript is faulty, or the translation is wrong, or you have not understood.
>
> 2

The mistakes are not in the revelation of God, but are in the misinterpretations of man; the Bible is without mistake, the critics are not.

Mistake 18: The Allegation That Grammatical Irregularities Are Errors

Like most human books, the Bible has grammatically irregular construction. It is a mistake, however, to assume this is an error.

First, there is no absolute standard for grammar. There are regular and irregular usages, but no real grammatical errors.

Second, grammar as such does not deal with truth but is only the form through which verbal truth is expressed. So an error could be expressed in good (regular) grammar, and the truth could be expressed in bad (irregular) grammar.

Third, irregular grammar is often a more forceful expression of an idea, as slang reveals.

In summation, all the objections to inerrancy fail. The Bible is as flawless as the God who inspired it. As we have seen, it is not the Bible that errs but rather the Bible's critics.

CONCLUSION

The Bible by many lines of evidence (see chapter 29) contains all the earmarks of having divine origin: sanctity, divine authority, infallibility, indestructibility, indefatigability, infeasibility, and inerrancy. It is the only book of its kind and is still the world's all-time bestseller.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

THE CANONICITY OF THE BIBLE

Evangelicals believe that not only is the original text of the Bible faithfully and accurately reproduced in the standard English translations, but neither are there books missing from the original Bible. (This is true of both Old and New Testaments.) Evangelicals also hold that the canon (or normative collection) of Scripture, finished by the end of the first century, is closed; that is, we possess in the sixty-six books of the Bible all that God intended to be there, from both Old and New Testament times. Further, we maintain that God never intended any more books to be added to the Bible.

THE COMMON CANON

The word ***canon*** means rule or norm, and as used of the Bible it means which books are the normative books for Christian faith and practice. Those considered canonical are the ones held to be inspired of God (2 Tim. 3:16); they were the books written by the prophets or the apostles (2 Peter 1:20–21; Eph. 2:20; 2 Peter 3:15–17). Judaism, Catholicism, and Protestantism agree over the common Old Testament (Jewish) canon, which consists of thirty-nine books (numbered twenty-four in Jewish Bibles). This can be called the ***common canon.***

However, a crucial difference in Christendom emerges over eleven pieces of Old Testament literature (seven books and four parts of books) that the Roman Catholic Church "infallibly" pronounced to be part of the Canon in A.D. 1546 at the Council of Trent. These books are known by Protestants as the Apocrypha and by Catholics as the deutero-canonical (lit: "second canon") books. After enumerating the books (see below), including the eleven apocryphal books, the Council of Trent stated,

> If anyone, however, should not accept the said books as sacred and canonical, entire with all their parts ... and if both knowingly and deliberately he should condemn the aforesaid tradition let him be anathema [forever cursed]. (Denzinger, *SCD*, number 784.)

Vatican II repeats the same language affirming the Apocrypha to be part of the inspired Word of God.

THE DEBATE ABOUT THE APOCRYPHAL BOOKS

Since the time of the Reformation, there has been a serious debate about whether a collection of books known as the Apocrypha belongs in the Bible. Jews and Protestants unanimously reject them as noncanonical, and Roman Catholics pronounced them canonical at the Council of Trent (1546).

The Names of the Apocryphal Books

The Apocrypha includes eleven books.[1] These include all the fourteen (or fifteen) books in the Protestant Apocrypha, minus the Prayer of Manasseh and 1 and 2 Esdras (called 3 and 4 Esdras by Roman Catholics, since the Protestant Ezra and Nehemiah are called 1 and 2 Esdras by Catholics).

	Revised Standard Version—Apocrypha	***New American Bible***

1.	The Wisdom of Solomon (c. 30 B.C.)	Book of Wisdom
2.	Ecclesiasticus (***Sirach***, 132 B.C.)	Sirach
3.	Tobit (c. 200 B.C.)	Tobit
4.	Judith (c. 150 B.C.)	Judith
5.	1 Esdras (c. 150–100 B.C.)	3 Esdras*
6.	1 Maccabees (c. 110 B.C.)	1 Maccabees
7.	2 Maccabees (c. 110–70 B.C.)	2 Maccabees
8.	Baruch (c. 150–50 B.C.)	Baruch 1–5
9.	Letter of Jeremiah (c. 300–100 B.C.)	Baruch 6
10.	2 Esdras (c. A.D. 100)	4 Esdras*
11.	Additions to Esther (140–130 B.C.)	Esther 10:4–16:24
12.	Prayer of Azariah (first century B.C.)	Daniel 3:24–90 (Song of Three Young Men)
13.	Susanna (second or first century B.C.)	Daniel 13
14.	Bel and the Dragon (c. 100 B.C.)	Daniel 14

15.	Prayer of Manasseh (2nd–lst century B.C.)	Prayer of Manasseh*

Although the Roman Catholic canon has eleven more books than the Protestant Bible, only seven extra books appear in the table of contents of Roman Catholic Bibles (e.g., ***The New American Bible***), making the total forty-six.[2] The four books or pieces of literature that do not appear in the table of contents are the Additions to Esther, added at the end of the book of Esther (Esther 10:4f.); the Prayer of Azariah, inserted between the Hebrew Daniel 3:23 and 24 (making it Daniel 3:24–90 in Roman Catholic Bibles); Susanna, placed at the end of the twelfth chapter in the Protestant and Jewish book of Daniel (as chapter 13); and Bel and the Dragon (chapter 14 of Daniel).

Reasons Advanced for Accepting the Apocrypha

The larger canon is sometimes referred to as the "Alexandrian canon," as opposed to the "Palestinian canon" (which does not contain the Apocrypha) because the extra books are alleged to have been a part of the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint, or "Seventy" [LXX]), which originated in Alexandria, Egypt, beginning the third century B.C. The reasons generally advanced in favor of this broader Alexandrian list accepted by Roman Catholics, which includes the apocryphal books, are as follows:[3]

(1) The New Testament reflects the thought of the Apocrypha, and even refers to events contained in them (cf. Heb. 11:35 with 2 Macc. 7, 12).

(2) The New Testament quotes mostly from the Greek Old Testament (LXX), which contained the Apocrypha. This gives tacit approval of the whole text, including the Apocrypha.

(3) Some of the early church fathers quoted and used the Apocrypha as Scripture in public worship.

(4) Some of the early church fathers—for example, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria—accepted all of the books of the Apocrypha as canonical.

(5) Early Christian catacomb scenes depict episodes from the Apocrypha, showing that they were part of the early Christian's religious life. If not for their ***inspiration***, this at least reveals a ***great regard*** for the Apocrypha.

(6) The great Greek manuscripts interpose the Apocrypha among the Old Testament books. This reveals that they were part of the Jewish-Greek translation of the Old Testament (LXX).

(7) Several early church councils accepted the Apocrypha: for instance, the Council of Rome (A.D. 382), the Council of Hippo (393), and the Council of Carthage (397).

(8) The Eastern Orthodox Church accepts the Apocrypha, revealing that they are a common Christian belief, not simply a Catholic dogma.

(9) The Roman Catholic Church proclaimed the Apocrypha canonical at the Council of Trent (1546). This was in accord with pronouncements at early Councils (see point 7 above) as well as the Council of Florence not long before the Reformation (c. 1442).

(10) The apocryphal books continued in the Protestant Bible as late as the nineteenth century. This indicates that even Protestants accepted the Apocrypha until very recently.

(11) Some apocryphal books written in Hebrew have been found among canonical Old Testament books in the Dead Sea community at Qumran. This shows that they were originally part of the Hebrew Canon.

THE PROTESTANT VIEW OF THE APOCRYPHA

In response to the alleged support for considering the apocryphal books as canonical, we will do two things. ***First***, we will respond to each of the Roman Catholic arguments in favor of the Apocrypha, showing that they fail to prove their point. ***Second***, we will build a positive case in favor of the Jewish and Protestant canons, which exclude the apocryphal books.

A Response to Catholic Arguments in Favor of the Apocrypha

Our response will follow the order of the arguments given by Roman Catholics discussed above, corresponding point by point.

(1) There may be New Testament allusions to the Apocrypha, but there are no clear New Testament quotations from them—***not once*** is there a definite quotation from any apocryphal book accepted by the Roman Catholic Church.[4] There are, of course, allusions to pseudepigraphal works that are rejected by Roman Catholics as well as Protestants, such as the Book of Enoch (Jude 14–15) and the Bodily Assumption of Moses (Jude 9). There are also citations from pagan poets and philosophers (Acts 17:28; Titus 1:12; 1 Cor. 15:33), but none of these are cited as Scripture. The New Testament simply refers to a truth contained in these books, which otherwise may (and do) contain errors. ***Roman Catholics agree.*** Further, the New Testament never refers to any of the fourteen (or fifteen) apocryphal books as authoritative or canonical; for example, they are never cited with introductory phrases like "thus says the Lord" or "as it is written" or "the Scriptures say," such as are found when canonical books are quoted.

(2) The fact that the New Testament often quotes from the Greek Old Testament in no way proves that the apocryphal books contained in Greek manuscripts of the Old Testament are inspired. First of all, it is not certain that the Greek Old Testament (LXX) of the first century A.D. contained the Apocrypha; the earliest Greek manuscripts that include these books date from the fourth century A.D. Further, even if these books were in the LXX of the apostolic era, Jesus and the apostles never once quoted them, although they are supposed to have been included in the very version of the Old Testament (the LXX) that they usually cited. Finally, even the notes in the current Roman Catholic Bible (NAB) make the revealing admission that the Apocrypha are "religious books used by both Jews and Christians which were not included in the collection of inspired writings." Instead, they "were introduced rather late into the collection of the Bible. Catholics call them 'deutero-canonical' (second canon) books" (see ***St. Joseph Edition of The New American Bible***, 413).

(3) Citations by the church fathers in support of the canonicity of the Apocrypha are selective and misleading. While some Fathers seemed to accept their inspiration, other Fathers used them only for devotional or homiletical

(preaching) purposes but did not accept them as canonical. As a recent authority on the Apocrypha, Roger Beckwith observes,

> When one examines the passages in the early Fathers which are supposed to establish the canonicity of the Apocrypha, one finds that some of them are taken from the alternative Greek text of Ezra (1 Esdras) or from additions or appendices to Daniel, Jeremiah or some other canonical book, which … are not really relevant; that others of them are not quotations from the Apocrypha at all; and that, of those which are, many do not give any indication that the book is regarded as Scripture. (*OTCNTC*, 387.)

For instance,

> the *Epistle of Barnabas* 6.7 and Tertullian (see), *Against Marcion* 3.22.5, are not quoting Wsd. 2:12
>
> but
>
> Isa. 3:10
>
> LXX, and Tertullian, *On the Soul* 15, is not quoting
>
> Wsd. 1:6
>
> but
>
> Ps. 139:23
>
> , as a comparison of the passages shows. Similarly, Justin Martyr (see), *Dialogue with Trypho* 129, is quite clearly not quoting Wisdom but
>
> Prov. 8:21–5
>
> LXX. The fact that he calls Proverbs "Wisdom" is in accordance with the common nomenclature of the earlier Fathers (ibid., 427).

So the Roman Catholic appeal to the use of the Apocrypha is without basis. In many cases the Fathers were not claiming divine authority for one or more of the eleven books canonized by the Council of Trent; rather, they were either citing a book that ***was*** part of the Hebrew canon or they were not quoting the Apocryphal books as Scripture.[5]

(4) Although some individuals in the early church had a high esteem for the Apocrypha, there were many individuals who vehemently opposed it. For example, Athanasius, Cyril of Jerusalem, Origen, and the great Roman Catholic biblical scholar and translator of the Latin Vulgate, Jerome, all opposed the Apocrypha. Even the early Syrian church did not accept the Apocrypha; in the second century A.D. the Syrian Bible (Peshitta) did not contain it (Geisler and Nix, ***GIB***, chapters 27–28).

(5) As even many Catholic scholars will admit, scenes from the catacombs do not prove the canonicity of the books whose events they depict. Such scenes indicate little more than the religious significance that the portrayed events had for early Christians; at best, they show only a respect for the books containing these events, not a recognition that they are inspired.
(6) None of the great Greek manuscripts contains all of the apocryphal books. In fact, only four—Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, and Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)—are found in all of them, and the oldest manuscripts totally exclude the books of the Maccabees. Yet Catholics appeal to these manuscripts for proof of their deutero-canonical books that include the Apocrypha. What is more, no Greek manuscript has the same list of apocryphal books accepted by the Council of Trent (Beckwith, ***OTCNTC***, 194, 382–83).
(7) There are some important reasons why citing these church councils does not prove the Apocrypha belonged in the canon of the church.
First, these were only local councils, not binding on the whole church, and local councils have often erred in their decisions and have been later overruled by the universal church. Some Catholic apologists do argue that even though a council was not ecumenical, its results can be binding if confirmed by a pope; however, they acknowledge that there is no infallible way to know which statements by popes are infallible and which are not. Indeed, these apologists admit that other statements by popes were even heretical, such as the teaching of the monothelite heresy[6] by Pope Honorius I.
Second, these books were not part of the Christian (New Testament period) writings and, hence, they were not under the province of the Christian church to decide. They were the province of the Jewish community, which wrote them and which had centuries before rejected them as part of the Canon.
Third, the books accepted by these Christian councils may not have been the same ones in each case; hence, they cannot be used as proof of the exact canon later proclaimed by the Roman Catholic church (at Trent).
Fourth, the local councils of Hippo and Carthage in North Africa were influenced by Augustine, who is the most significant antiquated voice that accepted the same apocryphal books later canonized by the Council of Trent. However, Augustine's position is ill-founded for several reasons:
A. His contemporary, Jerome, a greater biblical authority than Augustine, rejected the Apocrypha (see page 526).
B. Augustine himself recognized that the Jews did not accept these books as part

of their canon (***CG***, 19.36–38).
C. Augustine erroneously reasoned that these books should be in the Bible because of their mention "of extreme and wonderful suffering of certain martyrs" (ibid., 18.36). But on that ground ***Foxe's Book of Martyrs*** should also be in the Canon.
D. Augustine was inconsistent, since he rejected books not written by prophets, yet he accepted a book that appears to deny being prophetic (1 Mac. 9:27).
E. Augustine's mistaken acceptance of the Apocrypha seems to be connected with his mistaken belief in the inspiration of the Septuagint (LXX), whose later Greek manuscripts contained them. However, Augustine's later acknowledgment of the superiority of Jerome's Hebrew text over the Septuagint's Greek text should have led him to accept the superiority of Jerome's Hebrew canon as well, which did not have the Apocrypha.
The later Council of Rome (A.D. 382), which accepted apocryphal books, did not list the same books accepted by Hippo and Carthage; it does not list Baruch, thus listing only six, not seven, of the apocryphal books later pronounced canonical by the Roman Catholic Church. Even Trent lists Baruch as a separate book (Denzinger, ***SCD***, number 84).
(8) The Greek Orthodox Church has not always accepted the Apocrypha, nor is its present position unequivocal. At the synods of Constantinople (A.D. 1638), Jaffa (1642), and Jerusalem (1672), these books were declared canonical. But even as late as 1839 their Larger Catechism expressly omitted the Apocrypha on the grounds that its books did not exist in the Hebrew Bible.
(9) At the Council of Trent the infallible proclamation was made accepting the Apocrypha as part of the inspired Word of God. Some Catholic scholars claim that the earlier Council of Florence (1442) made the same pronouncement; however, this was not infallible and it does not have any real basis in Jewish history, the New Testament, or in early Christian history. Unfortunately, the "infallible" decision at Trent came a millennium and a half after the books were written and in an obvious polemic against Protestantism and the Reformation. Even before Martin Luther, the Council of Florence had proclaimed the Apocrypha inspired, which helped to bolster the doctrine of purgatory that had already blossomed in Catholicism. However, the manifestations of this belief in the sale of indulgences came to full bloom in Luther's day, and Trent's proclamation of the Apocrypha was a clear reaction against Luther's teaching. Furthermore, the official addition of books that support prayers for the dead is highly suspect, coming as it did only a few years after Luther protested against

this very doctrine. The decision of the Council of Trent has all the appearance of an attempt to provide infallible support for Roman Catholic doctrines that lack any real biblical basis.

(10) Apocryphal books appeared in Protestant Bibles prior to the Council of Trent, and they were generally placed in a separate section because they were not considered of equal authority. While Anglicans and some other non-Roman Catholic groups had a high regard for the inspirational and historical value of the Apocrypha, they did not consider it inspired and of equal authority with Scripture. Even Roman Catholic scholars through the Reformation period made the distinction between the Apocrypha and the Canon. Cardinal Ximenes made this distinction in his ***Complutensian Polyglot*** (A.D. 1514–1517) on the very eve of the Reformation; Cardinal Cajetan, who later opposed Luther at Augsburg in 1518, published a ***Commentary on All the Authentic Historical Books of the Old Testament*** (1532) many years after the Reformation began. Neither did this contain the Apocrypha. Luther spoke against the Apocrypha in 1543, placing its books at the back of his Bible (Metzger, ***IA***, 181f.).

(11) The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran included not only the community's Bible (the Old Testament) but also their library, with fragments of hundreds of different books. Among these were some Old Testament apocryphal books, but the fact that no commentaries were found on an apocryphal book and that only canonical books, not the Apocrypha, were found in the special parchment and script, indicates that the apocryphal books were not viewed as canonical by the Qumran community. Menahem Mansoor lists the following fragments of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha: Tobit, in Hebrew and Aramaic; Enoch, in Aramaic; Jubilees, in Hebrew; The Testament of Levi and Naphtali, in Aramaic; apocryphal Daniel literature, in Hebrew and Aramaic; and the Psalms of Joshua (***DSS***, 203). Millar Burrows, noted scholar on the Dead Sea Scrolls, concluded, "There is no reason to think that any of these works were venerated as Sacred Scripture" (***MLDSS***, 178).

At best, all that the arguments urged in favor of the canonicity of the apocryphal books prove is that various apocryphal books were given varied degrees of esteem by different persons within the Christian church, usually falling short of a statement of canonicity. Only after Augustine and the local councils he dominated mistakenly pronounced them inspired, did they gain wider usage and eventual "infallible" acceptance by the Roman Catholic Church at Trent. This falls far short of the kind of initial, continual, and full recognition of the canonical books of the Protestant Old Testament and Jewish Torah (which

exclude the Apocrypha) by the Christian church.
This is but another example of how the teaching Magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church proclaims infallible one tradition to the neglect of strong evidence in favor of an opposing tradition because it supports a doctrine that lacks any substantial support in the canonical books. The real (***proto***) canonical books were received ***immediately*** by the people of God into the growing canon of Scripture (Geisler and Nix, ***GIB***, chapter 13). The ***subsequent*** debate was by those who were not in a position, as was the immediate audience, to know whether they were from an accredited apostle or prophet. Hence, this subsequent debate over the antilegomena[7] was directly over its ***authenticity***, not canonicity. These books were ***already*** in the Canon; what some individuals in subsequent generations questioned was whether they rightfully belonged there. Eventually, all of the antilegomena were retained in the Canon, which is not true of the Apocrypha, for Protestants reject all of the apocryphal works, and even Roman Catholics reject some (e.g., 3 & 4 Esdras and The Prayer of Manasseh).

Arguments in Favor of the Jewish/Protestant Old Testament Canon

The evidence indicates that the Jewish/Protestant canon, consisting of thirty-nine books identical to the Hebrew Bible (Protestant Old Testament) and excluding the Apocrypha, is the true Canon.[8] The Palestinian Jews represented Jewish orthodoxy; therefore, their canon was recognized as the orthodox one. It was the canon of Jesus (Geisler and Nix, ***GIB***, chapter 5), Josephus, and Jerome, and for that matter it was the canon of many of the early church Fathers, including Origen, Cyril of Jerusalem, and Athanasius. The arguments in support of the Protestant canon can be divided into two categories: historical and doctrinal.

The True Test of Canonicity

Contrary to the Roman Catholic argument from Christian usage, the true test of canonicity is propheticity. That is, propheticity determines canonicity: God determined which books would be in the Bible by giving their message to a

prophet. So only books written by a prophet or an accredited spokesperson for God are inspired and belong in the canon of Scripture.

Of course, while God ***determined*** canonicity by propheticity, the people of God had to ***discover*** which of these books were prophetic. This was done immediately by the people of God to whom the prophet wrote, not centuries later by those who had no access to him or any way to verify his prophetic credentials. For example, Moses' books were accepted immediately and stored in a holy place (Deut. 31:26); likewise, Joshua's books were immediately accepted and preserved along with Moses' law (Josh. 24:26). Samuel wrote a book and added it to the collection (1 Sam. 10:25); Daniel already had a copy of his prophetic contemporary Jeremiah (Dan. 9:2, 11, 13); Paul encouraged the churches to circulate his inspired epistles (Col. 4:16); and Peter had a collection of Paul's writings, calling them "Scripture" along with the Old Testament (2 Peter 3:15–16).

There were a number of ways for immediate contemporaries to confirm whether someone was a prophet of God; among these were supernatural confirmations (cf. Ex. 3:1f; Acts 2:22; Heb. 2:3–4; 2 Cor. 12:12). Sometimes this came in the form of feats of nature, and other times in terms of predictive prophecy. Indeed, false prophets were weeded out if their predictions did not come true (Deut. 18:22). Of course, alleged revelations that contradicted previously revealed truths were rejected as well (Deut. 13:1–3).

The evidence that there was a growing canon of books accepted immediately by contemporaries who could confirm its prophetic authenticity is that succeeding books cited preceding ones. Moses' writings are cited through the Old Testament beginning with his immediate successor, Joshua (Josh. 1:7; 1 Kings 2:3; 2 Kings 14:6; 2 Chron. 17:9; Jer. 8:8; Ezra 6:18; Neh. 13:1; Mal. 4:4). Likewise, later prophets cited earlier ones (e.g., Jer. 26:18; Ezek. 14:14, 20; Dan. 9:2; Jonah 2:2–9; Mic. 4:1–3). In the New Testament Paul cites Luke (1 Tim. 5:18); Peter recognizes Paul's epistles (2 Peter 3:15–16), and Jude (4–12) cites 2 Peter. And the book of Revelation is filled with images and ideas taken from previous Scripture, especially Daniel (cf. Rev. 13).

In fact, the entire Jewish Bible/Protestant Old Testament was considered prophetic. Moses, who wrote the first five books, was a prophet (Deut. 18:15), and the rest of the Old Testament books were known as "the Prophets" (Matt. 5:17; Luke 24:27). "The Prophets" were later divided into Prophets and Writings. The reasons are not clear, but some believe this division was based on whether the author was a prophet by office or only by gift, while others claim it

was for topical use at Jewish festivals. Some say they were arranged chronologically in descending order of size (Geisler and Nix, ***GIB***, 244–45), but whatever the reason, it is clear that the original (cf. Zech. 7:12; Dan. 9:2) and continual way to refer to the entire Old Testament up to the time of Christ was the twofold division of the "Law and Prophets." In the same way, the "apostles and prophets" (Eph. 2:20; cf. 3:5) composed the entire New Testament; hence, the whole Bible is a prophetic book, including the last book (cf. Rev. 22:7, 9–10, 19). But, as we will see, this cannot be said for the apocryphal books.

There is strong evidence that the apocryphal books are not prophetic. Since propheticity is the test for canonicity, this would eliminate them from the Canon.

First, no apocryphal book claims to be written by a prophet. Indeed, as already noted, one apocryphal book even disclaims being prophetic (1 Mac. 9:27).

Second, there is no supernatural confirmation of any of the writers of the apocryphal books, as there is for the prophets who wrote canonical books.

Third, there is no predictive prophecy (see "P, PB" in ***BECA***) in the Apocrypha, such as we have in the canonical books (e.g., Isa. 53; Dan. 9; Mic. 5:2), which is a clear indication of their propheticity.

Fourth, there is no new messianic truth in the Apocrypha; thus, it adds nothing to the messianic truths of the Old Testament.

Fifth, even the Jewish community, whose books they were, acknowledged that the prophetic gifts had ceased in Israel before the Apocrypha was written.

Sixth, the apocryphal books were never listed in the Jewish Bible along with the "Prophets," or any other section for that matter.

Seventh, never once is any apocryphal book cited authoritatively by a prophetic book written after it. Taken together, this provides overwhelming evidence that the Apocrypha was not prophetic and, therefore, should not be part of the canon of Scripture.

The Continuous Testimony From Antiquity

In addition to the evidence for the propheticity of only the books of the Jewish Bible/Protestant Old Testament (which exclude the Apocrypha), there is a virtually unbroken line of support from ancient to modern times for rejecting the Apocrypha as part of the Canon. This is true both for Jewish rabbis and for Christian Fathers.

(1) Philo (20 B.C.–A.D. 40), an Alexandrian Jewish teacher, quoted the Old

Testament prolifically from virtually every canonical book. However, he never once quoted from the Apocrypha as inspired.

(2) Josephus (A.D. 30–100), a Jewish historian, explicitly excludes the Apocrypha, numbering the Old Testament as twenty-two books (the thirty-nine books of the Protestant Old Testament). Neither does Josephus ever quote apocryphal books as Scripture, though he was familiar with them. In "Against Apion" (1.8) he wrote,

> For we have not an innumerable multitude of books among us, disagreeing from and contradicting one another [as the Greeks have,] *but only twenty-two books, which are justly believed to be divine; and of them, five belong to Moses, which contain his law, and the traditions* of the origin of mankind till his death. This interval of time was little short of three thousand years; but as to the time from the death of Moses till the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, who reigned as Xerxes, *the prophets*, who were after Moses, wrote down what was done in their times in *thirteen books.* The remaining *four books contain hymns to God*, and precepts for the conduct of human life, (emphasis added)

These correspond exactly to the present Jewish and Protestant Old Testament.

(3) The Jewish teachers acknowledged that their prophetic line ended in the fourth century B.C. Yet, as even Catholics acknowledge, the apocryphal books were written after this time. Josephus wrote,

> From Artaxeres until our time everything has been recorded, but has not been deemed worthy of like credit with what preceded, because the exact succession of the prophets ceased (ibid).

Additional rabbinical statements on the cessation of prophecy support these (see Beckwith, ***OTCNTC***, 370). Seder Olam Rabbah 30 declares,

> Until then [the coming of Alexander the Great] the prophets prophesied through the Holy Spirit. From then on, "Incline thine ear and hear the words of the wise."

Baba Bathra 12b asserts,

Since the day when the Temple was destroyed, prophecy has been taken from the prophets and given to the wise.

Rabbi Samuel bar Inia said,

The Second Temple lacked five things which the First Temple possessed, namely, the fire, the ark, the Urim and Thummin, the oil of anointing and the Holy Spirit [of prophecy].

Thus, the Jewish fathers (rabbis) acknowledged that the time period during which the Apocrypha was written was not a time when God was giving inspired writings.

(4) Jesus and the New Testament writers never once quoted the Apocrypha as Scripture, even though they were aware of them and alluded to them at times (e.g., Heb. 11:35 may allude to 2 Mac. 7, 12, though this may be a reference to the canonical book of Kings—see 1 Kings 17:22). Yet the New Testament writers have ***hundreds*** of citations from all but a few canonical books in the Old Testament, and the manner in which they are cited with authority indicates that they believed them to be part of the "Law and Prophets" [i.e., whole Old Testament], which was believed to be the inspired and infallible Word of God (Matt. 5:17–18; cf. John 10:35). In fact, Jesus specifically quoted books from each of the parts of the Old Testament—"Law and Prophets," which He called "all the Scriptures" (Luke 24:27). There was also a threefold division of the Old Testament into Law, Prophets, and Writings, but this simply divided the "prophets" into two sections called "prophets and writings" (Geisler and Nix, ***GIB***, chapter 14).
(5) The Jewish Scholars at Jamnia (c. A.D. 90) did not accept the Apocrypha as part of the divinely inspired Jewish canon (see Beckwith, ***OTCNTC***, 276–277). Since the New Testament explicitly states that Israel was entrusted with the oracles of God and was the recipient of the covenants and the law (Rom. 3:2), the Jews should be considered the custodians of the limits of their own canon. And they have ***always*** rejected the Apocrypha.
(6) No canonical list or council of the Christian church accepted the Apocrypha as inspired for nearly the first four centuries. This is especially significant since

all of the lists available and most of the Fathers of this period rejected the Apocrypha. The first councils to accept the Apocrypha were local ones without ecumenical[9] force. The Catholic contention that the Council of Rome (A.D. 382), though not an ecumenical council, was all-inclusive because Pope Damasus (c. 305–384) ratified it, is without grounds.

First, this begs the question, making the assumption that Damasus was a pope with infallible authority.

Second, even Catholics acknowledge this council was not an ecumenical one.

Third, not all Catholics agree that statements like this by popes are infallible. There are no infallible lists of infallible statements by popes, nor are there any universally agreed-upon criteria that yield conclusions on issues like this that even all Catholics confirm.

Fourth, appealing to a pope to make infallible a statement by a local council is a double-edged sword. Catholic scholars admit that some popes taught error and were even heretical at times (see Geisler and McKenzie, ***RCE***, chapter 11).

(7) Many of the early Fathers of the Christian church spoke out against the Apocrypha. This included Origen, Cyril of Jerusalem, Athanasius, and the great Roman Catholic Bible translator Jerome.

(8) Jerome (340–420), the greatest biblical scholar of the early medieval period and the translator of the Latin Vulgate, explicitly rejected the Apocrypha as not part of the Canon. He said the church reads them "for example and instruction of manners" but does not "apply them to establish any doctrine" (Beckwith, ***OTCNTC***, 343, citing Jerome's preface to his Vulgate version of the Book of Solomon). In fact, he disputed Augustine's unjustified acceptance of these books. At first, Jerome even refused to translate the Apocrypha into Latin but later made a hurried translation of a few books. After listing the exact books of the Jewish and Protestant Old Testament (which excludes the Apocrypha), Jerome concluded,

> And thus altogether there come to be 22 books of the old Law [according to the letters of the Jewish alphabet], that is, five of Moses, eight of the Prophets, and nine of the Hagiographa [holy writings]. Although some set down … Ruth and Kinoth among the Hagiographa, and think that these books ought to be counted (separately) in their computation, and that there are thus 24 books of the old Law; which the Apocalypse of John represents as adoring the Lamb in the number of the 24 elders.

He added,

> This prologue can fitly serve as a Helmed (i.e. equipped with a helmet, against assailants) *introduction to all the biblical books*, which have been translated from Hebrew into Latin, so that we may know that *whatever is not included in these is to be placed among the Apocrypha* (ibid).

In his preface to Daniel, Jerome clearly rejected the apocryphal additions to Daniel (Bel and the Dragon, and Susanna) and argued only for the canonicity of those books found in the Hebrew Bible:

> The stories of Susanna and of Bel and the Dragon are not contained in the Hebrew. … For this same reason when I was translating Daniel many years ago, I noted these visions with a critical symbol, showing that they were not included in the Hebrew.… After all, both Origen, Eusebius and Appolinarius, and other outstanding churchmen and teachers of Greece acknowledge that, as I have said, these visions are not found amongst the Hebrews, *and therefore they are not obliged to answer to Porphyry for these portions which exhibit no authority as Holy Scripture* (ibid).

The suggestion that Jerome really favored the apocryphal books but was only arguing that the Jews rejected them is groundless. For one thing, he said clearly in the above quotation, ***"these portions which exhibit no authority as Holy Scripture."*** In addition, he never retracted his rejection of the Apocrypha; further, he stated (in ***Against Rufinius***, 33) that he had "followed the judgment of the churches" on this matter, and his statement "I was not following my own personal views" appears to refer to "the remarks that they [the enemies of Christianity] are wont to make against us." In any event, he nowhere retracted his many statements against the Apocrypha.

Finally, the fact that Jerome cited apocryphal books is no proof that he accepted them, for this was a common practice by many church fathers. What is important is that he never retracted his statement that the church reads them "for example and instruction of manners" but does not "apply them to establish any doctrine."

(9) The Apocrypha was even rejected by noted Roman Catholic scholars during the Reformation period, such as Cardinal Cajetan, who opposed Martin Luther. As already noted, Cajetan wrote ***Commentary on All the Authentic Historical Books of the Old Testament*** (1532), which excluded the Apocrypha. If he believed they were authentic, they certainly would have been included in a book on "all the authentic" books of the Old Testament.

(10) Martin Luther, John Calvin, and the other Reformers rejected the canonicity

of the Apocrypha. Lutherans and Anglicans used it only for ethical/devotional matters but did not consider it authoritative in matters of faith. Reformed churches followed ***The Westminster Confession of Faith*** (1647), which states,

> The Books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are not part of the canon of the Scriptures; and therefore are of no authority in the Church of God, nor to be any otherwise approved, or made use of, than any other human writings.

In short, the universal Christian church has not accepted the apocryphal books as part of the Canon to this date. The church rejects the Apocrypha because it lacks the primary determining factor of canonicity, which is propheticity; that is, the apocryphal books lack evidence that they were written by accredited prophets of God. Further evidence is found in the fact that the apocryphal books are never cited as authoritative in Scripture in the New Testament; the Apocrypha was never part of the Jewish canon, whose books they are, and the early church never accepted the Apocrypha as inspired.

The Mistake of the Council of Trent

The "infallible" pronouncement by the Council of Trent that the apocryphal books are part of the inspired Word of God is unjustified for many reasons. This statement actually reveals how fallible an allegedly infallible statement can be, since it is historically unfounded, being a polemical over-reaction and an arbitrary decision that involved a dogmatic exclusion.

Prophetically Unverified

Again, the true test of canonicity is propheticity, and, as just observed, there is no evidence that the apocryphal books were prophetic. They lack prophetic authorship, prophetic content, and prophetic confirmation.

Historically Unfounded

As also noted, the pronouncement at Trent went against a continuous line of teaching from ancient to modern times, including both noted Jewish and Christian Fathers such as Philo, Josephus, Cyril of Jerusalem, Athanasius, and Jerome.

A Polemical Overreaction

The occasion of Trent's pronouncement on the Apocrypha was part of a polemical action against Luther, supporting teaching he had attacked (such as prayers for the dead—cf. 2 Mac. 12:45–46, which reads, "Thus he made atonement for the dead that they might be freed from his sin").

An Arbitrary Decision

Not all of the Apocrypha was accepted by Rome at Trent. In fact, the Council arbitrarily accepted a book favoring its belief in prayers for the dead (2 Mac.) and rejected one opposed to prayers for the dead (2 [or 4] Esdras; cf. 7:105).[10] There were fourteen books, and yet they selected only eleven for their canon.

A Dogmatic Exclusion

In fact, the very history of this section of 2 (4) Esdras reveals the arbitrariness of the Trent decision. Second (4) Esdras was written in Aramaic by an unknown Jewish author (c. A.D. 100) and circulated in Old Latin versions (c. A.D. 200). The Latin Vulgate printed it as an appendix to the New Testament (c. A.D. 400), and it disappeared from Bibles until Protestants, beginning with Johann Haug (1726–1742), began to print it in the Apocrypha based on Aramaic texts, since it was not in Latin manuscripts of the time. However, in 1874 a long section in Latin (seventy verses of chapter 7) was found by Robert Bendy in a library in Amiens, France. Bruce Metzger notes,

> It is probable that the lost section was deliberately cut out of an ancestor of most extant Latin Manuscripts, because of dogmatic reasons, for the passage contains an emphatic denial of the value of prayers for the dead. (*IA.*)

Some Catholics argue that this non-selection was not arbitrary because

(1) Second (4) Esdras was not part of earlier deutero-canonical lists.
(2) It was written after the time of Christ.
(3) It was relegated to an inferior position in the Vulgate.
(4) It was only included among the Apocrypha by Protestants in the eighteenth century.

This argument is unconvincing.
First, 2 (4) Esdras was part of earlier lists of books not considered fully canonical, as even Catholics acknowledge.
Second, according to the Catholic criterion the date of the book has nothing to do with whether it should be in the Jewish Apocrypha but whether it was used by early Christians. And it ***was*** used, just as the other apocryphal books were.
Third, 2 (4) Esdras should not have been rejected simply because it was reduced to an inferior position in the Vulgate. Otherwise, Catholics would have to reject all the Apocrypha, since Jerome, who translated the Vulgate, relegated all the Apocrypha to an inferior position.
Fourth, the reason it did not reappear in Latin until the eighteenth century is apparently that early on some Catholic monk cut out the section against praying for the dead.
In spite of the testimony of antiquity against them, in A.D. 1546, just twenty-nine years after Luther posted his ***Ninety-five Theses***, in an attempt to counteract his attack on the sale of indulgences, which eventually led to a rejection of prayers for the dead and purgatory, the Roman Catholic Church proclaimed that these apocryphal books were on the same level as Scripture, declaring,

> The Synod … receives and venerates … all the books [including the Apocrypha] both of the Old and the New Testaments—seeing that one God is the Author of both … as having been dictated, either by Christ's own word of mouth or by the Holy Ghost … if anyone receives not as sacred and canonical the said books entire with all their parts, as they have been used to be read in the Catholic Church … let him be anathema. (Schaff, *CC*, 2:81.)

The Wrong Test for Canonicity

When all is said and done, the Roman Catholic Church uses the wrong test for canonicity. The correct test of what determines canonicity can be contrasted with the incorrect as follows (see Geisler and Nix, ***GIB***, 221):

Incorrect View of Canon	**Correct View of Canon**
Church Determines Canon	Church Discovers Canon
Church Is Mother of Canon	Church Is Child of Canon
Church Is Magistrate of Canon	Church Is Minister of Canon
Church Regulates Canon	Church Recognizes Canon
Church Is Judge of Canon	Church Is Witness of Canon
Church Is Master of Canon	Church Is Servant of Canon

In spite of the fact that Catholic sources can be cited supporting what looks very much like the "correct view" above, Catholic apologists often equivocate on this issue. Peter Kreeft, for example, argues that the church must be infallible if the Bible is, since the effect cannot be greater than the cause and since the church caused the Canon. But if the church is regulated by the Canon, not ruler over it, then the church is not the cause of the Canon.

Other defenders of Catholicism make the same mistake, giving lip service on the one hand to the fact that the church only discovers the Canon, yet on the other hand constructing an argument that makes the church the determiner of the Canon. They neglect the fact that it is God who caused (by inspiration) the canonical Scriptures, not the church.

This misunderstanding is sometimes evident in the equivocal use of the word ***witness.*** When we speak of the church as being a witness to the Canon (after the time it was written) we do not mean in the sense of being an eyewitness (i.e.,

firsthand evidence itself). Only the people of God contemporary to the events were firsthand witnesses. Rather, the later church is a witness ***to*** the evidence in the sense that it has reviewed the historical evidence for the authenticity of the canonical books as coming from prophets and apostles. The church is not evidence itself; it merely reviews the evidence. Yet when Roman Catholics speak of the role of the church in determining the Canon, they endow it with an evidential role it does not have. Several points will help clarify the proper role of the Christian church in discovering which books belong in the Canon.

First, only the people of God contemporary to the writing of the biblical books could be actual eyewitnesses to the evidence. They alone were witnesses to the Canon as it was developing, and only they can testify to the evidence of the propheticity of the biblical books, which is the determinative factor of canonicity.

Second, the later church is not an evidential witness for the Canon; it does not create or constitute evidence for the Canon. It is only a discoverer and observer of the evidence that remains for the original confirmation of the propheticity of the canonical books. Assuming that the church is evidence in and of itself is the mistake behind the Roman Catholic view favoring the canonicity of the Apocrypha.

Third, neither the earlier nor later church is the judge of the Canon. The church is not, as judges are, the final authority for the criteria of what will be admitted as evidence; that is, it does not determine the rules of canonicity. Since the Bible is the Word of God, only God can determine the criteria for our discovery of what is His Word. Or, to put it another way, what is of God will have His fingerprints on it, and only God is the determiner of what His fingerprints are like.

Fourth, both the earlier and later church is more like a jury than a judge. The role of a jury is to

(1) listen to the evidence, not create it or try to be it;
(2) weigh the evidence, not make it or constitute it, and
(3) render a verdict in accordance with the evidence.

This, as we have shown, is precisely what the Christian church has done in rendering its verdict that the Apocrypha is not part of Sacred Scripture. The

contemporary (first-century) church looked at the firsthand evidence for the ***propheticity*** (miracles, etc.), and the historical church has reviewed the evidence for the ***authenticity*** of these books, which were directly confirmed by God when they were written.

There is, of course, a certain sense in which the church is a "judge" of the Canon, namely, it is called upon, as all juries are, to engage in an active use of its mind in sifting and weighing the evidence and in rendering a verdict. But this is a far cry from what Roman Catholics believe, in practice, if not in theory, that the church plays a magisterial role in determining the Canon. After all, this is what is meant by the "teaching magisterium" of the church. The Roman Catholic hierarchy is not merely ministerial; it is magisterial—it has a judicial role, not only an administrative one. It is not only a jury looking at evidence; it is a judge determining what counts as evidence and what does not. And therein is the problem.

In exercising its magisterial role, the Roman Catholic Church chose the wrong course in rendering its decision about the Apocrypha, thus showing its fallibility.

First, it chose to follow the wrong criterion: Christian usage rather than propheticity.

Second, it used secondhand evidence of later writers rather than the only firsthand evidence for canonicity (divine confirmation of the author's propheticity).

Third, it did not use immediate confirmation by contemporaries of the events but later statements by people often separated from the events by generations or centuries.

All of these mistakes arose out of a misconception of the very role of the church as judge rather than jury, as magistrate rather than minister, a sovereign ***over*** rather than servant ***of*** the canon. By contrast, the Protestant rejection of the Apocrypha was based on a proper understanding of the role of the contemporary eyewitness to the evidence of propheticity and the succeeding church as being possessor of historical evidence for the authenticity of these prophetic books.

Differences over the Apocrypha are crucial to the doctrinal differences of Roman Catholics and Protestants, such as purgatory and prayers for the dead. In answering questions regarding these differences, as shown above, there is no evidence that the apocryphal books are inspired and, therefore, should be part of the canon of inspired Scripture. They do not claim to be inspired, nor does the Jewish community that produced them claim this. Indeed, they are never quoted

as Scripture in the New Testament, and many early Fathers, including the great Roman Catholic biblical scholar Jerome, categorically rejected them. Adding them to the Bible in an infallible decree at the Council of Trent has all the air of a polemical pronouncement, calculated to bolster support for doctrines for which there is no clear support in any of the sixty-six canonical books.
In view of the strong evidence against the Apocrypha, the decision by the Roman Catholic Church to pronounce them canonical is both unfounded and rejected by orthodox Protestants. Further, it is a serious error to admit nonrevelational material into the written Word of God, since it corrupts the revelation of God and thereby undermines the divine authority of Scripture (see Ramm, ***PRA***, 65).

THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON IS COMPLETE

The New Testament was written between about A.D. 50 and 90, and all major branches of Christianity accept its twenty-seven books as inspired and canonical. There are several lines of evidence that support the evangelical belief that the New Testament canon is closed. Primarily, Jesus promised a closed canon by limiting teaching authority to the apostles, who all died before the end of the first century.

The Evidence for the Completeness of the New Testament Canon

The reasons for believing that the twenty-seven books of the current New Testament, and those alone, belong in the Christian canon are very strong. The evidence includes the promise of Jesus, the providence of God, the preservation by the people of God, and the proclamation of the church.

The Promise of Jesus

There are clear indications in the New Testament that the Spirit of Christ’s

revelation to the apostles would complete the biblical revelation.

First, Jesus was the full and complete revelation of the Old Testament (Matt. 5:17). Indeed, Hebrews teaches that Jesus is the full and final revelation of God in "the last days" (Heb. 1:1–2). Further, it refers to Christ as "better than" the angels (Heb. 1:4), "better than" the law (Heb. 7:19), and "better than" the Old Testament law and priesthood (Heb. 9:23). Indeed, His revelation and redemption is said to be "eternal" (Heb. 5:9; 9:12, 15) and "once for all" (9:28; 10:12–14). So Jesus was the full and final revelation of God to humankind; He alone could say, "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9), and of Him alone could it be said that "in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" (Col. 2:9).

Second, Jesus chose, commissioned, and credentialed twelve apostles (cf. Heb. 2:3–4) to teach this full and final revelation that He gave them (Matt. 10:1f.), and before He left this world He promised these apostles to guide them into all truth, saying, "the Holy Spirit.… will teach you all things and will remind you of ***everything I have said to you***" (John 14:26). And, "When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into ***all truth***" (John 16:13). This is why it is said the church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets" (Eph. 2:20) and the earliest church "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2:42 NKJV). If the apostles of Jesus did not teach this completed revelation of God, then Jesus was wrong. But as the Son of God He could not be wrong in what He taught; therefore, the full and final revelation of God in Christ was given by the apostles.

Third, the apostles of Christ lived and died in the first century; consequently, the record of this full and final revelation of Christ to the apostles was completed in the first century. Indeed, one of the qualifications of an apostle was that he was an eyewitness of the resurrection of Christ, which occurred in the first century (Acts 1:22). When Paul's credentials as an apostle were challenged, he replied, "Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" (1 Cor. 9:1). Indeed, he is listed with the other apostles as the "last" to have "seen" the resurrected Christ (1 Cor. 15:6–8).

Fourth, so that there would be no doubt as to who was authorized to teach this full and final revelation of God in Christ, God gave special supernatural powers to the apostles (who in turn gave them to their associates—Acts 6:6; 8:15–18; 2 Tim. 1:6). That these powers were unique to the apostles is clear from the fact that they were called "the signs of an apostle" (2 Cor. 12:12) and that certain things could only occur through the "laying on of the apostles' hands" (Acts

8:18; cf. 19:6). Further, this “power” was promised to the apostles (Acts 1:1, 8), and after Jesus’ ministry (cf. John 14:12) they exercised special apostolic functions and powers, including striking people dead who lied to the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 5:9–11) and performing special signs and wonders (Acts 5:12; Heb. 2:4; 2 Cor. 12:12), which included even raising the dead on command (Matt. 10:8; Acts 20:7–12).

Fifth, there is only one authentic record of apostolic teaching in existence, and that is the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. All other books that claim inspiration come from the second century or later; these are known as the New Testament Apocrypha and are clearly not written by apostles, since the apostles all died before the end of the first century. Since we know the New Testament books have been copied accurately from the very beginning (see chapter 26), the only remaining question is whether all of the apostolic writings from the first century have been preserved. If they have, then these twenty-seven books complete the canon of Scripture, and anything written after them cannot be a revelation of God to the church.

There are two lines of evidence that all the inspired writings of the apostles and their associates were preserved and are found in the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. The first reason is based on the character of God and the second on the care and the testimony of the church.

The Providence of God

Since the God of the Bible is all-knowing (Ps. 139:1–6; 147:5), all-loving (Matt. 5:48; 1 John 4:16), and all-powerful (Gen. 1:1; Matt. 19:26), it follows that He would not inspire books for the faith and practice of believers down through the centuries that He did not preserve. Lost inspired books would be a lapse in God’s providence. The God who cares for the sparrows will certainly care for His Scriptures, and the God who has preserved His general revelation in nature (Rom. 1:19–20) will certainly not fail to preserve His special revelation in Scripture (Rom. 3:2). In short, if God inspired them (2 Tim. 3:16), God will preserve them.

The Preservation by the Church

Not only does the providence of God promise the preservation of all inspired books, but the preservation of these books by the church confirms it. This preservation is manifest in a number of ways.

First, a collection of these books was made from the earliest times; even within the New Testament itself this preservation process was put into action. Luke refers to other written records of the life of Christ (Luke 1:1–4), possibly Matthew and Mark. In Paul's epistle of 1 Timothy (5:18) the gospel of Luke (10:7) is quoted. Peter refers to a collection of Paul's epistles (2 Peter 3:15–16). Paul charged that his epistle of 1 Thessalonians "be read to all the brethren" (1 Thess. 5:27), and he commanded the church at Colosse: "After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans" (Col. 4:16). Jude (6–7, 17) apparently had access to 2 Peter (2 Peter 2:4–6), and John's book of Revelation was circulated to the churches of Asia Minor (Rev. 1:4). So the apostolic church itself was involved by divine imperative in the preservation of the apostolic writings.

Second, the contemporaries of the apostles show a concerned awareness of their mentors' writings, quoting from them prolifically (see chapter 17). Following them the Fathers of the second to fourth centuries made some 36,289 citations from the New Testament, including all verses except eleven! This includes 19,368 citations from the Gospels, 1,352 from Acts, 14,035 from Paul's epistles, 870 from the General Epistles, and 664 from Revelation (see Geisler and Nix, ***GIB***, chapter 24). The Fathers of the second century alone cited from every book of the New Testament except one (3 John), which they simply may have had no occasion to cite. This reveals not only their great respect for the writings of the apostles but also their ardent desire to preserve their written words.

Third, when challenged by heretical teaching, such as that of Marcion the Gnostic (c. 85–c. 160), who rejected all but part of Luke and ten of Paul's epistles (all but the Pastoral Epistles—1 and 2 Timothy and Titus), the church responded by officially defining the extent of the Canon. Lists of apostolic books and collections of their writings were made from early times, beginning with the second century. These include the Muratorian canon (A.D. 170), Apostolic canon (c. 300), Cheltenham canon (c. 360), and Athanasian canon (c. 367), as well as the Old Latin translation (c. 200). This process culminated in the late fourth and early fifth centuries at the Councils of Hippo (393) and Carthage

(410), which listed the twenty-seven books of the New Testament as the complete Canon. Every major section of Christendom has accepted this as the permanent verdict of the church. Evangelical Protestants agree that the Canon is closed.

The Proclamation of the Church

While there was some debate about the books that had initially been accepted into the New Testament church, eventually the universal Christian church came to pronounce unanimously on the twenty-seven books of the present New Testament canon. There has been no significant debate on this since around A.D. 400.

THE DEBATE ABOUT THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON

Unlike the Old Testament, additional books have never been accepted into the New Testament canon long after they were written. Furthermore, there have never been any serious long-term debates over the books that were accepted into the Canon. Nonetheless, there were some questions about some books for some time; these books will be called the New Testament Apocrypha.

The List of New Testament Apocrypha

The New Testament Apocrypha includes the Epistle of Pseudo-Barnabas (c. A.D. 70–79); the Epistle to the Corinthians (c. 96); The Gospel According to the Hebrews (65–100); the Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians (c. 108); the Didache, or Teaching of the Twelve (c. 100–120); The seven Epistles of Ignatius (c. 110); the Ancient Homily, or the Second Epistle of Clement (c. 120–140); the Shepherd of Hermas (c. 115–140); the Apocalypse of Peter (c. 150); and the Epistle to the Laodiceans (fourth century?).

Sometimes a number of books known as the New Testament Pseudepigrapha (lit: "false writings") are sometimes also called apocryphal. These books have been and are universally rejected by the Christian church. They include second-century books like the Gospel of Thomas (a Gnostic work), the Gospel of Peter (containing Docetic heresies), the Protevangelium of James (containing early devotion to Mary), the Gospel of the Hebrews, and the Gospel of the Egyptians, as well as others (see Geisler and Nix, ***GIB***, chapter 17).

Reasons for Rejecting the New Testament Apocrypha

There are several reasons for rejecting these books as noncanonical.
First, none of them experienced any more than a local or temporary acceptance.
Second, most of them had at best a quasi-canonical status, being merely appended to various manuscripts or listed in tables of contents.
Third, no major canon or church council accepted them as part of the inspired Word of God (see "B, IO" in ***BECA***).
Fourth, their limited and temporal acceptance is explainable on the grounds that they were believed wrongly (1) to have been written by an apostle, or (2) to have been referred to in an inspired book (e.g., Col. 4:16). Once this was known to be false they were completely and permanently rejected by the Christian church.

THE COMPLETENESS OF THE BIBLICAL CANON

There is no evidence that any inspired book has been lost. This is confirmed by

(1) the providence of God,
(2) the immediate and careful preservation of the church, and
(3) the absence of any evidence of any other prophetic or apostolic book.

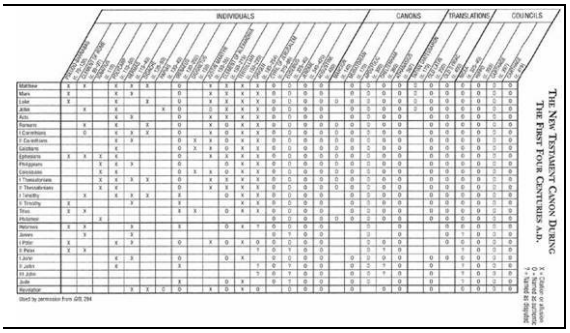
Alleged contrary examples are easily explained as either

(4) uninspired works to which the biblical author made reference, or
(5) inspired works contained in the sixty-six inspired books but with another name.

The list on the next page illustrates the point.

The Confirmation of the Canon

Unlike other holy books, including the Qur'an (see Geisler and Saleeb, ***AI***, chapter 9) and the ***Book of Mormon*** (see Geisler, ***CGM***), the Bible alone has been supernaturally confirmed to be the Word of God. Only the Scriptures were written by prophets who were supernaturally confirmed by signs and wonders. When Moses questioned how his message would be accepted, God performed miracles through him "that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has appeared to you" (Ex. 4:5). Later when Korah rose up to challenge Moses, God again miraculously intervened to vindicate His prophet (Num. 16). Likewise, Elijah was verified to be a prophet of God by supernatural intervention on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18).



In the Gospels, even the Jewish teacher Nicodemus said to Jesus, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him” (John 3:2; cf. Luke 7:22). Luke recorded, “Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him” (Acts 2:22). Hebrews affirms that “God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will” (Heb. 2:3–4). And the apostle Paul proved his apostleship by affirming that “the things that mark an apostle—signs, wonders and miracles—were done among you with great perseverance” (2 Cor. 12:12).

No other book in the world has authors who were confirmed in this miraculous manner. Of all the world’s religious leaders, not Confucius, not Buddha, not Muhammad, and not Joseph Smith were endorsed by miracles that were verified by contemporary and credible witnesses.[11] ***The Bible alone proves to be the Word of God written by prophets and apostles of God who were confirmed by special acts (miracles) of God*** (see chapter 29).

CONCLUSION

The Bible is the only infallible written revelation of God to man. It is complete, since both Old and New Testaments contain all the books God inspired for the faith and practice of future generations. This is confirmed by the promise of Christ, the providence of God, the preservation by the people of God, and the proclamation of the early church. Further, the Bible is sufficient for faith and practice; nothing more is needed; the spiritual guide to life needs no new chapters. The Author inspired a complete manual from the beginning and has preserved all of it, intact.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

SUMMARY OF THE EVIDENCE FOR THE BIBLE

The foundation for apologetics is prolegomena (see part 1). The Bible cannot be the Word of God unless there is a God (see chapter 2), nor can the Bible be supernaturally confirmed to be the Word of God unless there are special acts of God, such as miracles (see chapter 3). Nonetheless, within this context there are many lines of supporting evidence that the Bible is the Word of God.

As was shown earlier (see chapter 2), science has demonstrated that there is a supernatural, super-intelligent Creator of the universe, just as the book of Genesis declares (1:1, 27; 2:4). In addition, the Bible foresaw many things that have only been known by science centuries later.

SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE FOR A SUPERNATURAL CAUSE OF THE UNIVERSE

Based on the intuitively obvious truth that every thing that comes into existence has a cause, modern science has shown that the universe must have had a Cause, since the material universe came into existence. All the evidence for the universe having a beginning supports this conclusion, including the second law of thermodynamics, the expanding universe, the radiation echo, the discovery by

the Hubble Space Telescope of the large mass of energy predicted by the Big Bang theory, Einstein's general theory of relativity, and the impossibility of an infinite number of moments before today.[1]

As we saw earlier, in the light of the overwhelming scientific evidence, agnostic astronomer Robert Jastrow wrote, "***That there are what I or anyone would call supernatural forces at work is now, I think, a scientifically proven fact***" ("SCBTF" in ***CT*** 15, 18, emphasis added). The British physicist Edmund Whittaker added, "It is simpler to postulate creation ex nihilo—divine will constituting nature from nothingness" (***GA***, 111).[2]

SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE FOR A SUPER-INTELLIGENT CAUSE OF THE UNIVERSE

There are two powerful arguments for a super-intelligent Cause of the universe and all living things. The first is from astronomy and the second from microbiology.

The Anthropic Principle—Astronomy

The anthropic (Gk: ***anthropos***, "human being") principle states that the universe was fitted from the very first moment of its existence for the emergence of life in general and for human life in particular. As Robert Jastrow noted, the universe is amazingly preadapted to the eventual appearance of humanity, for if there were even the slightest variation at the moment of the Big Bang, the conditions for human life would not have been possible. If conditions in our universe were different, even in the smallest degree, no life of any kind would exist. In order for life to be present today an incredibly restrictive set of demands must have been present in the early universe—and they were ("SCBTF" in ***CT***, all).

Theistic Implications of the Anthropic Principle

The incredible balance of multitudinous factors in the universe that make life possible on earth (and so far as we know, nowhere else) bespeak of fine-tuning by an intelligent Being. As even agnostic scientists have noted, the conditions that give rise to the anthropic principle are such that would lead one to believe that the universe was "providentially crafted" for our benefit. It is, as Robert Jastrow put it, a "theistic" principle. Nothing known to human beings, other than an intelligent Creator, is capable of pre-tuning the conditions of the universe to make life possible. Or, to put it another way, the kind of specificity and order in the universe that makes life possible on earth is just the kind of effect that is known to come from an intelligent Cause.

Famous astronomer Alan Sandage remarked,

> As I said before, the world is too complicated in all of its parts to be due to chance alone. I am convinced that the existence of life with all its order in each of its organisms is simply too well put together. Each part of a living thing depends on all its other parts to function.... How does each part know? How is each part specified at conception? The more one learns of biochemistry the more unbelievable it becomes unless there is some kind of organizing principle—an architect for believers. ("SRRB" in *T*, 54.)

Robert Jastrow summarized:

> The anthropic principle is the most interesting development next to the proof of the creation, and it is even more interesting because it seems to say that *science itself has proven, as a hard fact, that this universe was made, was designed, for man to live in. It is a very theistic result.* ("SCBTF" in *CT*, 17.)

Intelligent Design Explains the Origin of Complex Life—Microbiology

Contrary to the claims of modern evolutionists, the Bible declared centuries in advance that life does not arise from purely non-intelligent natural laws. The only cause known to scientists that can produce incredible complexity, even the simplest one-celled life, is super-intelligence. Former atheist Sir Fred Hoyle (1915–2001) affirmed,

> Biochemical systems are exceedingly complex, so much so that the chance of their being formed through random shufflings of simple organic molecules is exceedingly minute, to a point indeed where it is insensibly different from zero.... [Thus, the existence of] an intelligence, which designed the biochemicals and gave rise to the origin of carbonaceous life. (*EFS*, 3, 143.)

Microbiology has demonstrated,

(1) The genetic code of life is mathematically identical to that of a human language.
(2) The specified complexity of a ***one-celled animal*** is equal to thirty volumes of the ***Encyclopedia Britannica.***

Some of the same naturalistic scientists who reject the fact that this one-celled life had a super-intelligent Creator inconsistently believe, nevertheless, that one small message to us from outer space would prove the existence of intelligent life there. Astronomer Carl Sagan (1934–1996), for example, believed that "the receipt of a single message from space would show that it is possible to live through such technological adolescence" (***BB***, 275). Yet Sagan noted elsewhere that the genetic information in the human brain expressed in bits is probably comparable to the total number of connections among neurons—about a hundred trillion, 10^{14} bits. If written out in English, this information would fill some twenty million volumes, as many as in the world's largest libraries. "The equivalent of twenty million books is inside the heads of every one of us. The brain is a very big place in a very small space." Sagan goes on to note that "the neurochemistry of the brain is astonishingly busy, the circuitry of a machine more wonderful than any devised by humans" (***C***, 278). But if this is so, then why does the human brain not need an intelligent Creator just like those wonderful machines (such as computers) devised by humans?

Michael Behe's excellent book ***Darwin's Black Box*** provides strong evidence from the nature of a living cell that life could not have originated or evolved by anything but intelligent design. The cell represents irreducible complexity that cannot be accounted for by small incremental changes called for by evolution. As we have seen, Charles Darwin admitted,

> If it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed which could not possibly have been formed by numerous, successive, slight modifications, my theory would absolutely break down. (*OOS*, 6th ed., 154.)

Even evolutionist Richard Dawkins agrees:

> Evolution is very possibly not, in actual fact, always gradual. But it must be gradual when it is being used to explain the coming into existence of complicated, apparently designed objects, like eyes. For if it is not gradual in these cases, it ceases to have any explanatory power at all. Without gradualness in these cases, we are back to miracle, which is a synonym for the total absence of [naturalistic] explanation. (*BW*, 83.)

But Behe provides numerous examples of irreducible complexity that cannot evolve in small steps. He concludes,

> No one at Harvard University, no one at the National Institutes of Health, no member of the National Academy of Sciences, no Nobel Prize winner—no one at all can give a detailed account of how the cilium, or vision, or blood clotting, or any complex biochemical process might have developed in a Darwinian fashion. But we are here. All these things got here somehow; if not in a Darwinian fashion, then how? (*DBB*, 187.)

Also,

> Other examples of irreducible complexity abound, including aspects of DNA reduplication, electron transport, telomere synthesis, photosynthesis, transcription regulation, and more. [Hence,] life on earth at its most fundamental level, in its most critical components, is the product of intelligent activity (ibid., 160, 193).

Behe adds,

> The conclusion of intelligent design flows naturally from the data itself—not from sacred books or sectarian beliefs. Inferring that biochemical systems were designed by an intelligent agent is a humdrum process that requires no new principles of logic or science (ibid.).

Thus,

> The result of these cumulative efforts to investigate the cell—to investigate life at the molecular level—is a loud, clear, piercing cry of “design!” The result is so

> unambiguous and so significant that it must be ranked as one of the greatest achievements in the history of science. The discovery rivals those of Newton and Einstein (ibid., 232–33).

ADVANCED SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE IN THE BIBLE

The Exact Order of Events Known by Modern Science

In addition, in a day when the ancient polytheistic myths of origin prevailed, the author of Genesis declared that the universe came into being out of nothing by the act of a theistic God in the exact order that modern science discovered a millennium and a half later. The universe came first (Gen. 1:1a), then the earth (1:1b), then the land and sea (1:10). After this came life in the sea (1:21), then land animals (1:24–25), and finally, last of all, human beings (1:27). This too supports the view that the author of Genesis had access to some intelligence as to how the Creator made the universe.

Everything Reproduces After Its Kind

Further, the first chapter of Genesis informs us that everything reproduces "after its kind," a scientific fact contrary to many ancient and even earlier modern "hopeful monster views" that in effect a reptile laid an egg and a chicken hatched from it. Both repeated observation and the fossil record demonstrate that each type of life produces its own kind. Indeed, even noted evolutionist Stephen J. Gould declared,

> Most species exhibit no directional change during their tenure on earth. They appear in the fossil record looking much the same as when they disappear; morphological change is usually limited and directionless. [Further,] in any local area, a species does not arise gradually by the steady transformation of its ancestors: it appears all at once and "fully formed" ("EEP" in *NH*, 13–14).

Human Bodies Were Made From the Earth

Many ancient polytheistic beliefs claim that humans came from the gods or that they evolved from lower animals. Modern naturalistic science concurs with the latter, though the means of evolving has changed. Other religious books claim equally unscientific views. The Qur'an, for example, teaches that human beings were created from a "blood clot" (Sura 23:14).

By contrast, the Bible declares, "The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being" (Gen. 2:7). Solomon added that at death, "The dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it" (Eccl. 12:7). Modern science confirms the biblical record, showing that, in addition to being largely water, the human body is made of the very same elements found in the earth.

Rain Water Returns to Its Source

The process we know of as evaporation, condensation, and precipitation was described in the Bible in these terms centuries before scientists knew how it worked: "All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again" (Eccl. 1:7). Before it rained in the Garden of Eden, it says,

> But streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground
> —the
> Lord
> God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils t
> breath of life, and the man became a living being. (
> Gen. 2:6–7
>)

Here again, the biblical author's description, perhaps without being aware of the modern technicalities, is in perfect accord with what the Bible declared centuries in advance.

The Earth Is Round and Hangs in Space

Unlike the ancient belief that the world was square, the Bible declares that the earth is round. Isaiah wrote, "He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in" (Isa. 40:22).
One of the oldest books in the Bible, whose story goes back to around four thousand years ago, declared that the earth was hung in space. While other myths in the ancient world held that the earth rested on the back of Hercules or rested on pillars, Job said of God, "He spreads out the northern skies over empty space; he suspends the earth over nothing" (Job 26:7).

Life Is in the Blood

Another secret of modern science, hidden for centuries, was announced over three thousand years ago in the Bible. Moses wrote in Leviticus (17:11): "For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life." It is likewise known by modern science that life is in the blood, a fact attested to by a loss of blood bringing death.

The Sea Has Paths and Boundaries

The Bible also states well in advance of modern science that the sea has paths.

Psalm 8:8 wrote of “the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.” Proverbs 8:29 adds, “He gave the sea its boundary so the waters would not overstep his command, and … he marked out the foundations of the earth.” The continental shelf that makes this possible is a fairly recent discovery of modern science.

The Laws of Sanitation

The book of Leviticus, long before there was any knowledge of bacteria and germs, set forth laws of sanitation and cleansing that presuppose a knowledge that diseases spread by germs invisible to the naked eye (cf. Lev. 12–15). Cleansing of hands, dishes, and clothes, as well as laws for disposing, of human waste all reveal a source in touch with knowledge known by the Creator. While modern science has demonstrated that there is a supernatural, super-intelligent Creator of the universe, the writer of Genesis had access to this information thousands of years in advance (see, McMillen, ***NTD***).

THE TESTIMONY OF THE SCROLLS

As has been demonstrated in chapters 24, and 25, no book from the ancient world has more manuscript support than does the Bible. While the original manuscripts are not available, the copies are highly reliable in that we possess more, earlier, and better copied manuscripts than for any other book from the ancient world.

The New Testament Manuscripts Are More Numerous

Many great classics from antiquity survive in only a handful of manuscript copies. According to the great Manchester scholar F. F. Bruce (1910–1991), we have nine or ten good copies of Caesar’s ***Gallic Wars***, twenty copies of Livy’s ***Roman History***, two copies of Tacitus’s ***Annals***, and eight manuscripts of

Thucydides' ***History*** (***NTD***, 16). Once again, the most documented secular work from the ancient world is Homer's ***Iliad***, surviving in some six hundred and forty-three manuscript copies. By contrast, there are now thousands of Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. ***The New Testament is far and away the most highly documented book from the ancient world.***

The New Testament Manuscripts Are Earlier

Generally the older the better, since the closer to the time of original composition, the less likely it is that the text has been corrupted. Most books from the ancient world survive not only in a mere handful of manuscripts but also in manuscripts that were made around ***one thousand years*** after they were originally composed. The oldest manuscript for the ***Gallic Wars*** is some ***nine hundred years*** later than Caesar's day. The two manuscripts of Tacitus are ***eight*** and ***ten centuries*** later, respectively, than the original. In the case of Thucydides and Herodotus, the earliest manuscript is some ***thirteen hundred years*** after their autographs. But with the New Testament it is altogether different (Bruce, ***NTD***, 16–20). In addition to complete manuscripts from only three hundred years later, most of the New Testament is preserved in manuscripts less than ***two hundred years*** from the original (P^{45}, P^{46}, P^{47}), some books of the New Testament dating from little over ***one hundred years*** after their composition (P^{66}), and one fragment (P^{52}) coming within ***a generation*** of the first century.

For other sources it is rare to have, as the ***Odyssey*** does, one manuscript copied only ***five hundred years*** after the original. The New Testament, by contrast, survives in complete books from a little over a hundred years after the New Testament was completed. As mentioned, the John Rylands Papyri (P^{52}) is dated A.D. 117–138 and survives from within about a generation of the time it was composed. Whole books (the Bodmer Papyri) are available from A.D. 200, and most of the New Testament, including all the Gospels, are available in the Chester Beatty Papyri from 150 years after the New Testament was finished (viz., c. A.D. 250).

Beginning in A.D. 350 the great New Testament manuscripts known as Vaticanus and Sinaiaticus provide us with virtually the entire New Testament. ***No other book from the ancient world has as small a time gap (between***

composition and earliest manuscript copies) as the New Testament.[3]

The New Testament Manuscripts Are More Accurately Copied

The New Testament (first century) is the most accurately copied book from the ancient world. The famous textual scholars Westcott and Hort estimated that only one-sixtieth of its variants rise above "trivialities," which would leave the text 98.33 percent pure. The great scholar John A. T. Robertson said that the real concern is only with a "thousandth part of the entire text" (***ITCNT***, 22), which would make the New Testament 99.9 percent free of variants. The noted historian Philip Schaff calculated that of the 150,000 variants known in his day, only four hundred affected the meaning of a passage, only fifty were of any significance, and ***not even one*** affected "an article of faith or a precept of duty which is not abundantly sustained by other and undoubted passages, or by the whole tenor of Scripture teaching" (***CGTEV***, 177).
One hundred percent of the message of the New Testament has been preserved in its manuscripts! Sir Frederick Kenyon, an authority on the subject, concluded,

> The number of manuscripts of the New Testament, of early translations from it, and of quotations from it in the oldest writers of the Church, is so large that it is practically certain that the true reading of every doubtful passage is preserved in some one or other of these ancient authorities.... *This can be said of no other ancient book in the world.* (*OBAM*, 55.)

The New Testament Manuscripts Were Written by Contemporaries and Eyewitnesses

Not only were the copies of the manuscripts more, earlier, and better, but they were so early as to vouch for the fact they were composed by eyewitnesses and contemporaries.
The New Testament itself claims to come from eyewitness testimony. Read again what Luke wrote:

> Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught. (Luke 1:1–4)

Indeed, Colin Hemer (***ASHH***, all) has shown that Luke must have composed his gospel by around A.D. 60, just before he wrote Acts (cf. Acts 1:1 and Luke 1:1). Since Jesus died around A.D. 33, this would place Luke only twenty-seven years after the events, while most eyewitnesses were still alive.

Paul speaks of over five hundred eyewitnesses of the results of the Resurrection when he wrote 1 Corinthians, which even critics date by A.D. 55–56. This is only twenty-two or twenty-three years after the events mentioned therein (1 Cor. 15:6). John the apostle also claims to be an eyewitness in his writings:

> That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.... (1 John 1:1–2; cf. John 21:22–25)

Peter added,

> We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. (2 Peter 1:16)

Many noted scholars, including critical ones, have argued convincingly that the New Testament books were written during the time of the eyewitnesses. Former liberal archaeologist William F. Albright (1891–1971) wrote,

> Every book of the New Testament was written by a baptized Jew between the forties and the eighties of the first century a.d. (very probably sometime between about a.d. 50 and 75). ("WA" in *CT*, 359.)

Famous for his role in launching the "Death of God" movement, Bishop John Robertson wrote a revolutionary book entitled ***Redating the New Testament*** in which he posited revised dates for the New Testament that place it earlier than even most conservative scholars have held. Remember that he placed Matthew at c. A.D. 40–60+; Mark at c. 45–60; Luke at 57–60+; and John at c. 40–65+ (***RNT***, 352–354). This would mean that some gospels could be as early as seven years after the time Jesus died and would put the reliability of the New Testament documents beyond reasonable doubt.

THE TESTIMONY OF THE SCRIBES

Another strong line of evidence that the Bible is of divine origin is the testimony of the authors. These men not only taught but also lived and died by the highest standard of morality and truthfulness known to humanity. In spite of persecution and death (Heb. 11:32–38), they insisted that their message came from God.

The Nature of a Prophet as a Mouthpiece of God

A biblical prophet is described in these vivid terms: "The Sovereign LORD has spoken—who can but prophesy" (Amos 3:8). He is one who speaks "all the words which the LORD [has] spoken" (Ex. 4:30 NKJV). God said to Moses of a prophet: "I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him" (Deut. 18:18). He added, "Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it" (Deut. 4:2). Jeremiah was ordered, "This is what the LORD says: Stand in the courtyard of the Lord's house and speak to all the people.… Tell them everything I command you; do not omit a word" (Jer. 26:2).

In brief, a prophet was someone who said what God told him to say, no more and no less.

Prophets Claimed to Be Moved by the Spirit of God

Throughout the Sacred Scriptures, the authors claimed to be under the direction of the Holy Spirit (2 Sam. 23:2; 2 Peter 1:21), but not all prophets were known by the name of prophet. Some were kings, like David, yet he was a mouthpiece of God, nonetheless.[4] Others were lawgivers, like Moses, but he too was a prophet or spokesman for God (Deut. 18:18). Some biblical writers even disclaimed the term ***prophet*** (Amos 7:14–15), meaning they were not professional prophets, like Samuel and his school of the prophets (1 Sam. 19:20). Nonetheless, even if Amos was not a prophet by office, he was certainly a prophet by gift (cf. Amos 7:14–15). That is, prophets were being used as mouthpieces of God.

"Thus Saith the Lord"

Nor did all who were prophets always speak in the first-person style of an explicit "Thus ***saith*** the LORD." Phrases like this (Isa. 1:11, 18; Jer. 2:3, 5, etc. KJV), "God said" (Gen. 1:3, 6, etc.), "the Word of the Lord came to me" (Jer. 32:6; Ezek. 30:1, etc.), or the like are found hundreds of times in Scripture. These reveal beyond question that the writers were claiming to give the very Word of God.

Those who wrote historical books, as did the prophet Jeremiah (Kings), spoke in an implied "Thus ***did*** the Lord." Theirs was a message more about the ***acts*** of God on behalf of His people than the ***words*** of God to His people. Nonetheless, all the biblical writers were vessels through whom God conveyed His message to humankind.

The Scriptures Claim to Be Breathed Out by God

Writing about the entire Old Testament canon, the apostle Paul declared, "All Scripture is ***God-breathed*** and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16–17). Jesus described the Scriptures as the very "word that comes ***from the mouth of God"*** (Matt. 4:4). They were written ***by*** men who spoke ***from*** God. Paul said his writings were ***"words taught by the Spirit"*** (1 Cor. 2:13).

What the Bible Says, God Says

As we have established, another way the Bible claims to be the Word of God is expressed in the formula "What the Bible says, God says." This is manifested in the fact that often an Old Testament passage will claim God said it, yet when this same text is cited in the New Testament it asserts that "the Scriptures" said it. And sometimes the reverse is true, namely, in the Old Testament it is the Bible that records it, but the New Testament declares that it was God who said it (cf. Genesis 12:3 and Gal. 3:8; Gen. 2:24 and Matt. 19:4–5).

The Bible Claims to Be the "Word of God"

Many times the Bible claims to be "the word of God" in these very terms (Matt. 15:6). Paul speaks of the Scriptures as ***"the oracles of God"*** (Rom. 3:2 NKJV), and Peter declares, "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through ***the living and enduring word of God***" (1 Peter 1:23; see also Heb. 4:12, emphasis added in all).

Since there is every evidence that the biblical authors were men of the truth (they not only taught the highest ethic, but they lived it and were willing to die for it), when they declared the Bible was of divine, not human, origin, there is good reason to believe what they said. Indeed, the truth of their writings is verified for

further supporting evidence both from miracles (the supernatural) and archaeology (the stones).

THE TESTIMONY OF THE SUPERNATURAL

The Bible is a supernatural book, making supernatural predictions and containing supernatural confirmations.

Supernatural Predictions in the Bible

The Bible contains nearly three hundred predictions concerning Christ. Even critics agree that the latest of these come from some two hundred years before His time; many come hundreds of years earlier. Every one has come to pass as predicted, and they are often clear and specific. They include that Jesus would be:

(1) born of a woman (Gen. 3:15; cf. Gal. 4:4);
(2) born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14; cf. Matt. 1:21f);
(3) "cut off" (killed) 483 years after the declaration to reconstruct the temple in 444 B.C. (Dan. 9:24f). (This was fulfilled to the very year [Hoehner, ***CALC***, 115–38].);
(4) of the seed of Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3 and 22:18; cf. Matt. 1:1 and Gal. 3:16);
(5) of the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10; cf. Luke 3:23, 34 and Heb. 7:14);
(6) of the house of David (2 Sam. 7:12f; cf. Matt. 1:1);
(7) born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2; cf. Matt. 2:1 and Luke 2:4–7);
(8) anointed by the Holy Spirit (Isa. 11:2; cf. Matt. 3:16–17);
(9) heralded by the messenger of the Lord (Isa. 40:3 and Mal. 3:1; cf. Matt. 3:1–2);
(10) a performer of miracles (Isa. 35:5–6; cf. Matt. 9:35);
(11) a cleanser of the Temple (Mal. 3:1–3; cf. Matt. 21:12f.);
(12) rejected by the Jews (Ps. 118:22; cf. 1 Peter 2:7);
(13) the sufferer of a humiliating death (Ps. 22 and Isa. 53; cf. Matt.

27:31f.), involving:

A. rejection by His own people (Isa. 53:3; cf. John 1:10–11; 7:5, 48);

B. silence before His accusers (Isa. 53:7; cf Matt. 7:12–19);

C. being mocked (Ps. 22);

D. piercing His hands and feet (Ps. 22:16; cf. Luke 23:33);

E. being crucified with sinners (Isa. 53:12; cf. Mark 15:27–28 and Matt. 27:38);

F. praying for His persecutors (Isa. 53:12; cf. Luke 23:34);

G. piercing His side (Zech. 12:10; cf. John 19:34);

H. burial in a rich man's tomb (Isa. 53:9; cf. Matt. 27:57–60);

I. casting lots for His garments (Ps. 22:18; cf. Luke 23:24 and John 19:23–24);

(14) raised from the dead (Ps. 2:7; 16:10; cf. Acts 2:31 and Mark 16:6);
(15) ascended into heaven (Ps. 68:18; cf. Acts 1:9); and
(16) seated at the right hand of God (Ps. 110:1; cf. Heb. 1:3).

Unlike psychic predictions, which are generally not short-term, are often general, and are usually wrong (see Geisler, "PAPB" in ***BECA***), these biblical predictions were often specific, always long-term, and never wrong. A study made of top psychics (***The People's Almanac***, 1976) revealed that they were wrong 92 percent of the time. Jeanne Dixon, for example, was usually wrong, and her biographer, Ruth Montgomery, admits that she made false prophecies. Dixon "predicted that Red China would plunge the world into war over Quemoy and Matsu in October of 1958; she thought labor leader Walter Reuther would actively seek the presidency in 1964." On October 19, 1968, she assured us that Jacqueline Kennedy was not considering marriage; the next day, Mrs. Kennedy wed Aristotle Onassis. She also said that World War III would begin in 1954, the Vietnam War would end in 1966, and Castro would be banished from Cuba in 1970.

A study of prophecies made by psychics in 1975 and observed until 1981, including Jeanne Dixon's projections, showed that of seventy-two predictions, only six were fulfilled in any way. Two of these were vague and two others were

hardly surprising—the U.S. and Russia would remain leading powers and there would be no world wars (see Geisler, "PAPB" in ***BECA***). With only an 8 percent accuracy rate, how seriously can we take these claims? Such a percentage could easily be explained by chance and general knowledge of circumstances.

Even Jeanne Dixon's prophecy of John Kennedy's death is vague, wrong in some aspects (she says that the 1960 election would be dominated by labor, which it was not), and contradicted by her other prophecies—she said Nixon was supposed to win and he didn't. Certainly, there was nothing miraculous about it.

First, Dixon never named "Kennedy," while the Bible, by contrast, named King Cyrus a century and a half before he was born and told what he would do (see Isa. 45:1).

Second, Dixon gave no specificity as to how, where, or when Kennedy would be killed (cf. the specificity in the biblical predictions as to where, when, and how Christ would be born and die).

Third, Dixon's prediction was general. All she divined was that a Democratic president would die in office. Since there was about 50/50 chance that a Democratic president would be elected and a reasonable chance that he would be shot at during an expected two-term time period, there was nothing altogether unusual about this. Furthermore, there was about a century-old cycle going in which nearly every twenty years or so a president was shot. Even Ronald Reagan was later almost killed in office.

Likewise, the highly reputed "predictions" of Nostradamus are not amazing. Contrary to popular belief, he was often wrong when specific, he was usually vague, and he never predicted some of the things attributed to him (see Geisler, "N" in ***BECA***). For example, he never predicted either the place or the year of a great California earthquake, and the date later added did not come to pass. Further, most of his "famous" predictions, such as the rise of Hitler, are completely misplaced. He mentioned "hister" (a place), not Hitler (a person).

It is the Bible that makes long-range, specific predictions, which were fulfilled as predicted. This is further evidence of the Bible's divine origin.

Supernatural Confirmations in the Bible

In addition to the supernatural predictions in the Bible, there are numerous supernatural confirmations in it. When there was need, prophets of God were

given special divine confirmation.
Moses was given miracle-working ability (Ex. 4:1f.), including creating life from dust (Ex. 8:16–17) and dividing the waters of the Red Sea (Ex. 14). Elijah was confirmed as a prophet of God by bringing fire down from heaven (1 Kings 18), and Elisha performed many miracles to prove he was a prophet, including raising a boy from the dead (2 Kings 4:8–37).
The New Testament informs us that "Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know" (Acts 2:22). Indeed, the unbelieving Jewish leader Nicodemus said to Jesus, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him" (John 3:2). Paul said he had the miraculous signs of an apostle (2 Cor. 12:12). The writer of Hebrews affirmed:

> How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will. (
>
> Heb. 2:3–4
>
>)

Even the Qur'an acknowledges that Jesus was confirmed as a prophet by miracles, including raising a person from the dead (Sura 5:113). Muhammad himself refused to do miracles like the prophets before him (Sura 6:37). The truth is that there is no other book in the world other than the Bible whose truths are confirmed by historically credible supernatural events.

THE TESTIMONY OF THE STRUCTURE (OF THE BIBLE)

One of the supporting lines of evidence for the Bible's divine origin is its amazing unity amid its vast diversity. That is, even though the Bible was composed by many persons of diverse background and in different periods, nonetheless, it manifests astounding evidence that there is one Mind behind it. Consider first the awesome diversity of the Bible.
First, it was written over ***a period of some fifteen hundred years*** or more (from at least 1400 B.C. to nearly A.D. 100).
Second, it is composed of ***sixty-six different books.***
Third, these books were written by some ***forty different authors.***

Fourth, it was composed in ***three languages***—Hebrew, Greek, and some Aramaic.
Fifth, it contains ***hundreds of different topics.***
Sixth, it was written in a ***variety of different literary styles***, including history, poetry, didactic, parable, allegory, apocalyptic, and epic.
Seventh, it was composed by ***authors of many different occupations.***
Yet in spite of all this vast diversity, the Bible reveals an astounding unity.
First, it is a continuous, unfolding drama of redemption, from Genesis to Revelation, from Paradise lost to Paradise regained; from the creation of all things to the consummation of all things (Sauer, ***DWR*** and ***TC***, all).
Second, the Bible has one central theme: the person of Jesus Christ (Luke 24:27, 44). In the Old Testament Christ is seen by way of anticipation; in the New Testament by way of realization. In the Old Testament He is predicted, and in the New Testament He is present (Matt. 5:17–18). The Old Testament expectation came to a historic realization in the New Testament.
Third, the Bible has one unified message: Humankind's problem is sin, and the solution is salvation through Christ (Luke 19:10; Mark 10:45). Such incredible unity amid such great diversity is best accounted for by Deity. The very Mind the writers of Scripture claimed inspired them appears to have superintended them, weaving each of their pieces into one overall mosaic of truth.
Critics claim that this is not so amazing considering that succeeding authors were aware of preceding ones and, hence, could build upon the foundation without contradicting it. Or, later generations only accepted their book into the growing canon of Scripture because it seemed to fit with the others. However, these objections overlook several important facts.
First, not all biblical authors possessed all the other books when they wrote theirs. Some wrote in exile (Ezekiel). Others wrote from foreign lands (Esther). Some were written in the East (Hebrews), while others came from Asia Minor (John) or Rome (2 Timothy).
Second, not all writers of biblical books were aware of the fact that their book would be used in the Canon in the way it has been (e.g., Song of Solomon or Proverbs). Hence, they could not have slanted in the way in which it would best fit.
Third, the books were not accepted into the Canon hundreds of years later by people who were looking for books that would fit. Though some later generations raised legitimate questions as to how a book came to be in the Canon, there is evidence that the books were accepted immediately by the

contemporaries as they were written. For example, when Moses wrote, his books were placed by the ark of the covenant (Deut. 31:26). Later, when Joshua wrote, his book was placed there along with Moses' books. Likewise, Daniel possessed a copy of Moses and the prophets before him, including a contemporary named Jeremiah (Dan. 9:2). In the New Testament Paul cites Luke (1 Tim. 5:18; cf. Luke 10:7), and Peter possessed Paul's epistles (2 Peter 3:15–16). While not every Christian everywhere possessed every book immediately, those to whom it was written accepted it immediately and others eventually as it was confirmed to them as authentic.

Fourth, even if every author of Scripture possessed every other book before he wrote his own, there is still a unity of Scripture that transcends normal human ability. Indeed, one would have to assume (contrary to fact) that every author of Scripture was an incredible literary genius who saw both the broader unity and "plan" of Scripture and just how his piece was to play a part in it so that the unforeseen end would come out even though he could not foresee it himself. It is simply easier to posit a single, superintending Mind behind the whole thing, who devised the plot and the plan and how it would unfold and eventuate from the beginning (Isa. 46:10).

To illustrate the incredible unity of the Bible, suppose, for example, that a family medical advisor was composed by forty doctors over 1,500 years, in different languages, on hundreds of different medical topics, etc. What kind of unity would it have, even if all the succeeding authors knew what the preceding one had written? One chapter would say all disease is caused by demons that need to be exorcised. Another would claim that disease is in the blood, which needs to be drained out (hence the red in the barber pole), while still another would claim disease is psychosomatic, a matter of mind over matter. Such a book would consistently lack unity and continuity, and no one would seriously consider it a definitive source to answer what is the cause and cure of disease. Yet the Bible, with even greater diversity, is the world's number one bestseller, still sought out by countless millions as the solution to humankind's spiritual maladies. It alone, of all books known to humankind, needs Deity to account for its amazing unity in the midst of its beautiful diversity. And since there is evidence that such a Deity exists (see chapter 2), the unity of the Bible provides evidence that it is His Book.

THE TESTIMONY OF THE STONES

The rocks cry out in support of the historicity and authenticity of the Bible. No archaeological find has ever refuted a biblical claim, and thousands of finds have confirmed in general and in detail the biblical picture. As we read previously, noted archaeologist Nelson Glueck has boldly asserted,

> As a matter of fact ... it may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference. Scores of archaeological findings have been made which confirm in clear outline or exact detail historical statements in the Bible. (*RD*, 31.)

William F. Albright concluded, "There can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of the Old Testament tradition" (***ARI***, 176). Further,

> As critical study of the Bible is more and more influenced by the rich new material from the ancient Near East, we shall see a steady rise in respect for the historical significance of now neglected or despised passages and details in the Old and New Testaments. (*FSAC*, 81.)

For the Old Testament, archaeological confirmations have spanned the Creation record (Gen. 1–2) in the Ebla Tablets[5], including Noah's Flood (Gen. 7–9), the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11), patriarchal history (Gen. 12–50), Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18–19), the fall of Jericho (Josh. 6), King David (2 Sam.), and the Assyrian Captivity (Isa. 20).

In the New Testament book of Acts alone there are literally hundreds of archaeological confirmations of innumerable details of the narration. Noted Roman historian A. N. Sherwin-White said of Luke's writings:

> For Acts the confirmation of historicity is overwhelming.... Any attempt to reject its basic historicity even in matters of detail must now appear absurd. Roman historians have long taken it for granted. (*RSRL*, 189.)

Indeed, during decades of research in the area, Sir William Ramsay wrote,

> I found myself often brought into contact with the book of Acts as an authority for

> the topography, antiquities, and society of Asia Minor. It was gradually borne in upon me that in various details the narrative showed marvelous truth. (*SPTRC*, 8.)

Colin Hemer has detailed these in his volume ***The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History.*** This includes common knowledge, specialized knowledge, and even detailed local knowledge of topography (see chapter 26).

In addition, Luke manifests an incredible array of knowledge of local places, names, conditions, customs, and circumstances that befit only an eyewitness contemporary of the time and events—all without a single mistake. And all of this is to say nothing of the numerous other biblical places, names, and events that have been confirmed by archaeology (see Yamauchi, ***SS***, 115–19).

THE TESTIMONY OF THE SAVIOR

Jesus claimed to be the Son of God (John 8:58; Matt. 16:16–18; 26:63–64) and was confirmed by acts of God (John 3:2; Acts 2:22). But Jesus said the Bible is the Word of God (see chapter 16); hence, either the Bible is the Word of God or else Jesus is not the Son of God. If Jesus is the Son of God that He was supernaturally confirmed to be, then the Bible is the Word of God.

Jesus Confirmed the Old Testament to Be the Word of God

Jesus declared that the Old Testament was ***divinely authoritative*** (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10); ***imperishable*** (Matt. 5:17–18); ***infallible*** (John 10:35); ***inerrant*** (Matt. 22:29; John 17:17); historically reliable (Matt. 12:40; 24:37–38); scientifically accurate (Matt. 19:4–5; John 3:12); and ultimately supreme (Matt. 15:3, 6). Indeed, many things Bible critics deny, Jesus personally affirmed as true, including:

(1) Daniel was a prophet, not a mere historian (Matt. 24:15).
(2) God created a literal Adam and Eve (Matt. 19:4).

(3) Jonah was literally swallowed by a great fish (Matt. 12:40).
(4) The world was actually destroyed by a flood (Matt. 24:39).
(5) There was one prophet Isaiah (not two or three) who wrote all of Isaiah (1–39 and 40–66: see Luke 4:17–20 and Mark 7:6).

Jesus Promised the New Testament Would Be the Word of God

Jesus not only confirmed the Old Testament as the Word of God but He also promised the New Testament would be God's Word as well. He declared that the Holy Spirit would teach the apostles "all things" and lead them into "all truth" (John 14:26; 16:13). The apostles claimed this divine authority for their words (John 20:31; 1 John 1:1; 4:1, 5–6)—the apostle Peter acknowledged Paul's writings as "Scripture" (2 Peter 3:15–16). Since the New Testament is the only authentic infallible record of apostolic teaching, it must be the "all truth" Jesus promised through the apostles. Thus Jesus taught that both the Old Testament and the New Testament are the Word of God (see chapter 28).

THE TESTIMONY OF THE SPIRIT

No amount of evidence apart from the work of the Holy Spirit will convince anyone of the significance of the fact that the Bible is God's Word. The Bible informs us: "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children" (Rom. 8:16). This, of course, is based on the testimony of the Word of God, for "faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17). John added, "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13).
God not only bears witness to the believer that Christ is the Son of God, but also that the Bible is the Word of God. John wrote,

> We accept man's testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. (

1 John 5:9–10

)

The record, of course, is the Bible. John went on, “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:13). Indeed, “These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31). So the Spirit of God bears witness that the Bible is the Word of God and that the Christ revealed in it is the Son of God.

God’s witness, however, is through the Word, not apart from it. He provides the subjective assurance through the objective Word and the objective evidence for it. God does not bypass the head on the way to the heart. He said, “Come now, let us reason together … though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool” (Isa. 1:18).

THE TESTIMONY OF THE SAVED

The life-transforming power of the Bible is widely known. Blasphemers, murderers, prostitutes, adulterers, derelicts, drug addicts, and sinners of every stripe have been transformed by its message. One chief example was Saul of Tarsus, hater and persecutor of Christ and Christians, whose miraculous conversion is recorded in Acts 9. He later wrote, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile” (Rom. 1:16).

Literally millions of people worldwide, from stone-age pagans to modern-age scientists, have testified to the power of the Word of God to make them children of God. Many social organizations, such as the Salvation Army and Inner City Ministries, can attest to the fact that “the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). The apostle Peter added, “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God” (1 Peter 1:23).

While early Islam experienced its greatest growth under the military sword, early Christianity grew by “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph.

6:17). Christianity took over the old Roman Empire not by military might (it had none) but by the might of the Spirit of God working through the Word of God (Zech. 4:6).

The great Christian apologist William Paley (1743–1805) summarized the difference between the growth of Christianity and Islam in this vivid comparison:

> For what are we comparing? A Galilean peasant (Jesus) accompanied by a few fishermen, with a conqueror at the head of his army (Muhammad). We compare Jesus, without force, without power, without support, without one external circumstance of attraction or influence, prevailing against the prejudices, the learning, the hierarchy, of his country, against the ancient religious opinions, the pompous religious rites, the philosophy, the wisdom, the authority, of the Roman empire, in the most polished and enlightened period of its existence—with [Muhammad] making his way among Arabs; collecting followers in the midst of conquests and triumphs, in the darkest ages and countries of the world, and when success in arms not only operated by that command of men's wills and persons which attend prosperous undertakings, but was considered as a sure testimony of Divine approbation. That multitudes, persuaded by this argument, should join the train of a victorious chief; that still greater multitudes should, without any argument, bow down before irresistible power—is a conduct in which we cannot see much to surprise us; in which we can see nothing that resembles the causes by which the establishment of Christianity was effected (*EC*, 257).

6

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The Bible is the only known book in the world that both claims to be and proves to be the Word of God.[7] The evidence supporting this claim has been summarized in this chapter: The testimony of science that demonstrates it, of the scrolls that transmit it, the scribes who wrote it, the supernatural that confirms it, the structure that manifests it, the stones that support it, the Savior who verified it, the Spirit that witnesses to it, and the saved who have been transformed by it. These combined testimonies confirm that the Bible is what it claims to be—the divinely inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word of God (see chapters 13–14, 27).

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APPENDIX ONE

OBJECTIONS AGAINST THEISTIC ARGUMENTS

In chapter 2 the traditional theistic arguments were set forth. Since the time of David Hume (1711–1776) and Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) many objections have been leveled against these arguments. Most of them are without merit, and none are telling; nonetheless, each will be addressed briefly.

Objection One: Maybe God Once Existed, But No Longer Exists

The kalam (horizontal) cosmological argument (see Craig, ***KCA***) posits a First Cause to explain how a universe that had a beginning got started. In response, some have objected that, at best, this only shows a need for a Cause at the beginning of the universe; it does not prove that this Cause (God) now exists.

Response to Objection One

First of all, at best this objection only applies to the kalam (horizontal) form of

the cosmological argument, not the vertical form of Aquinas (***ST***, 1.2.3), for the latter argues from the existence of a present contingent (or changing) being to a present Necessary Being.
Further, even the kalam argument can be expanded by adding (like the vertical cosmological argument) that the First Cause must be a Necessary Being, since that is the only kind of Cause that can produce a contingent being, such as the universe is. A Necessary Being cannot cease to exist; hence, it must exist now.

Objection Two: Finite Beings Need Only a Finite Cause

Following David Hume (see ***DCNR***), some object that only a finite cause is necessary to account for a finite effect, such as the universe. Positing an infinite Cause is unnecessary, representing a kind of metaphysical overkill.

Response to Objection Two

In response, it is noted that, according to the principle of causality, ***every*** finite (limited) being or effect is caused to exist. Thus, this Cause of all finite beings cannot be finite. It is the Unlimited Limiter of every limited thing that exists; thus, this First Cause cannot be finite or limited, because if it were limited (i.e., caused) it would need a cause beyond it to ground its limited existence. So, if there is a limited existence, then Something must be limiting it that is itself Unlimited.

Objection Three: If Everything Needs a Cause, Then So Does God

Bertrand Russell (1872–1970) claimed that if everything needs a cause, then so does God. If everything does ***not*** need a cause, then neither does the world. So, in either case there is no need for God (see ***WIANC***).

Response to Objection Three

However, this dilemma is based on a misunderstanding of the principle of causality, which does not state that "everything needs a cause" but only that "every ***finite*** (or contingent) thing needs a cause." A being that is not finite (viz., is infinite) does not need a cause, nor does one that is not contingent (viz., is necessary). Since the physical universe is finite, it does need a cause. Likewise, not everything that is eternal needs a cause (e.g., God) but everything that has a beginning does need a cause. Since the physical universe had a beginning, it must have had a Cause.

Objection Four: The Universe as a Whole Does Not Need a Cause

Some anti-theists claim that the universe as a whole needs no cause; only its parts do, for to claim otherwise, allegedly, is the fallacy of composition, assuming that the whole must have the characteristics of the parts.

Response to Objection Four

This is not the case, as was demonstrated previously (see chapter 2 on the vertical cosmological argument).

Objection Five: Chance Can Explain the Origin of All Things

Following Hume, many appeal to chance as an explanation of the apparent design in the world. Improbable events do happen, just like an improbable roll of the dice does, and given an eternal universe, sooner or later any improbable

combination of events will occur.

Response to Objection Five

First, insofar as it is directed at the need for an intelligent cause, this argument violates a fundamental law of thought. An effect cannot be greater than its cause; the Cause of intelligent beings must be intelligent, for it cannot give perfections it does not have to give.
Second, chance has no causal power—it is merely the intersection of lines of causality. There are natural causes and intelligent causes, but there are no chance causes.
Third, the evidence does not support a chance cause of the universe. No scientist would claim that the presidential faces on Mount Rushmore were the result of chance; only intelligent intervention adequately explains these results. Likewise, there is more information in DNA, the simplest form of life, than in either the skeptics' words or Mount Rushmore. Only an intelligent Creator is adequate to account for this vast complexity of information in the code of life.
Fourth, the agnostic would not agree that the very words he used to express his view were a purely chance product rather than an expression of an intelligent being. If he did claim this, then his words have no meaning and, hence, no truth value to refute theism.

Objection Six: The Principle of Causality Is Unprovable

Since all forms of the cosmological argument depend on the principle of causality, the cosmological argument would fail if the principle of causality were not sound. David Hume insisted that either it is based on experience (which could be otherwise), or it is a mere tautology (empty statement) that is true only by definition.

Response to Objection Six

First of all, Hume's argument is based on his epistemological atomism—that all empirical (experiential) impressions are "entirely loose and separate" (see ***ECHU***), which is self-defeating, for if all events were entirely loose and separate, there would be no way to know it.

Further, the cosmological argument is not based on merely empirical observation but on metaphysical necessity. For example, a contingent being is one that of necessity can ***not*** be, and a Necessary Being is of necessity One that can ***not*** not be.

It is impossible that something could arise from nothing; the principle of causality is that "every limited being has a cause for its existence." This principle is not based in any mere conceptional or definitional necessity but in the fundamental reality that nonexistence cannot cause existence.

What is more, Hume himself emphatically denied that things do not have a cause for their existence (***LDH***, 1:187).

Finally, the reason that all finite, contingent beings need a cause is that "contingent" means "what could not be," and if all contingent beings could not be, then there could be nothing at all. However, there is something; hence, a state of total nothingness is not actually possible. There must be a noncontingent (i.e., necessary) Cause of all contingent beings.

Objection Seven: The Cosmological Argument Commits the Post Hoc Fallacy

David Hume argued that we cannot be sure which effects have which causes, since the post hoc fallacy is always possible; that is, it does not follow logically that something happens ***because*** of something else simply because it always happens ***after*** that something else. Therefore, we cannot infer that the universe follows from an intelligent supernatural Cause.

Response to Objection Seven

It is true that it is sometimes difficult empirically, if not practically, to determine which cause is responsible for which effect. Nonetheless, this a-theistic conclusion does not follow from this for many reasons.

First, the cosmological argument does not infer a specific (i.e., finite) cause from a specific effect. It infers an infinite Cause for all finite effects.

Second, even on Hume's empirical grounds he was willing to admit that some things occur so regularly in connection with others that we have a practical "proof" (***ECHU***, VI) that they are connected. We know that only intelligent causes regularly and repeatedly produce specified complexity; consequently, the incredible complexity in the universe points to an intelligent Cause.

Third, as noted above, Hume never denied that there was a causal connection, i.e., that events need causes. He simply questioned the grounds on which some people argue for this. But again, even he admitted that some things are so regularly connected as to call the connection a "proof."

Fourth, even though we cannot always know which finite cause produces which effect, this does not apply to an infinite Cause, for there can only be one infinite Being. There cannot be two Alls, nor can there be two absolutely perfect Beings, because to be two they would have to differ, yet if one lacked some perfection the other had, then one would not be absolutely perfect.

Fifth, if we could not know which kind of cause is behind which kind of effect, then we could not validly infer that there was an atheist's mind behind the atheist's thoughts in the very objection he presents. Further, even the atheist assumes that there is a real theist's mind (cause) behind the theist's writings (effects).

Objection Eight: An Infinite Series of Causes Is Possible

Critics often object that the First Cause is invalid because there could be an endless series of causes, each cause being caused by another before it.

Response to Objection Eight

As is well known in mathematics, infinite numbers are possible; however, several very important considerations invalidate this criticism.

First of all, mathematical infinites are abstract, not concrete. As has been demonstrated, there are an infinite number of points between A and B, but one cannot get an infinite number of sheets of paper between them, no matter how thin the sheets are.

Likewise, an infinite number of moments is not possible before today (see chapter 2), otherwise today would never have come. So a temporal series of infinite causes going backward is not possible either.

Further, in the vertical form of Thomas Aquinas's cosmological argument, the very first cause outside of a finite, contingent, changing being must be infinite and uncaused. This is so because ***every*** finite being needs a cause; hence, one finite being cannot cause the existence of another. So there cannot be even ***one*** intermediate efficient causal link between the Creator and His creatures. The very first efficient cause outside of beings whose existence is actualized (caused) by another must be the Actualizer of all other beings.

In addition, an infinite series of simultaneous and existentially dependent causes is not possible. There must be a here-and-now ground for a simultaneous series of causes, none of which would otherwise have a ground for its existence. An ungrounded infinite regress is tantamount to affirming that the existence in the series arises from nonexistence, since no cause in the series has a real ground for its existence. Or, if one cause in the series grounds the existence of the others, then it must be a First Cause (and hence the series is not infinite). Otherwise it turns out to be a cause that causes its own existence (which is impossible), while it is causing the existence of everything else in the series.

Objection Nine: The Concept of an Uncaused Being Is Meaningless

It is urged by some critics that there is no meaning to terms like an "Uncaused" or "Necessary" Being, since we have nothing in our experience to which they correspond.

Response to Objection Nine

This is not a valid objection for many reasons. For one thing, if an uncaused God is meaningless, then so is an uncaused universe, which many atheists posit. Since nothing cannot produce something, then ultimately something must be uncaused—either the universe or its Cause. But, as demonstrated, the universe cannot be eternal since it is running down.

In addition, the very sentence "A Necessary Being has no meaning" would be meaningless unless there were some meaning to the words "necessary being." In short, the atheist assumes the phrase has meaning, otherwise his claim that it is meaningless is self-defeating.

Further, there is nothing incoherent about the term, since it is not contradictory. We know what "contingent being" means (viz., what exists but ***can*** not exist), and necessary is the opposite of contingent (viz., what cannot not exist).

Finally, the meaning of these terms is derived from their relationship to what is dependent upon them, and this meaning is twofold: ***First***, terms like ***necessary*** or ***infinite*** are negative terms; they describe what God is not. God is not limited (unlimited) and not contingent (necessary). ***Second***, we know what these limitations mean from experience, and so, by contrast, we know that God does not have any of these limitations.

It is important to mention that a negative term does not denote a negative attribute. It is not the affirmation of nothing; rather, it is the negation of all contingency and limitation in the First Cause. The positive content of what God is derives from the causal principle; He is Actuality because He causes all actuality; He is Being since He is the Cause of all being. However, as the Cause of all being His being cannot be caused; as the ground of all contingent beings, He cannot be a contingent being.

Objection Ten: It Is Possible That Nothing Ever Existed, Including God

Anti-theists rightly insist that if there is a Necessary Being, it is impossible for it not to exist. However, it is supposedly not necessary for a Necessary Being to exist; even though something now exists, it is logically possible that nothing ever existed, including God. In short, the ontological argument—that it is logically necessary that a Necessary Being exists—is invalid.

Response to Objection Ten

In response, we acknowledge that this is true and that it is a valid criticism of the ontological argument. However, this reasoning does not work against the cosmological argument, which begins with something that actually exists, namely, a contingent being. And if even one contingent (dependent) being exists, then there must be a Necessary Being on which it depends for its existence. Furthermore, if a Necessary Being exists, then it is not possible that it not exist, for the only way a Necessary Being could exist is to exist necessarily. In like manner, there need not be any triangular shaped things in existence, but if there are, then they must have three sides. Hence, the atheist's objection to the concept of a Necessary Being applies only to a logically necessary being, not to an actually Necessary Being, which must exist to account for the actual contingent being(s) that exist.

Objection Eleven: The Cosmological Argument Depends on the Invalid Ontological Argument

Following Kant, many critics of theism believe that there is an ontological sleight-of-hand by importing the existence of a Necessary Being into every cosmological argument, which is an illegitimate move from experience to logical necessity.

Response to Objection Eleven

However, this criticism is not applicable to the metaphysical form of the cosmological argument. First of all, the ontological argument need not assume that existence is a perfection or predicate that adds to the concept of the subject. Existence does not have to be a predicate; one can simply say that everything

that exists must be predicated according to one or more modes of existence (for example, contingently, necessarily, or impossibly).
For another thing, since the cosmological argument begins with existence, rather than thought, it does not have to smuggle in existence. The first premise is "Something exists," not the idea of a Necessary Being—with which Anselm (see ***BW***, 2f.) began his ontological argument.
Furthermore, the cosmological argument proceeds with principles that are grounded in reality, not in mere thought; that is, they are ontologically grounded principles and not simply rationally inescapable ideas. The cosmological argument is based on the metaphysical truth that "Nothing cannot cause something," rather than the rational assertion that "Everything must have a sufficient reason."
Finally, the cosmological argument concludes with an Actual Ground of all finite beings, as opposed only to a logically Necessary Being; that is, it ends with Pure Actuality as the cause of existence for all limited existence, as opposed to a Being that logically cannot not be. In other words, the cosmological argument is not based on the invalid ontological argument.

Objection Twelve: Necessity Does Not Apply to Existence But Only to Concepts

According to this objection, a Necessary Being is a misapplication of the term "necessary," for necessity applies only to concepts or ideas, never to actual reality.

Response to Objection Twelve

This argument fails for two basic reasons.
First, something does not have to be necessarily true in order to be true. There are different degrees of certainty about true propositions. Most theists (except those who defend the ontological argument) agree that the existence of God is not known with logical inescapability. Some, however, believe that it can be

demonstrated with actual undeniability.
Further, the objection is self-defeating, for either the statement "Necessity does not apply to existence" is itself a statement about existence, or else it is not. If it is a statement about existence, then it is self-defeating, for it claims to be both necessary and about reality, while it is saying no necessary statements can be made about reality. On the other hand, if it is merely a meta-statement, or statement about statements (and not really a statement about reality), then it cannot mandate what kind of statements may or may not be made about reality. In brief, the only way to deny existentially necessary statements as possible is to make (or imply) one in the very denial, which is self-falsifying.
Second, this criticism begs the question: How do these critics know that necessity does not apply to being? Because there is no Necessary Being? There is no valid way in advance of looking at the argument for God's existence to know if a Necessary Being exists. The concept is not contradictory; it simply means not-contingent, which is a coherent idea. But if there is no prior way to know that a Necessary Being cannot exist, then it is possible that necessity may apply to being, namely, if a Necessary Being does in fact exist.

Objection Thirteen: Theistic Arguments Lead to Metaphysical Contradictions

Immanuel Kant offered several alleged contradictions, or antinomies, that he thought resulted from applying cosmological argumentation to reality. At least three of these antinomies apply to the cosmological argument.

Response to Objection Thirteen

The Antinomy About Time

If we assume that time applies to reality, then a contradiction seems to result that the world is ***both*** temporal and eternal.
Thesis: The world must have begun in time, or else an infinity of moments

elapsed before it began, and this is impossible (since an infinity of moments can never be completed).
Antithesis: The world could not have begun in time, for this implies that there was a time before time began, and this is contradictory.
In response, we note that Kant's thesis is correct; an infinite number of moments is not possible before today. However, Kant's antithesis is mistaken, since it does not follow that there was time before time, if the world had a beginning. The only thing prior to time is the Eternal (i.e., God). In other words, it could have been a creation ***of*** time, not a creation ***in*** time.

The Antinomy About Causality

This antinomy argues that it must be true that the world both has a First Cause and does not have a First Cause.
Thesis: Not every cause has a cause, or else a series of causes would not begin to cause, as they in fact do.
Antithesis: A series of causes cannot have a beginning, since everything demands a cause. Hence, the series must go on infinitely.
Again, the "antithesis" of this alleged dilemma is incorrect in stating that ***every*** cause needs a cause. According to the principle of causality, every cause does not need a cause; only ***finite*** things need causes. Thus, the series does not need to go on infinitely—there can be an Uncaused Cause of all other things.

The Antinomy About Contingency

Kant insisted that everything must be both contingent and not contingent, if we assume that these concepts apply to reality.
Thesis: Not everything is contingent, or else there would be no condition for contingency. In other words, the dependent must be depending on something that is not dependent.
Antithesis: Everything must be contingent, for necessity applies only to concepts and not to things.
This objection fails, for as noted above there is no way to deny that necessity can apply to reality without making a necessary statement about reality. Only an ontological disproof could possibly establish Kant's point, and ontological disproofs fail, since they make necessary statements about existence.

Further, the cosmological argument concludes that something necessarily exists, which is a refutation of Kant's contention that necessity does not apply to existence.

Objection Fourteen: There Is No Need for a Here-and-Now Cause of the Universe

Some critics argue that even if God is the ***originating*** Cause of the universe, He is not the ***sustaining*** Cause of it. God brought the world into existence, but He is not needed to keep it in existence.

Response to Objection Fourteen

First, it was shown above that God could not have caused the universe and then subsequently ceased to exist Himself. Such is not possible because the theistic God is a Necessary Being, and a Necessary Being cannot cease to be—if it exists, it must by its very nature exist necessarily. A Necessary Being cannot exist in a contingent mode any more than a square can exist without four sides.
Second, a Necessary Being must be causing a contingent being at all times, for a contingent being must always be contingent as long as it exists, since it is impossible to become a Necessary Being (which, by its very nature, cannot come to be or cease to be). Other than going out of existence, this is the only other alternative for a contingent being, but if a contingent being is always contingent, then it always needs a Necessary Being on which it can depend for its existence. Since no contingent being holds itself in existence, it must have a Necessary Being to hold it from going into nonexistence—at all times.
Third, it is important to note that the hidden assumption of this objection is that simultaneous causality does not make sense. But there is no contradiction in saying that an effect is being effected at the very instant it is being caused. This is clearly the case with the relation between the premises (cause) and the conclusion (effect) of a syllogism. Cause and effect are simultaneous, for the instant one takes away the premise(s), at that very instant the conclusion does

not follow. Likewise, the causal relation between one's face and the image in the mirror is simultaneous.

Many who misunderstand the simultaneous nature of causality confuse an ***effect*** with an ***after-effect.*** For example, when the ball is thrown, it continues to move after the thrower is no longer throwing it, just as the clock continues to run after it is wound. However, in each of these and like examples the after-effect is being directly and simultaneously effected by some cause, after the original cause is no longer causing it. For instance, the force of inertia keeps the ball moving after the pitcher throws it, and the forces of tension and reaction keep the spring of a clock moving after the person winds it. But if any of these forces should go out of existence, at that very instant the after-effect would stop dead. For example, if inertia ceased the very instant after the ball left the pitcher's hand, the ball would instantly stop in midair; in the same way, the clock would stop ticking the instant the physical laws "effecting" it were not operative. Every so-called after-effect is only an effect of some other cause(s).

There are no existential after-effects: Whatever is existing, exists here-and-now, and whatever is being caused to exist right now must have something causing it to exist right now. A basic distinction will help illustrate the point. The artist is not the cause of the ***being*** of a painting; he is only the cause of the ***becoming*** (or coming to be) of the painting. The painting continues to be after the artist takes his hands off of it. In like manner, the mother does not cause the being of her son but only his becoming, for when the mother dies the son continues to live.

Now, it is necessary that finite beings have a cause not only of their becoming but also of their here-and-now being, for at every moment of their existence they are dependent for their existence on another. They never cease to be limited, finite, contingent beings, and as such they demand a cause for their existence. Every finite being is caused; therefore, it does not matter at what moment (m^1, m^2, m^3, etc.) of his existence—he is still receiving his existence from something beyond him. Changing the moment of his dependent existence does not make him a nondependent existent.

Part of the problem would be removed if we did not talk of exist-***ence*** (as though it were a whole package received at once) but of exist-***ing*** (which is a moment-by-moment process). The word "being" is even more misleading in this regard. No one receives his whole being at once, not even the next instant of it. Each creature has a present "be-ing," and at each moment of a dependent be-ing there must be some independent Being on which he is depending for that moment.

In this respect, the distinction between the Latin ***esse*** (to be) and ***ens*** (a being, a

thing) is helpful. God is pure ***Esse***, and our present ***esse*** (to-be-ness) is dependent on Him. Pure Existence must existentialize our continuing existence; otherwise, we would not continue to exist. God as Pure Actuality is actualizing everything that is actual; hence, it is the present actuality of all that is actual, of all that demands a causal ground.

Objection Fifteen: Act/Potency or Necessary/Contingent Models Are Arbitrary

This objection states that the act/potency or necessary/contingent models used to conclude the existence of a theistic God are arbitrary. Reality can be conceived in other ways that do not lead to God.

Response to Objection Fifteen

In response, theists point out that the necessity/contingency model is not arbitrary but is logically exhaustive. Either there is only a Necessary Being, or else there is a contingent being (s) as well as a Necessary Being. But there cannot be merely contingent beings, for contingent beings do not account for their own existence, since they are, but they can ***not*** be.
Likewise, either everything is one pure undifferentiated Actuality, or pure potentiality, or a combination of actuality and potentiality. ***No other possibility exists.*** Yet there cannot be two Pure Acts, since act as such is unlimited and unique; there cannot be two Ultimates or two Infinite Beings, so whatever else exists must be a combination of actuality and potentiality. Since no potentiality can actualize itself, then whatever beings there are that are composed of actuality and potentiality must be actualized by Pure Actuality. Thus, there is nothing arbitrary whatsoever about these models; they are logically exhaustive.

Objection Sixteen: The Cosmological Argument Commits Modal Fallacies

Modal logic is based on the distinction between what is possible and what is necessary. This form of reasoning has developed its own list of fallacies; for instance, some modal logicians argue that it does not follow from the fact that it is possible for all the parts of my car to break down at one time or another that it is necessary that all the parts will break down at one time. Thus, though all contingent beings possibly do not-exist, they do not necessarily not-exist at one time and thus would need no universal cause of their existence.

Response to Objection Sixteen

In response, two points are important:
First, modal logic has certain presuppositions that one need not accept. For example, it assumes that "no world at all" is not a possible world. Hence, it comes to the ungrounded conclusion via an ontological argument that a Necessary Being must exist.
Second, even granting modal logic, this objection would only cast doubt on some forms of the argument from contingency. This objection does not apply to the cosmological argument from contingency used above, since it is not concerned with showing that all things that could not-exist needed a Cause to produce their existence, but that ***all things that do exist*** (though possibly could not-exist) ***need a cause for their present existence***, both individually and ***en toto.***
Another possible charge of committing a modal fallacy is that it is illegitimate to infer from the fact that the world necessarily needs a being as First Cause that the world needs a Necessary Being as First Cause. Again, this charge would be correct in some forms of the argument, but not the one (following Aquinas) used above, for in it God is not considered a Necessary Being because the argument demonstrates His being necessarily—He is called a Necessary Being because ontologically He cannot not be. We learn of His Necessary Being not from the rigor of our premises, but because the Cause of all contingent being cannot be a contingent being—He must be necessary.
The mistake of many theists, especially since the time of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716), is to cast the cosmological argument in a context of ***logical necessity*** based on the principle of ***sufficient reason.*** This ultimately

leads to contradictions and an invalidating of the argument. In contrast to this procedure, other theists (like Aquinas) used the principle of existential causality to infer the existence of unlimited Cause or Actualizer of all existence. This conclusion is not rationally inescapable, but it is actually undeniable. In brief, if any contingent being exists, then a Necessary Being exists; if any being with the potentiality not to exist does exist, then a Being with no potentiality not to exist must exist.

Objection Seventeen: An Imperfect World Does Not Need a Perfect Cause

Following David Hume (***DCNR***), it is also objected that if there is a cause of the universe, it need not be perfect, since the world is imperfect. If a cause resembles its effects, then it would seem that the world must be caused by an imperfect, finite, male and female group of gods, for this is what we know as the causes of similar imperfect things in our experience.

Response to Objection Seventeen

First, the Ultimate Cause cannot be im-perfect (not-perfect), since the not-perfect can only be known if there is a Perfect by which it is known to be not perfect.
Second, the cause does not have to be equal to its effect. The cause cannot be less than the effect (since no effect can be greater than its cause), but it can be more than its effect.
Third, the Cause of finite beings cannot be imperfect, since it is Being itself or Pure Actuality; only Pure Actuality can actualize a potency (potentiality) for existence, and no potency for existence can actualize itself, for if it could, then nothing could produce something. Hence, the Cause of being must be perfect in its Being, since it has not potency, limitations, or privation that can constitute an imperfection.

Objection Eighteen: What Is Logically Necessary Does Not Necessarily Exist

Some anti-theists argue that it is logically necessary for a triangle to have three sides, but it is not necessary for any three-sided thing to exist. Therefore, even if it were logically necessary for God to exist it would not mean that He actually does exist.

Response to Objection Eighteen

At best, this is only an objection to the ontological argument, not to the cosmological and teleological arguments (see chapter 2). Further, theists need not, and most theists do not, conceive of God as a ***logically*** Necessary Being but as an ***actually*** Necessary Being. That is, it is logically possible that God does not exist, but if He does exist, then it is actually necessary that He exists, just as it is logically possible that no triangle exists, but if one does, then it is actually necessary that it have three sides. Likewise, it is logically possible that there is no Necessary Being, but if a Necessary Being does exist, then it is actually necessary for it to exist, for if it is a Necessary Being, then by its very nature it must exist necessarily.

Objection Nineteen: Real Causes Cannot Be Inferred From Observed Effects

Immanuel Kant (***CPR***) argued that we cannot validly infer a real cause from effects that we experience. There is an unsurpassable gulf between the thing-to-me (***phenomena***, or perceived) and the thing-in-itself (***noumena***, or real). We cannot know the latter; we know things as they appear to us but not as they really are.

Response to Objection Nineteen

First, this objection either begs the question or is self-defeating. It begs the question if it supposes that our senses do not provide us information about the real world, wrongly assuming that we sense only sensation rather than sense reality through sensations. Or to put it another way, this argument mistakenly believes that we know only our ideas rather than knowing reality through our ideas.

Second, if this objection claims that we cannot know reality, the agnostic is making a statement about reality, claiming that he knows enough about reality that he is sure that he cannot know anything about reality. But this is a self-defeating claim. Put in terms of the principle of causality, how can Kant know that reality is causing our experiences unless there is a valid causal connection between the real (***noumenal***) world of the cause and the apparent (***phenomenal***) world of our experience? Further, one could not even know his own ideas and words were the result of his mind unless there were a real connection between cause (his mind) and effect (his ideas). Nor would he write books, as agnostics do, assuming that readers would look at the phenomenal effects (words) and be able to know something about the noumenal (real) cause (his mind).

Objection Twenty: It Is Impossible for an All-Powerful God to Exist

Theists claim God is all-powerful, but many non-theists insist this is impossible. The logic of their argument can be outlined as follows:

(1) If God were all-powerful, then He could do anything.
(2) If God could do anything, then He could make a rock so big that He couldn't move it.
(3) But if God could not move this rock, then He could not do everything.
(4) An all-powerful God that can do anything cannot make a rock too heavy for Him to lift. Hence, the theistic God (who is all-powerful) cannot exist.

Response to Objection Twenty

Put in this form, the theist rejects the first premise, since it is an improper definition of omnipotence. God cannot literally do everything; He can only do anything that is ***possible*** to do. There are many things God cannot do: He cannot cease being God; He cannot contradict His own nature; He cannot do what is logically impossible; He cannot do what is actually impossible (like force someone to freely love Him). Likewise, God cannot make a rock so heavy that He cannot lift it for the simple reason that ***anything He can make is finite***, and anything that is finite He can move by His infinite power. If He can make it, He can move it.

Objection Twenty-One: If God Is Infinite, Then He Is Contradictory Things

If God is infinite, then He is everything, including opposites, but this is impossible, for then an infinite God would be both good and evil, both perfect and imperfect, both being and nonbeing. These are opposites, and God cannot be opposites. Further, the theist cannot admit that God is evil or nonexistent. Therefore, no theistic God exists.

Response to Objection Twenty-One

The theist responds by rejecting the premise that God is everything; He is only what He is—an absolutely perfect Being. God is not what He is not—an imperfect being; God is Pure and Necessary existence; thus, He cannot be non-existent.

When we say that God is unlimited or infinite, we do not mean that He is everything. God is not a creature, for instance—He made all but is not all. We do not mean, for example, that God is both limited and infinite; the unlimited cannot be limited, and the uncreated Creator cannot be a created creature. Nor do we mean that God is imperfect—as an unlimited Being, God cannot be limited in

His perfection, and evil is not a perfection; it is an imperfection. The standard of all good cannot be evil; the Perfect cannot be imperfect.

Objection Twenty-Two: God Is Nothing But a Projection of Our Imagination

Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872) argued that man made God in his image (***EC***), that God is only a projection of what we think of ourselves, nothing more. All our ideas of God come from our ideas of human beings; hence, God is only a projection of these ideas and does not exist beyond them. The essence of Feuerbach's argument can be stated this way:

(1) God exists in human consciousness.
(2) But humans cannot go beyond their own consciousness.
(3) Therefore, God does not exist beyond our consciousness.

Response to Objection Twenty-Two

For one thing, this objection fails because God is not a mere projection of human imagination. As the theistic arguments show (see chapter 2), the existence of God is supported by cogent rational explanations.

Furthermore, the problem with this argument is the second premise—that we cannot go beyond our consciousness does not mean nothing exists beyond our consciousness. I cannot go beyond my mind, but I know there are other minds beyond mine with whom I can communicate. Further, if we cannot go beyond our consciousness, then even Feuerbach could not make the statement: "There is no God beyond our consciousness." How does he know there is no God out there, unless his knowledge can go beyond his consciousness? To put the criticism another way, to make "nothing but" statements (such as, "God is nothing but a projection of our imagination") is to imply "more-than" knowledge. How could one possibly know God is nothing but a projection of his imagination unless he knew more than his imagination?

Finally, that we do not go beyond our own consciousness does not mean that our consciousness is not of things that are beyond us. Of course, we cannot ***get out of*** ourselves, but we can ***reach out of*** ourselves. And this is precisely what knowledge does. Consciousness is not simply consciousness of itself; we are also conscious of others. When we read a book we are not simply conscious of our own ideas; we are conscious of another mind who wrote the words from which we got those ideas.

Objection Twenty-Three: God Is Only an Illusion

Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) insisted that God is an illusion—someone we wish to be true but having no basis beyond our wishes. God is a childhood neurosis we never outgrew, the result of a desire for a Cosmic Comforter, a kind of Heavenly Linus Blanket. But the fact that we wish for a pot of gold at the end of a rainbow does not mean there is one there. Likewise, the desire for a heavenly Father to comfort us in the woes of life is illusory (***FI***).

Response to Objection Twenty-Three

There are many ways to respond to Freud's objection to God. For one thing, it is very difficult to put this into any kind of argument that has premises that cannot be easily challenged. Perhaps the following is what is meant:

(1) An illusion is something based only in wish but not in reality.
(2) Belief in God has the characteristics of an illusion.
(3) Therefore, belief in God is a wish not based in reality.

Of course, in this form the theist challenges the minor premise on many grounds. First of all, not all who believe in God do so simply because they wish for a Cosmic Comforter. Some find God because they thirst for reality, and many find God because they are interested in truth, not simply because they are concerned

about feeling good.

Further, there are numerous discomforting dimensions to the Christian belief in God. God is not only a Father who provides; He is also a Judge who punishes. Christians believe in hell, and yet no one really wishes this to be true.

In addition, Freud may have it backwards. Maybe our images of earthly fathers are patterned after God rather than the reverse. Perhaps this is because God has created us in His image rather than the opposite.

Also, the mere human desire for God is not the only basis for believing that God exists. Freud's argument would, at best, only apply to those who had no other basis than their own wish that God exists.

What is more, God may exist even if many (even all) people had the wrong reason (their own wish) for believing that He did. That one wishes he will win the lottery does not mean that he will not win it—some do. That many wish for a better way of life does not mean it is unobtainable—many attain it.

Furthermore, Freud confuses ***wish*** and ***need.*** What if, as even many atheists admit, there is a ***real need*** for God in the human heart? One may want prime rib and wine, but he only needs bread and water. Children want candy, but what they need is real food. If the desire for God is a need, not merely a want, then Freud's analysis of religious experience is inadequate.

Finally, it may be that Freud's belief that there is no God is itself an illusion. After all, if one does not wish to follow and obey God, is it not much easier to believe that no God exists? Indeed, for anyone living in sin and rebellion against God, it is very comforting to believe that neither He nor hell is real (cf. Ps. 14:1; Rom. 1:18f.). It is at least as likely, if not more so, that the atheist has killed the Father as that the theist has created Him.

Objection Twenty-Four: Theistic Arguments Are Not Persuasive

Some object that theistic arguments are persuasive only to those who already believe, and they do not need them. Thus, they are useless.

Response to Objection Twenty-Four

This objection fails for several reasons. Whether anyone is convinced by it will depend on several factors. For one thing, even if the argument is sound, persuasiveness will depend in part on whether the argument is understood. Further, once the mind understands the argument, it is a matter of the will whether one assents to it. No one is ever forced to believe in God simply because his mind understands ***that*** there is a God; there may be other personal factors beyond the analysis here that lead a man to remain uncommitted to belief ***in*** God. Theistic arguments do not automatically convert unbelievers, but persons of good will who understand the arguments ought to accept them as true. If they do not, it does not prove that the arguments are wrong; it simply shows that they are unwilling to accept them.

Objection Twenty-Five: If God Knows Everything, Then Man Is Not Free

According to theism, God's knowledge is infinite, but if God knows everything, including the future, then we are not free, for whatever an omniscient (all-knowing) God knows must come to pass (is determined).

Response to Objection Twenty-Five

First of all, knowing what men ***will*** do with their freedom is not the same as preordaining what they ***must*** do. God's knowledge is not incompatible with free will; there is no contraction in God's knowing in advance what we will do with our freedom. God is responsible for the ***fact*** of freedom, but men are responsible for the ***acts*** of freedom.

In addition, God in His foreknowledge might even persuade men to make a certain decision, but there is no reason to suppose that He coerces any decision so as to destroy freedom. He works persuasively but not coercively.

Further, one and the same act can be determined from the standpoint of God's knowledge and yet free from the standpoint of our choice. God can know for sure (is determined) what we will freely do (is free).

What is more, as an eternal Being God does not really ***fore***-know anything. He is eternal and, as such, He simply ***knows*** in one eternal Now everything there is to know. God sees all of time—past, present, and future—from His lofty perch of eternity; whereas human beings looking through the tunnel vision of time can see only the present.

If God does not ***fore***-know (but simply ***knows*** all of time in His eternal present), then our free choices are not determined in advance; He is simply seeing them in His present.

Finally, as the First Cause of all things, God does not have to wait to see them, for the effect preexists in its cause. Hence, God knows the future by knowing it in Himself as its Cause.

CONCLUSION

Many objections have been proposed against proofs for the existence of God. Most of them are straw-man arguments or are based on a misunderstanding of the proof for God's existence, and none of them succeed in diminishing the classical proofs for God. These venerable arguments remain firm, having stood the test of time.

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APPENDIX TWO

DO HISTORICAL FACTS SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES?

Do the facts of history speak for themselves, or must they be interpreted? If the latter, is there more than one way to interpret them? What role does one's worldview play in the interpretation of facts? Is there any way to adjudicate between one worldview and another?

If facts do not speak for themselves, then how can we argue from biological facts, like irreducible complexity, to a Creator? Or from the fact of the origin of the universe to a Creator? (see chapter 2). Is it not inconsistent to argue from the fact of the second law of thermodynamics or from specified complexity to a theistic God, and yet reject the view that the facts of history also reveal a theistic God? More specifically, if one can argue from the singularity of the origin of the universe to a Creator, then why can't one argue from the singularity of the resurrection of Christ to a God?

Several possible answers present themselves. Most of these are incompatible with the view that the historical facts speak for themselves; this view begs the question.

THE FIRST POSSIBLE ANSWER

Some claim that facts do not need an overall interpretive framework (like theism) for one to see that they lead to an intelligent Creator. Even an unbeliever can see that irreducible complexity, such as is in the human eye, demands a Creator.

Problems With the First Response

There are several difficulties with this answer.

First, few unbelievers would admit this. Darwin acknowledged that the eye was difficult to explain, but he concluded it was not necessary to posit a Creator to explain it (see ***OOS***). If unbelievers were to hold that it is necessary to posit an intelligent Cause of the eye, then they would not be unbelievers in God. Unbeliever Richard Dawkins posits a "blind watchmaker," that is, natural law to account for the eye and all other specified complexity in nature (***BW***).

Second, suppose all reasonable persons either do or should accept the conclusion that the irreducible complexity in a human eye or the incredible specified complexity in a single-celled animal calls for an intelligent cause. Even so, this cause does not have to be beyond the universe (as in theism); it could be within the universe (as in panentheism or pantheism). Hence, even in this case, these facts do not lead to a theistic view.

Third, it is highly doubtful by the nature of the case that any fact or facts within the universe logically demand an intelligent Cause beyond the universe. This seems to be true for two reasons. For one thing, a worldview (such as theism) is an interpretation of the whole universe. But no one fact within the universe, which gets its meaning from being part of the whole, can be used without begging the question to interpret the whole of which it is a part.

Also, there are other possible ways to interpret these facts within the universe without appealing to a theistic God (e.g., as naturally caused or as anomalies). As long as some other interpretation is logically possible, then a theistic explanation is not logically necessary. For instance, as to the claim that Christ's rising from the dead demands a theistic God as an explanation, the unbeliever responds by questioning

(1) whether He really died;

(2) whether He really rose;
(3) whether resurrection demands a supernatural Cause as opposed to
(a) a yet unknown natural cause or
(b) a cause within the universe.

Unless all these alternatives can be shown to be impossible, then the so-called "facts" of the Resurrection do not speak for themselves.

ANOTHER POSSIBLE ANSWER

Others argue that facts must speak for themselves, otherwise it would not be possible to argue from facts in this world to God, which proponents of the cosmological, teleological, and moral arguments believe is possible.
For example, proponents of the kalam cosmological argument claim that a great deal of scientific evidence points to a beginning of the universe, and since nothing can arise without a cause, there must be a Cause of the entire universe. But any Cause that existed before and beyond the whole natural world is by definition a supernatural Cause. Hence, beginning with scientific facts (like the second law of thermodynamics) can lead to a theistic conclusion.

A Response to the Second Posed Solution

It would seem on the surface that this position has demonstrated that one can begin with facts and argue back to theism. However, on closer examination there is an equivocation on the term ***facts.*** The facts that ***do not*** logically lead to theism are facts that are within the universe. They are a part of the whole, but not the whole. The facts that ***do*** lead to a theistic conclusion are facts that are the facts of the whole universe, not just part of it.
For example, in the valid form of the cosmological argument the facts are the condition of the ***whole universe*** coming into existence, not just part of it. Likewise, isolating an eye or a one-celled animal and pointing to its design does not thereby prove a Designer beyond the universe. However, if one could

demonstrate that the entire universe manifests design (as the anthropic principle is employed to do), then this would point to a theistic Designer beyond the universe.

In brief, there are two reasons why facts within the universe, no matter how much they may point to a Cause, cannot be used as such to demonstrate that a theistic God exists.

First, the Cause may be within the universe, not beyond it.

Second, a Cause is needed to explain only part of but not the whole universe, whereas in a theistic universe a Cause is needed to explain the whole universe. Indeed, the cause needed to explain just part of the universe may be the whole universe, but no theist would agree that the whole natural universe is God.

A THIRD POSSIBLE ANSWER

Of course, one may simply ***presuppose***, without any reason or argument, that the theistic view is correct and that no fact within the universe speaks for itself. In this case, no facts in the world speak for themselves, for all bare facts carry no meaning, and all interpreted facts must be interpreted from the presupposed worldview framework (such as theism).

The problem with this view is not with the claim that facts do not speak for themselves but with the claim that there is no way to adjudicate conflicts between worldviews. In this case, no fact or argument, historical or otherwise, can be used to defend one worldview over another; everyone is speaking about the same facts with entirely different meaning grids. There is no real communication between different worldviews, no common ground on which to stand, and no way to establish one worldview over another. But in this event, either all worldviews are true—even opposing ones, which is impossible—or no worldview is true, which is unreasonable, since at least one viewpoint must correspond to reality (be true). Every view cannot be false (see chapter 8).

ANOTHER ALTERNATIVE: THE FACTS SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES APART FROM A WORLDVIEW

Finally, one may argue, as some historical apologists do, that the facts speak for themselves apart from presupposing (or proving) one worldview over another. One argument proposed in favor of this view goes as follows: It is self-defeating to affirm that there are any facts without meaning, since the very affirmation about the allegedly meaningless fact is a meaningful statement about the facts. Therefore, all facts are meaningful; there are no so-called bare facts.

However, this argument does not really prove that facts speak for themselves; rather, it merely shows that facts can and do bear meaning. But what the argument must prove (and fails to do so) is that facts are capable of only one meaning and that they manifest it evidently. Nevertheless, it is evident that meaningful statements about facts can be made without attributing some meaning to the facts themselves, and this does not prove that the meaning is inherent in the facts. It is possible that the meaning was assigned to the facts by the one making the meaningful statement about them. Indeed, only "mean-ers" (i.e., minds) can give meaning.

Further, it is not at all clear in what sense an objective fact can mean anything in and of itself. It is a subject (e.g., a mind) that utters meaning about objects (or about other subjects), but objects as such are not subjects that are emitting meaning. This is true unless we assume that all objective facts are really little transmitters of meaning or thought from some Mind that communicated this meaning through them. But to assume this would be to invoke one particular worldview over another in order to prove that "facts speak for themselves." And even then it could be argued that the facts are not speaking for themselves but for the Mind (God) who is speaking through them.

It seems best to conclude, then, that objective and isolated facts as such do not speak for themselves. Finite minds may give differing interpretations of them or an infinite Mind may give an absolute interpretation of them, but the facts as such do not emanate any meaning of and from themselves. Of course, if there is an absolute Mind from whose vantage point the facts are given absolute or ultimate meaning, then there is an objective interpretation of the facts that all finite minds should concur is the ultimate meaning. If this is the correct worldview, then there is an objective meaning to all facts in the world. All facts are theistic facts, and no non-theistic way of interpreting them is objective or true. Hence, objectivity in history is possible since in a theistic world, history would be His-story. Objectivity, then, is possible only from within an established theistic worldview.

Furthermore, as we have seen (see chapter 2), there are some general facts about

the universe as a whole from which one can reasonably infer a theistic worldview. For instance: (1) Its coming into being; (2) its contingency; and (3) its anthropic nature from conception. Once this theistic context is established, the particular and isolated facts, which have no meaning in themselves, get their meaning from this overall theistic framework.

CONCLUSION

The sum of the matter as it relates to history is that history is objectively knowable, even if one must posit a worldview framework to interpret the facts. Either the facts of history "speak for themselves" and, hence, are objectively knowable, or else they do not. If not, there is a rational way to establish the correct worldview framework by which they should be interpreted. However, theism is grounded in sound reasons (see chapter 2), and it provides the proper way to understand and interrelate the facts of history and thus avoid pure historical subjectivism.

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[1] Not all of these are necessary for ***traditional*** orthodoxy, but they are necessary for a ***consistent*** orthodoxy. Inerrancy, for example, is not a test for evangelical ***authenticity*** but for evangelical ***consistency.***

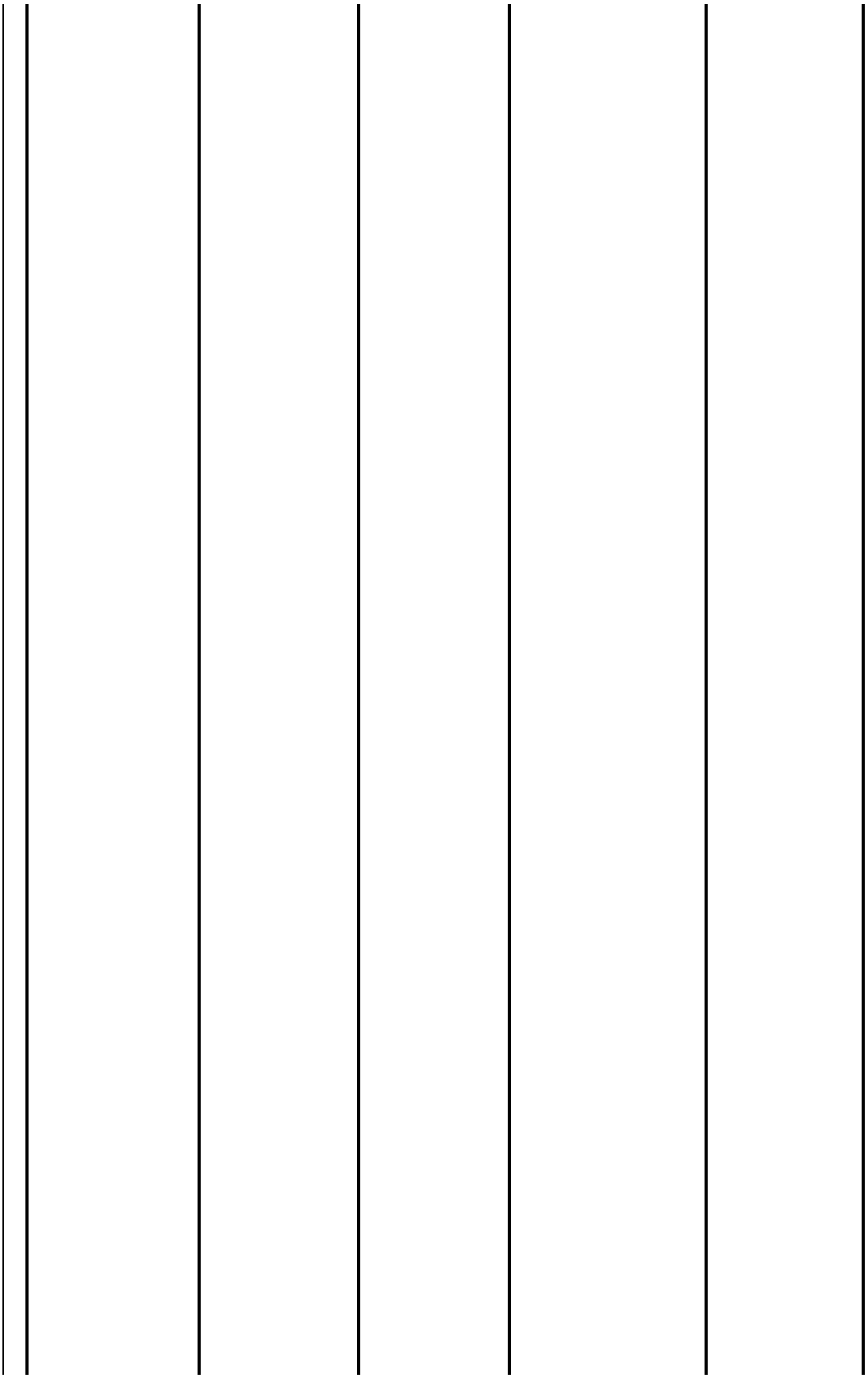
[2] The belief in a theistic God and miracles are also fundamental beliefs, as is creation ***ex nihilo*** ("out of nothing").

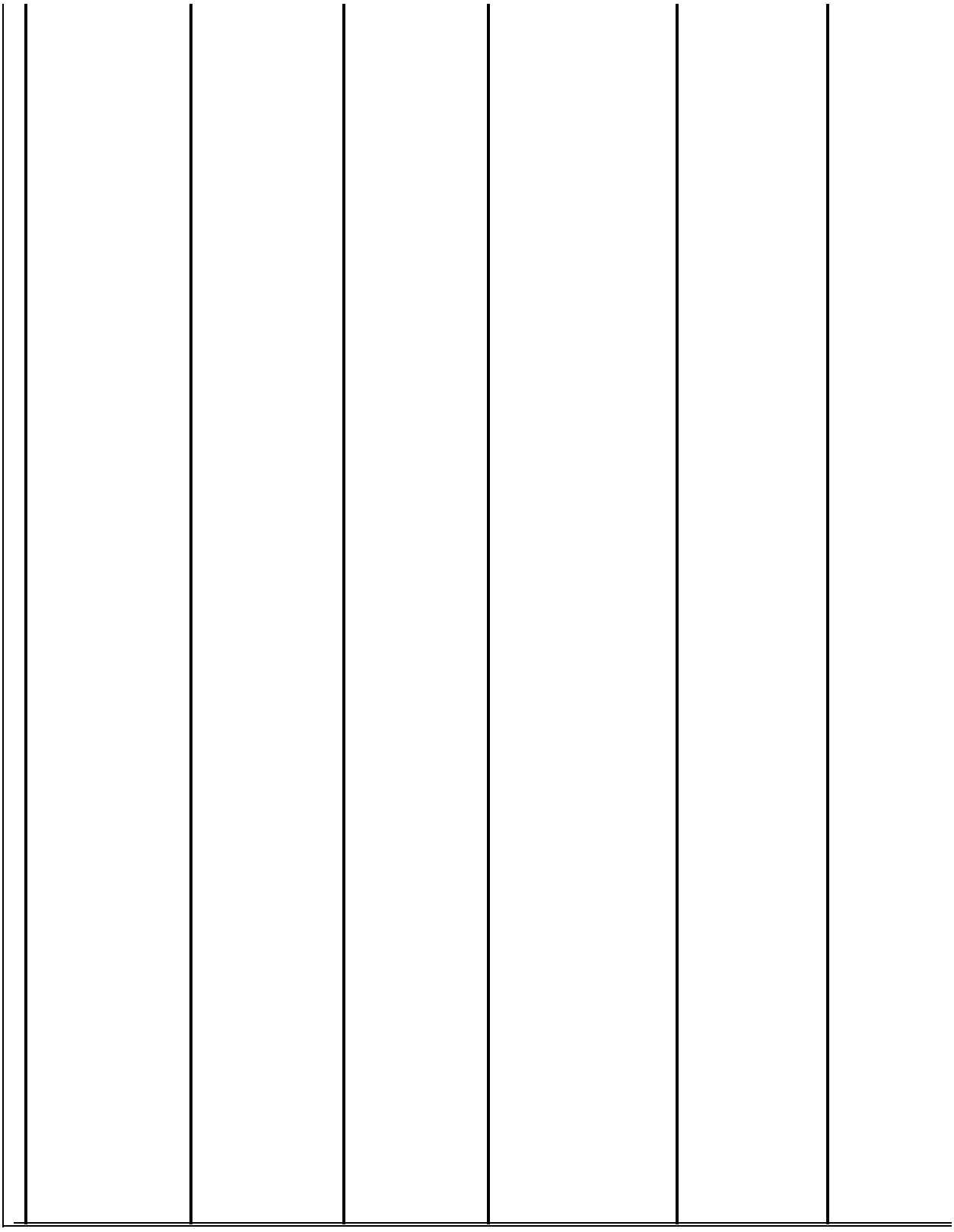
[3] Traditional Roman Catholics deny the "alone" in these statements.

[4] Recently a number of individuals and groups calling themselves "evangelicals" have denied eternal conscious punishment of the wicked in favor of annihilationism. Historically, however, eternal conscious punishment has been affirmed by orthodox theology, from the earliest time down through the Reformation into the modern era (see W. G. T. Shedd, ***Eternal Punishment***).

[5] Subdivisions (3) through (8), as well as all corollary topics, will be published in subsequent volumes.

[1] For a furt discussio each worldvie see Norm Geisler, ***Ba Encyclop of Christ Apologet (BECA)***





DR. NORMAN

GEISLER

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VOLUME TWO

GOD

CREATION

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Five persons deserve special recognition for the final state of this volume.

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VOLUME TWO

PART ONE: GOD

PART TWO: CREATION

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SYNOPSIS FOR VOLUME TWO

PART ONE: GOD (THEOLOGY PROPER)

In Volume 1 we discussed Introduction to Theology (Prolegomena) and the Bible (Bibliography). These serve as the method and basis for doing systematic theology.
In this volume (2), we will focus on Theology Proper, that is, on the attributes and activities of God. In the first half, attention is centered on God Himself—His attributes and His characteristics. This covers both God's nonmoral (metaphysical) attributes (chapters 1–12) as well as His moral ones (chapters 13–17). After treating who God is, in the second half we will discuss what God does (in relation to His creation).

PART TWO: CREATION

Again, in the second half, attention is turned from what God ***is*** (His attributes) to what God ***does*** (His activity). There are several areas of God's activity:
First, the creation of all things material (chapters 18–19);
Second, the origin of spiritual creation (chapter 20);
Third, the sustenance of all creation (chapter 21);
Fourth, God's relation to His creation, such as transcendence over and immanence in (chapter 22), His sovereign control over all creation (chapter 23), and His providence for the universe (chapter 24).
This will complete the survey of God's activity in His creation, other than His acts of redemption, which will be treated in Volume 3: Sin and Salvation.

PART ONE

GOD
(THEOLOGY PROPER)

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS AN ATTRIBUTE OF GOD?

By "attribute" is meant some characteristic that can be attributed to God's nature—an essential trait of God. Other terms for attribute are "property," "perfection," or "name." ("Names of God" is an older term; see Thomas Aquinas, ***ST***, la.13.1.) "Attribute" will be used both because it is something attributable to God and because it is a customary term.

Few (if any) studies are more important than that of the attributes of God. There are many reasons for this, including the following.

All Basic Theological Truth Depends Upon God's Attributes

Virtually every major doctrine of the faith is based on the doctrine of God. For instance, the claims that the Bible is the Word of God and that Jesus Christ is the Son of God are entirely dependent on what is meant by ***God***, of whom the Bible is the Word and Christ the Son. Likewise, a miracle is defined as a special act of God (see Geisler, "M, D" in ***BECA***), but there cannot be acts of God unless there is a God who can act, and only a theistic God can perform these special acts known as miracles (see Geisler, ***Systematic Theology***, Volume 1, chapter 3).

Even doctrines like eschatology depend on a God who can infallibly predict the future and who has the omnipotent power to bring about what He desires to occur. The same is true of the doctrine of the Atonement: The meanings of reconciliation, propitiation, divine satisfaction (see Volume 3), and many other aspects of redemption depend on the kind of God whose acts they are.
If, for example, God is not absolutely just, then both the need for Christ's atonement and the justification of hell (see Volume 4) are undermined. The fact is that every essential Christian teaching is dependent for its validity on the orthodox doctrine of God. Hence, a study of His attributes is key to the rest of evangelical theology.

We Cannot Recognize False "Gods" Without Knowing the True God

The Bible constantly exhorts believers to beware of false prophets (Matt. 7:15), to test the spirits (1 John 4:1), and to watch out for the doctrines of demons (1 Tim. 4:1). But there is no way to recognize error unless we know the truth; counterfeits cannot be detected unless we know the genuine article. Likewise, there is no way to determine what is false about God unless we know what is true about Him. Jesus said, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32). A study of the attributes of the true God is essential to the fulfillment of the apologetic task of defending the faith (Phil. 1:7; 1 Peter 3:15; Jude 3).

Error Has Practical Consequences

In his excellent book ***Ideas Have Consequences***, Richard Weaver lays out the answer to the question of why one's beliefs are important. (His reasoning applies with even greater force to ideas about God.) A brief look at history tells the often-tragic tale of the results of beliefs. Hitler's fascist ideas cost more than twelve million lives during the holocaust. Stalin's Marxist ideas eventually liquidated at least eighteen million. Chairman Mao's Communist ideas eliminated some thirty million. And when one's beliefs involve God, an even

more important consequence lies in the balance—the timeless souls of billions. Theological ideas have longer-lasting consequences than mere political ideas—eternal consequences (Mark 8:36).

Our Spiritual Growth Is Dependent Upon Our Concept of God

A. W. Tozer (1897–1963) said, "What you think of God is the most important thing about you" (***KH***, 1). In our spiritual lives, we cannot transcend the God we worship; we can rise no higher than what we believe to be the highest. Our concept of God will have a marked effect on our practical lives.
It is a psychological fact that we tend to become like what (or whom) we admire the most. Hero worship produces followers who tend to emulate their idols, whether they are athletes, saints, or gods. Because worshipers become like the gods they worship, our godliness tends to become like our God. Our concept of God will, therefore, define the limits of our godliness.

A Commitment to What Is Less Than Ultimate Will Not Be Ultimately Satisfying

No one knew this better than the wisest man who ever lived. Solomon tried everything "under the sun" for satisfaction. Whether it was wine, women, wealth, worldliness, wisdom, works, or wickedness, he concluded that all is "vanity" and "vexation of spirit" apart from God (Eccl. 1–2 KJV). True satisfaction is not found under the sun, but beyond the sun—in the Son (Eccl. 12:1). God alone can fill the God-sized vacuum in every human heart. No one will find ultimate satisfaction in anything less than the Ultimate (Tillich, ***UC***). The quest for eternal pleasure will never be found in anything but the Eternal. And the desire for infinite happiness cannot be found in anything short of the Infinite God. Hence, any false view of God as less than the Ultimate, Infinite, and Eternal will not bring beatitude (blessedness) to the soul. As Augustine put it, the soul is restless until it finds its rest in God—the true and living God (***C***).

ARE GOD'S ATTRIBUTES ONE OR MANY?

How many attributes does God have? Most theologians, especially in the evangelical tradition, believe that God has many attributes. However, this creates a quandary for classical theism, which holds that God is a simple (indivisible) Being (see chapter 2).

The Problem Stated

Briefly, the issue is this: If God is simple (absolutely one) in His essence, how can He have many attributes? If He is more than one thing, how can He be only one Being? If His essence has more than one characteristic, how can it avoid having some kind of multiplicity in it?

A Response to the Problem

The answer to this lies in the fact that while many ***things*** are being said about God, they are being affirmed of only one ***Being***. God is not many beings; He is only one Being, but God has many different characteristics that are true about His one Being. This is the case because no one thing said about Him is exhaustive; so many things must be said about Him in order for us to have a more complete knowledge of Him. Thus, God is one Being (essence), but He has many attributes (properties).

ARE ALL THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD SYNONYMOUS?

Another question that arises about the attributes of God is whether they are all synonymous; that is, do they all really mean the same thing?

The Problem Stated

Since there is only one God, all characteristics attributed to Him refer to one and the same Being. But it would appear that everything said about the same thing is saying the same thing, and what is saying the same thing is synonymous. Therefore, it seems necessary to conclude that all attributes of God are synonymous.

A Response to the Problem

The above conclusion does not follow, for many different things can be said about the same thing. For example, a stone is solid, ***and*** round, ***and*** heavy, and yet there is only one stone about which these things are being said. These different characteristics are not the same. For instance, solidity is not roundness, and heaviness is not solidity. Consequently, many different characteristics can be attributed to one and the same Being, God. Just as the one center of a circle has many different radii flowing into it, even so the one nature of God has many attributes predictable of it (see Thomas Aquinas, ***ST***, la.13.4).

HOW MANY ATTRIBUTES DOES GOD HAVE?

Different theologians list different numbers. This is (1) partly due to the fact that some theologians are not attempting to give a comprehensive list; (2) partly because some theologians combine certain attributes into one; (3) partly owing to the disagreement as to whether some attributes ***are*** really attributes or whether they are ***activities*** of God (e.g., mercy); and (4) partly because some theologians do not distinguish between an ***attribute*** (which is of God's essence, such as holiness) and a ***characteristic*** (which is not an attribute but is simply something that belongs to God in general, such as ineffability [see chapter 10]).
The following list attempts to be comprehensive and non-overlapping. In it there

are twenty nonmoral attributes of God, five nonmoral characteristics of God, six moral attributes of God, and three moral characteristics of God.

Nonmoral Attributes of God

The nonmoral attributes (also called metaphysical attributes) of God are at least the following: pure actuality and simplicity (see chapter 2), aseity ("not caused by another") and necessity (see chapter 3), immutability and eternality (see chapter 4), impassibility and infinity (see chapter 5), immateriality and immensity (see chapter 6), omnipotence and omnipresence (see chapter 7), omniscience (see chapter 8), wisdom and light (see chapter 9), majesty, beauty, and ineffability (see chapter 10), life and immortality (see chapter 11), and unity and triunity (see chapter 12).

Other Nonmoral Characteristics of God

There are also some nonmoral traits that characterize God; these involve how God, in His essential attributes, relates to His creatures. They include sovereignty, transcendence, immanence, omnipresence, and ineffability (treated earlier). Without a creation, God would have nothing to be sovereign over, transcendent above, immanent in, or omnipresent to. (As stated below, ineffability is an overall characteristic.) God's essential attributes, however, are proper to His nature as such, even if there were no creatures with whom/which to relate.

Moral Attributes of God

There are at least six basic moral attributes of God: holiness, justice, jealousy, perfection, truthfulness, and goodness (love).[1] These are essential to God's

nature.

Other Moral Characteristics of God

In addition to God's moral attributes, He has other moral characteristics in relation to His creatures. Two of these are mercy and wrath, which are activities that ***follow from or are rooted in*** His nature (as loving and just, respectively) but are not ***intrinsic*** to His nature as such. Ineffability (see chapter 10) is an ***overall*** characteristic of God's essence, particularly His metaphysical ("above" or "beyond" the physical) attributes, in relation to creatures.

HOW ARE GOD'S ATTRIBUTES PREDICATED?

There are only three possible ways to predicate (ascribe) attributes of God: univocally, equivocally, and analogically. Univocal predication means to attribute the characteristic to God in ***entirely the same way*** it is attributed to creatures. Equivocal predication means to use them of God in an ***entirely different way***, and analogical predication means to apply them to God in a ***similar way***.[2]

Equivocal Predications About God Leave One in Skepticism

If all statements about God were affirmed equivocally—in an entirely different way than applied to creatures—we would be left in skepticism about Him. This kind of unknowable God is found in some forms of mysticism, which stress only negative (what ***cannot*** be known) knowledge of God (see Plotinus, ***E***), and in some forms of neo-orthodoxy, which emphasize that God is "wholly other," completely different, without similarity (see Kierkegaard, ***CUP***).
Again, "equivocal" means in an entirely different way. However, what is entirely different from being is nonbeing. What is entirely different from good is not

good, and what is entirely different from true is false. Hence, to equivocally attribute being to God (i.e., in an entirely different way than to a creature) would mean He is not being. Likewise, to equivocally affirm good of God would mean He is not good, and to equivocally assert truth of God would mean He is not truth. In short, equivocal attributions of God leave us totally ignorant of what God is really like. All we could know is that He is not like whatever a given term means when applied to creatures (see Scotus, ***PW***).

If equivocal attributions of God leave us in ignorance of what God is like, then we are left in agnosticism. And agnosticism is self-defeating, since (1) it claims to know that we cannot know, and (2) it claims to know enough about God to say that we cannot know anything about God. Thus, equivocal attributions as a way of knowing God are unacceptable.

Univocal Attributions About God Are Impossible

"Univocal" means "entirely the same." But we can't attribute things to God univocally; there is an infinite difference between an infinite Being and a finite being (see chapter 5). So attributes about an infinite Being must be affirmed infinitely of Him, and attributes about finite beings must be affirmed finitely of them. Hence, we cannot attribute things to God and creatures univocally. If we did, then either God would be finite or creatures would be infinite.

Analogical Attribution About God Is the Only Alternative

All things attributed to God must be done so either equivocally (entirely different), univocally (entirely the same), or analogically (similarly). Equivocal predication is self-defeating, and univocal predication is impossible. Therefore, all proper statements about God must be analogical. Analogous God-talk is the only meaningful way to speak of God (see Volume 1, chapter 9); thus, all the names or attributes of God are applied to Him analogically (see Mondin, ***PAPCT***).

RESPONSES TO OBJECTIONS ABOUT ANALOGY

Several objections have been leveled against the doctrine of analogy. These are largely based on a misunderstanding of what is meant by it.

The Objection That Analogy Leads to Agnosticism

John Duns Scotus (1266–1308) argued that in every analogy there is an element of sameness and an element of difference, for that is what an analogy is (***PW***). If it were entirely the same, it would be univocal, and if it were entirely different, it would be equivocal. Of course, this sameness in the analogy must be understood either univocally (entirely the same) or analogically (similar). But if it is understood univocally, then analogy is reducible to univocal predication and is not truly analogical. And if it is understood analogically and so on infinitely, one never comes to a basis for knowing what is the same in the analogy. An infinite regress leads to agnosticism; that is, to no knowledge about God. Therefore, analogy supposedly leads to agnosticism.

Response to the Objection That Analogy Leads to Agnosticism

This objection confuses an analogous ***concept*** with an analogous ***predication***. It confuses the ***understanding*** of a term and the ***application*** of that term. Of course, every term used properly of God and creatures must be ***defined*** the same way (i.e., univocally); however, it cannot be ***affirmed*** the same way. God is infinite, and creatures are finite (see chapter 5); hence, the same (univocal) concept must be predicated of God in a non-univocal (i.e., analogical) way. In short, the ***thing signified*** is the same, but the ***mode of signification*** is different. An analogous concept ***would*** lead to agnosticism. But univocally conceived or defined terms applied (predicated) to God in an analogous way do not lead to agnosticism.

The Objection That Analogy Is Reducible to Univocity

Another objection to analogous talk about God is that every analogy has an element that is common (or the same) in both things—this is said to be analogous. But "same" means univocal, for if the definition has an element of sameness, then this element is univocal. Analogy means "partly the same," yet, again, "same" means univocal. Consequently, analogous talk allegedly reduces to univocal talk about God.

Response to the Objection That Analogy Reduces to Univocity

As noted above, this objection confuses an analogous ***definition*** (concept) and an analogous ***affirmation*** (predication). It is true that analogous definitions reduce to univocal ones, for the terms (e.g., "being," "good," "true") used of God and creatures must be ***defined*** the same way when used of God and man. However, they cannot be ***affirmed*** the same way of God and of man, for God is infinite, and creatures are finite. Hence, a term (for instance, "good") must be affirmed infinitely of God and finitely of man, for God is infinitely good, and man is only finitely good. Thus, a term must be ***understood*** the same way (univocally) of God and man, but it must be ***applied*** differently (analogously). ***What*** is said is the same, but ***how*** it is said of God and creatures is different.

WHAT IS THE BASIS FOR ANALOGICAL PREDICATION ABOUT GOD?

The basis for the analogy between God and His creatures is found in their similarity. God created things like Himself; thus, we can study the creature and learn something of the Creator. For example, one of God's basic attributes is pure actuality (see chapter 2). But Pure Actuality (God) cannot create another Pure Actuality. Pure actuality as an attribute does not have potentiality

(potency/limitation). Whatever is ***created*** has the potentiality not to exist (for example, it didn't exist before it was created). Therefore, Pure Act cannot make another Pure Act (just as an uncreated Being cannot create another uncreated Being). Hence, whatever Pure Act makes has both act and potency (whereas Pure Act has no potency).

Pure Act is only ***analogous*** to a being composed of act/potency. The act in act/potency is similar to Pure Act, but the potency in it is different from act. Thus, creatures are both similar and different from their Creator: They are similar in their actuality, but they are different in their potency (act is like Act, but potency is unlike Act). Potency is the limiting factor. Consequently, God is not like the limitations (potency) in creatures—He is only like their actuality.

WHAT KIND OF ANALOGY EXISTS BETWEEN GOD AND CREATURES?

There are two basic types of analogy: extrinsic and intrinsic. Extrinsic analogy is an analogy where only the effect, not the cause, has the characteristic ***properly***. For example, hot water causes an egg to become ***hard***. The water is not hard; it only produces the hardness.

However, an intrinsic analogy is an analogy where both effect ***and*** cause possess the characteristic. For example, ***hot*** water produces a ***hot*** egg. Both the egg and the water are hot. The effect receives the characteristic from the cause—heat communicates heat.

Now, both these kinds of analogy apply to the relationship between God and creatures, intrinsic analogy applies, since the Cause can't ***give*** what it hasn't ***got***; it can't ***produce*** what it doesn't ***possess***; it can't share what it doesn't have to share.

However, extrinsic analogy also applies, since ***God can't give what is impossible to give***, namely, infinity, uncausality, necessity, etc. Again, a Creator can't create another uncreated Being. Pure Act can't make a being without potency. An Infinite Being can't make another Infinite Being.

In summary, Pure Act can cause act, but Pure Act cannot cause another Pure Act. When Act causes act, it must also cause its potency. The act caused must be like the Act causing it, but the potency caused cannot be like the Act causing it (since Pure Act has no potency).

ANSWERING MORE OBJECTIONS TO ANALOGY

Several additional objections have been leveled at the doctrine of analogy. A brief response to each is in order (see Geisler, "RL" in ***BECA***).

Objection One

It is objected that mosquitoes produce malaria without being like malaria. However, mosquitoes are not the ***efficient cause*** of malaria, but only the ***instrumental cause*** (for an explanation of the different types of causes, see Volume 1, chapter 10). Malaria parasites are the efficient cause of other malaria parasites, and malaria parasites are like the malaria parasites they cause.
For example, a student's exam is not like his ***pen*** that wrote it; the pen is only an ***instrumental cause***. But it is like the student's ***mind***, which is the ***efficient cause*** of his exam.

Objection Two

It is objected that hammers break mirrors without being like broken glass. This is true, but again, hammers are instrumental causes, not efficient causes. The ***motion*** (the efficient cause) of the arm using the hammer causes motion in the glass (and motion is like motion).

Objection Three

Back to the analogy: Hot water makes an egg hard, but hardness is not like hot

water, which is soft.
This is so, but it must be remembered that hardness in the egg is due to its ***material cause***, not its efficient cause. Hotness in the egg is similar to hotness in the water (its ***efficient cause***).
In conclusion, effects are necessarily like their efficient cause, but not necessarily like their instrumental or material cause. They are also like their exemplar cause (see Volume 1, chapter 10).

WHY ARE MANY ATTRIBUTES OF GOD NEGATIVE?

A careful examination of the nonmoral (metaphysical) attributes of God reveals that they are negative. For example, in-finite means "not finite," immutable means "not mutable" (i.e., "not changeable"), in-divisible means "not divisible," etc. This is true of ***all*** the metaphysical attributes of God whether the etymology of the term indicates it or not. For instance, necessary really means "not contingent," and aseity means "not caused by another."
What is important to remember, however, is that while the term used is negative, its effect is not negative in its reference to God. The nature of negative attribution is simply to assure that all finitude is negated of an attribute before it is predicated of God. This is called the *via negativa* (the way of negation). We must remove all limitation (potency) from a term before its positive characteristic (its actuality) can be applied to an unlimited Being (see Geisler and Corduan, ***PR***, chapter 11).
The reason for the way of negation is that all characteristics we know are found in a finite, limited mode. But God's Being is unlimited (infinite). Therefore, the limited mode of the characteristic must be negated from it before it can be properly applied to God.
However, these so-called negative attributes imply positive characteristics. Again, the negation only removes the ***limitation*** from the perfections (e.g., being, goodness, truth, righteousness) that are being applied to God. It does not ***eliminate*** the perfection but rather ***purifies*** it.

WHICH ATTRIBUTES OF GOD ARE POSITIVE?

All negations imply an affirmation; we cannot know God is "***not*** that" unless we know what "that" is. The nature of positive attributes is based on the causal relation between the Cause (God) and His effect (creatures). As mentioned previously, the Cause cannot give what it does not have. It cannot share what it does not have to share.

But the Cause is unlimited, and the effect by nature is limited. This being the case, only those terms whose definitions do not necessarily imply any limitation (potency) can be applied to God in a metaphysical (i.e., literal) way. For example, God is Being, Goodness, Truth, Holiness, Perfection, etc. But He is infinite Being, infinite Goodness, infinite Truth, etc. Thus, whenever these positive terms are applied to God, they must be applied in a ***similar*** (analogous) way and not in an identical (univocal) way. As previously established, the limiting factors in the terms must be negated before they can be properly applied to God.

We must distinguish between the ***nature*** (characteristic) itself and the ***mode*** in which it exists. Goodness is that which is desirable for its own sake. The ***nature*** of goodness is not necessarily limited, but the ***mode*** of goodness that exists in creatures is necessarily limited. Likewise, being is that which is. The ***nature*** of being is not necessarily limited, but the ***mode*** of being that exists in creatures is necessarily limited (by its potency). The *via negativa* merely removes the mode of limitation before the unlimited perfection is attributed to God.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN METAPHYSICAL AND METAPHORICAL ATTRIBUTES OF GOD?

Not all language about God in the Bible is metaphysical (or literal). Scripture does employ many metaphorical and anthropological descriptions of (attributions to) God. God is said to have "arms" (Deut. 33:27), "eyes" (Heb. 4:13), and even "wings" (Ex. 19:4). He is called a "rock" (1 Sam. 2:2), a "tower" (Prov. 18:10), and a "shield" (Gen. 15:1).

The difference between metaphorical and metaphysical attributions of God is found in the nature of God and what is being said of Him. ***Metaphysical***

attribution is based on the way God actually is—it results from His efficient causality. It is like its Cause; it is based in an ***intrinsic*** causal relation between an efficient cause and its effect. (See above, under "What Kind of Analogy Exists Between God and Creatures?")
However, a ***metaphorical*** attribution of God is not the way God actually is. It is based on an ***extrinsic*** causal relation; it is not like its Cause. Why, then, are metaphors used?

The Reasons for Metaphors

There are several reasons for using metaphorical expressions of God.
First, metaphors often inform us what God ***can do***, not what He is. They often describe His abilities, not His attributes. Thus, He is like a strong tower or shield that can protect us, or He has wings that can hold us up, etc.
Second, metaphors communicate what God is like in an ***indirect*** and ***non-literal*** way. The nonliteral actually depends upon the literal. We know God is not literally a stone, since we know He is literally an infinite Spirit, and a stone can be neither infinite nor a spirit. But once we know that God is not literally a stone, a metaphor does tell us what he literally is, namely, stable and immovable.
Third, metaphors (similes and other figures of speech) are often ***evocative***, even though they are not literally ***descriptive***; that is, they do not literally and directly describe God. Even so, they do evoke a response to Him (while metaphysical descriptions often do not). Hence, metaphors are frequently used in the Bible because God wants a response from us. For example, compare the evocative power of a metaphorical vs. a metaphysical statement about God:

- Metaphysical: God is the uncaused Cause of our being.
- Metaphorical: "Underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deut. 33:27).

- Metaphysical: God is omnipotent.
- Metaphorical: "Who is like me and who can challenge me? And what shepherd can stand against me?" (Jer. 49:19).

- Metaphysical: God is omniscient.
- Metaphorical: “Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (Heb. 4:13).

The Various Kinds of Metaphorical Descriptions of God

In addition to figures of speech, the Bible employs three basic kinds of metaphorical statements about God. First of all, there are ***anthropomorphisms***, which depict God in human form, such as having eyes (e.g., Heb. 4:13), ears (2 Chron. 6:40), and arms (Deut. 5:15). Next, there are ***anthropopathisms***, which picture God having changing human feelings like anger and grief (Eph. 4:30). Finally, there are ***anthropoieses***, which attribute to God human actions, such as repenting (Gen. 6:6) and forgetting (Isa. 43:25; Job 11:6). None of these are intended as literally true, and to take them as such can lead to serious error.

The Danger of Metaphorical Descriptions of God

While metaphors are powerful, they can also be harmful. If they are taken literally, they can lead to grievous error and even heresy. The following is a sample of what can happen if metaphors are not properly understood and are taken literally:

- “The Lord repented” (Ex. 32:14 RSV) can lead to a denial of His immutability.
- “The eyes of him” (Heb. 4:13) can lead to a denial of God’s immateriality.
- “He is the Rock” (Deut. 32:4) can lead to a denial of His infinity.
- “Whom he foreknew” (Rom. 11:2) can lead to a denial of His eternality.
- “The LORD became angry” (1 Kings 11:9) can lead to a denial of His impassibility.
- “The LORD came down to see” (Gen. 11:5) can lead to a denial of His omniscience.

CONCLUSION

As we established earlier, nothing is more important than what we think of God. The characteristics found in creatures that we attribute to Him must first be purified of any imperfection or limitation and then applied to Him in an unlimited way. Any term that loses its meaning when stripped of its finitude cannot be applied to God literally, but only metaphorically. To take metaphorical descriptions of God literally leads to heretical views of God.
Nothing less than the true God can bring ultimate satisfaction or complete godliness in one's life. Hence, the study of the true God and His attributes is the most important endeavor a finite mind can entertain. Such is the project of this volume.

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CHAPTER TWO

GOD'S PURE ACTUALITY AND SIMPLICITY

INTRODUCTION

God's nonmoral attributes are also called metaphysical attributes; they are the framework into which the moral attributes fit. For example, God is not only love (a moral attribute); He is infinite (a metaphysical attribute). Hence, He is infinite love. Likewise, God is not only perfect; He is immutably perfect (see chapter 4), and so on.

Two of the key attributes of God are pure actuality and simplicity. Pure actuality is the attribute from which the other metaphysical attributes can be drawn logically, although they all have a biblical basis on their own. In the same way, simplicity, which can be drawn from pure actuality, is the basis for understanding many of the other nonmoral attributes of God.

GOD IS PURE ACTUALITY

By "actuality" is meant that which is in act or that which ***is*** (existence). This is in contrast to potentiality (see chapter 1)—that which ***can be*** (namely, a ***potential*** for existence). Pure actuality, then, is that which is (existence) with ***no possibility***

to not exist or to be anything other than it is—existence, pure and simple. Pure actuality has no potential for nonexistence, and it has no potential for change. If it could change, then it would have to go out of existence. But nothing can undergo the change to go out of existence unless it has that potential. Pure actuality has no potential of any kind, to say nothing of the potential to cease to exist. It is pure act.

There are biblical, theological, and historical bases for God's pure actuality. These will be set forth in order.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S PURE ACTUALITY

There are many strains of biblical teaching that are woven together to support God's pure existence. Note the following.

God Exists Independently of All Else

"In the beginning God …" (Gen. 1:1). "He is before all things" (Col. 1:17). "Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God" (Ps. 90:2). "I am the Alpha and the Omega" (Rev. 1:8). "I am the First and the Last" (Rev. 1:17). "And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began" (John 17:5; cf. 17:24; Rev. 13:8; 17:8). God existed prior to and independently of anything else. All other things that exist depend on Him, while He depends on nothing else for His existence.

God Gives Existence to Everything Else

Not only did God exist prior to all else that exists, but He is also the cause of everything else in existence. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). "So God created … every living and moving thing" (Gen.

1:21). “Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made” (John 1:3). “For by him all things were created … all things were created by him and for him” (Col. 1:16). “You created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being” (Rev. 4:11). “He is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else” (Acts 17:25). “For from him and through him and to him are all things” (Rom. 11:36). “There is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live” (1 Cor. 8:6). “He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Col. 1:17). “He has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe” (Heb. 1:2). “It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists” (Heb. 2:10).
The God of the Bible not only existed before all things, but all things also exist because of Him. He is Pure Existence, who gave existence to everything else that exists. Without Him nothing else would be.

God is Pure Existence (Pure “I AM”-ness)

Some biblical texts describe God as Pure Existence. When Moses asked God His name in Exodus 3:14, “God said to Moses, ‘I AM who I am.’ “God is pure “I AM”-ness; He is the self-existent One who depends on no one else for His being. This traditional understanding of Exodus 3:14 is confirmed by Jesus’ usage of it in John 8:58, when He declared, “Before Abraham was born, I am!” The Jews listening not only understood His claim but also responded accordingly: “At this, they picked up stones to stone him” (John 8:59), because only God could make such a claim.

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR GOD’S PURE ACTUALITY

Not only does the Bible describe God as Pure Existence with no potential for nonexistence, but there are also many solid theological arguments to support the

same conclusion. God's pure actuality can be inferred from His uncausality and necessity (see chapter 3). Each of these—uncausality and necessity—is an attribute of God that follows from two different forms of the cosmological argument (vertical and horizontal; see Volume 1, chapter 2).

Pure Actuality Follows From God's Uncausality

God's pure actuality follows from the cosmological argument for His existence, for as was shown earlier (in Volume 1, chapter 2), God is the uncaused Cause of all else that exists. What has no cause of its existence is not actualized (caused) by another. And what is not actualized has no potentiality, for potentiality for actualization is a condition for being actualized. Therefore, God as the uncaused Cause of all else that exists had no potentiality for existence or nonexistence. He simply exists, pure and simple.

The argument for God as the Pure Actualizer of all else that has actuality begins in the real change we experience. All real change involves a passing from a state of potentiality for that change to the actual change itself. However, nothing passes from potentiality to actuality except some actual cause actualizing this potentiality. No potentiality for existence can actualize its own existence. Therefore, ultimately, there must be a First, Unactualized Actualizer of every other being that has been actualized. This First, Unactualized Actualizer must be Pure Actuality, for if it has any potentiality, then it would have needed an actualizer. However, again, nothing can actualize its own existence, since a self-caused being is impossible. (A cause is ontologically prior to its effect, and nothing can be prior to itself.) Neither can there be an infinite regress of beings that were actualized, for in that case there would be nothing to put actuality into the series. Consequently, there ***must*** be a First, Unactualized Actualizer that has no potentiality in its being, which is Pure Actuality (Thomas Aquinas, ***ST***, la.2.3).

In brief, God is the uncaused Cause of all that exists. The uncaused Cause has no potential to not exist, and what exists without any potential not to exist is Pure Existence. He is a necessary Being (see chapter 3), and as such He has no potentiality not to exist. In summary, God is Pure Actuality with no potency for nonexistence, while creatures are both act and potency, having the potential for nonexistence (i.e., they did not exist before they were created).

Pure Actuality Follows From God's Necessity

Another form of the cosmological argument reasons from contingency being (s) to a necessary Being. A necessary Being by definition is one who cannot not exist (if it exists at all). But what cannot not exist has no potential for nonexistence. And what exists with no potential not to exist is Pure Existence. So if even one contingent being exists, then a necessary Being must exist, for no contingent being (viz., that one that ***can*** not exist) can cause its own existence, for the mere potential to be does not account for why such a being does exist. Hence, ultimately there must be a Being who ***cannot*** not exist to ground all beings that can not exist but do exist (i.e., humans).

To state the argument another way, if a contingent being exists, then a necessary Being must exist. Otherwise, nonexistence could be the cause of existence, for if another being who cannot exist is the cause of one who does exist, then it is possible for nothing to be the cause of something. But this is absurd, since nothing cannot cause anything—it is nothing. Only something that exists can cause existence.

This being the case, if God is a necessary Being (one who has no potential not to be), then He must be Pure Actuality. As we have seen, a Being with no potentiality for nonexistence is Pure Existence.

Pure Actuality and Other Metaphysical Attributes of God

Important implications with regard to other attributes of God can be drawn from His pure actuality. Basically, ***all*** the other essential metaphysical attributes of God follow from His pure actuality, including His simplicity, aseity (see chapter 3), necessity, immutability (see chapter 4), eternality, and infinity.

Simplicity Follows From Pure Actuality

God's simplicity (indivisibility) follows logically from His pure actuality, for

Pure Act cannot be divided—it has no potentiality. Whatever has no potentiality to be divided cannot be divided; there is nothing by which it can be divided. Whatever cannot be divided is indivisible. Therefore, pure actuality is indivisible.

Further, pure actuality has no potentiality; thus, it has no potentiality to change. What changes has parts, since part of it changes and part does not. And what has parts can change—it can come apart. Hence, God cannot have parts (which is simplicity), since He has no potentiality to change.

What is more, Pure Act cannot be differentiated, for actuality as such must be identical to actuality as such. In order to differ, there must be a difference. But without a potentiality to differ, there is no way to differ: It must be identical to itself. What is identical to itself is simple; therefore, a Being of pure actuality is simple, and, consequently, indivisible. (For more on God's simplicity, see "The Historical Basis for God's Pure Actuality" below.)

Aseity Follows From Pure Actuality

A Being who is existence, pure and simple, could not have come into existence. Neither could it cease to exist, since it is existence itself. God is existence; all else merely ***has*** existence. Such a Being has self-existence, that is, existence in and of itself. This self-existence is known as aseity.

Immutability Follows From Pure Actuality

As established previously, pure actuality has no potentiality whatsoever. Thus, it has no potentiality to change (change is a passing from potentiality to actuality); it is immutable. A Being of Pure Actuality is a simple Being with no parts. However, what has parts can change—it can come apart. Hence, God cannot have parts: He is absolutely one (simple).

Necessity Follows From Pure Actuality

Pure Actuality has no potential not to exist, and a Being with no potential not to exist must exist necessarily. And what must exist necessarily is a necessary Being.

Eternality (Nontemporality) Follows From Pure Actuality

Time involves change (from one moment to another). But Pure Actuality cannot change. Therefore, Pure Actuality is not in time; it is eternal.

Infinity Follows From Pure Actuality

Infinity means without limits. What is Pure Actuality has no limits; it has no potentiality for any kind of limitation. Potentiality is what limits being. Since a Being with no potentiality has no limits, Pure Actuality is infinite.
In short, all the basic metaphysical attributes of God follow logically from His pure actuality, and His pure actuality follows from His being the Uncaused First Cause of all else that exists.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S PURE ACTUALITY

The historical basis for God's pure actuality is early and continuous. It begins with the early fathers of the church and goes on virtually without interruption to modern times. Since many of the same quotations are found under God's aseity and necessity (see chapter 3), they will not be stated here.
It is sufficient to note that God was considered Pure Existence, without any possibility or potentiality for nonexistence, from the very beginning of the Christian faith. Typical of these references are those of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas.

Theologians on God's Pure Actuality

Augustine (354–430)

> It is that absolute "IS," that true "IS," that "IS" in the true sense of the word, that I long for; that "IS;" which "is" in that "Jerusalem" which is "the Bride" of my Lord; where there will not be death, there will not be failing. (*EBP*, 39.8)

"For God is Absolute Being and, therefore, all other being that is relative was made by Him" (***C***, 11.5). "Because I said, 'I Am Who I Am,' [in Ex. 3:14] … thou didst understand what Being is, and thou hast despaired to grasp it" (***SNTL***, 7.7).

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)

"It was shown above that there is some first being, whom we call God; and that this first being must be pure act, without any admixture of any potentiality" (***ST*** la.9.1).

> The first being must of necessity be in act, and in no way in potentiality … absolutely speaking, actuality is prior to potentiality; for whatever is in potentiality can be reduced to actuality only by some being in actuality. Now it has been proven already that God is the First Being. It is therefore impossible that in God there should be any potentiality. (*ST* la.3.1)

Further, "Not only is God his own essence … but he is also his own existence (***esse***)" (***ST*** la.3.4). Also,

> From the fact that God is eternal it necessarily follows that he is not in potentiality; for anything whose substance has any potentiality is able by reason of this potentiality not to exist, since a possibility for being is also a possibility for not being. (*SCT*, 1.16)

God, then, is Pure Actuality. He is Being. Everything else merely ***has*** being.

Most early and even later Fathers identified this with God's self-revelation to Moses (Ex. 3:14) as the great I AM or self-existent One (cf. John 8:58). Étienne Gilson insightfully noted the Greeks, unlike Christians, never got their gods and

their metaphysical principles together (***GP***, chapter 1). Failure to do this would mean that God is not ultimate but is subject to some reality more ultimate than He is.

ANSWERING OBJECTIONS TO GOD'S PURE ACTUALITY

Opponents of God's being Pure Actuality, including various forms of process thought, both panentheistic and neotheistic (see Volume 1, chapters 2, 4, 5, and 8), raise several objections to this attribute.

Objection One From the Potential to Create

If God has no potentiality, then how did He have the potential to create? He did create, and whatever He did do, He must have had the potential to do.

Response to Objection One

God has no passive potency: He has no possibility to ***be*** what He is not. But He does have active potency (power to ***do*** what He has not done). Hence, the potential to create existed in God's active power to create, just as the potential to move a book preexists in our muscles before we move it.

Objection Two From the Potential to Exist

If creatures had the potential to exist before they existed, then this potential must have been in God. It could not have existed outside of God, for this would be dualism, not theism. If it was in God, then there were potentials in God, and He

is, then, not Pure Actuality.

Response to Objection Two

Our potentiality to exist was co-created with our actuality. We came into existence with our potential to exist. The potential to exist did not exist before we existed, except insofar as it preexisted in the active power of God. But God's ***active*** power is not a passive potentiality. There is no passive potency in God.

Objection Three From the Ability to Act

If God has no potentiality, then how can He act in the world, which does have potentiality (e.g., a world of change). Whatever acts in a changing world is changing. God acts in a changing world. Hence, God changes.

Response to Objection Three

This confuses what God is and what He ***does***. God is unchanging in His ***attributes*** but engages in changing ***actions***.
God acts from ***beyond*** time, but His acts are ***in*** time. He causes from eternity, but the effects He causes are in temporality. He is the Unchanging Cause of changing things. The ***Cause*** is uncreated; only the ***effect*** is created. Just as a mind can act in matter without being matter, even so God can act in time without being temporal.

Objection Four From the Alleged Misinterpretation of Exodus 3:14

Many neotheists (see Volume 1, chapters 2, 4, 5, and 8) draw attention to the

idea that “biblical statements such as ‘I Am Who I Am’ (Ex. 3:14) are misinterpreted by classical theists to express the true divine nature as pure actuality from which simplicity is derived, while statements that describe God as the ‘one who is, was, and will be’ (Rev. 1:4) are ignored or written off as figures of speech” (Pinnock, ***OG***, 99).

Response to Objection Four

First, these expressions are stated from a human point of view—in time. There is no more need to take them literally of God than there is to take literally the ones that say God has hands, arms, or wings.

Second, these two texts do not contradict each other. To claim that God always “is” (present tense) does not imply that He did not exist in our past or will not in our future. On the contrary, it declares that He ***always is***—which is compatible with His I AM-ness.

Third, assuming there is no contradiction in Scripture (see Volume 1, part 2), the question is, which passage must be taken literally (metaphysically) and which must not? Two hermeneutical clues indicate that God really is the “I AM,” namely, the eternal, self-existent One. For one thing, in the Exodus passage it was specifically asked, “What is his name [character, essence]?” (Ex. 3:13), whereas Revelation 1:4 is simply John’s description of the God who, from a temporal vantage point, always was, is, and will be. Further, when God speaks in the Revelation passage, He describes Himself as the “***I am***” (present tense) who nevertheless ***is*** the “beginning” and who ***is*** in “the end.” Indeed, He ***is*** in the past, He ***is*** in the present, and He ***is*** in the future. As a matter of fact, He always is: It goes on to say He is the one “who is, and who was, and who is to come” (Rev. 1:8).

Fourth, when two passages conflict, the one to be taken literally is the one that can best explain the other not being taken literally. For example, John 4:24 says, “God is spirit.” Yet God is described as having eyes, arms, and legs and as being a tower, a rock, and even a bird with wings. It makes no sense to say He is literally all these other things and figuratively a spirit. It is not an unusual practice to understand certain things in the Bible figuratively.

Fifth, appeals to current trends in linguistics to interpret Exodus 3:14 as “I will be who I will be” are insufficient for many reasons.

To begin with, the context opposes it, since God is asked to give His "name" (character or essence).
Further, the history of both Jewish and Christian interpretation of this text is overwhelmingly in favor of the classical interpretation.
What is more, the Greek translation of the Old Testament (Septuagint—LXX), as even neotheistic proponents admit, favors the traditional aseity view. It translates the Hebrew "I AM WHO I AM" (***ekyeh ser ehyeh***) as ***ho ōn***, "He who is."
The rendering "I will be who I will be," while grammatically possible, is contextually implausible and historically late, emerging in the wake of process theology. Ironically, for those who claim classical theism was influenced by the (Greek) philosophy of their day, it turns out that their view is molded by the (process) philosophy of our day.
Also, the very name Yahweh (YHWH), usually translated Lord in the Old Testament, is probably a contraction of "I AM who I AM." Old Testament commentator R. Alan Cole says, "This pithy clause ["I Am Who I Am"] is clearly a reference to the name YHWH. Probably 'Yahweh' is regarded as a shortening of the whole phrase, and a running together of the clause into one word" (E, 69). Even ***The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*** (***TDNT***) acknowledges, "The name is generally thought to be a verbal form derived from the root ***hwy*** [***hayah***], 'be at hand, ***exist***, come to pass' " (on "YHWH," 500, emphasis added). Arthur Preuss summed it up well:

> The more general and more ancient opinion among theologians favors the view that aseity constitutes the metaphysical essence of God. Hence, we shall act prudently in adopting this theory, especially since it is well founded in Holy Scripture and Tradition, and can be defended with solid philosophical arguments.... Sacred Scripture defines YHWH as *ho ōn*, and it would seem, therefore, that this definition is entitled to universal acceptance. (*GHKEA*, 172)

Once again, this process way of understanding (neotheistic) is contrary to Jesus' use of it in John 8:58: "Before Abraham was born, I am!" Notice that He did not affirm, "Before Abraham was, I will be who I will be," as He should have if the neotheistic understanding of this text is correct. For a follower of Christ, Jesus' understanding of the text should be definitive.
Sixth, and finally, even if it could be proven that Exodus 3:14 does not support the claim for God's self-existence and simplicity, there are plenty of other texts and arguments that do (as was shown above).

GOD'S SIMPLICITY—GOD IS ABSOLUTELY SIMPLE

"Simple" means without parts, for what has parts can come apart. Simple also means indivisible; that is, God is not capable of being divided. There are no "seams" in God, so there is no place in which the fabric of His Being can be torn or come undone. Further, God's simplicity means that He is absolutely one: Not only does He have unity, but He is absolute unity. It is not oneness within many-ness; it is oneness without many-ness in His Being (essence), even though there is a plurality of persons (see chapter 12).

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S SIMPLICITY

Again, there are biblical, theological, and historical bases for God's simplicity. The biblical basis is found in several groups of verses.

Verses That Speak of God's Absolute Unity

The Bible affirms that God is one, not multiple, in His Being. This absolute unity of essence, along with His immateriality, supports the concept of God's simplicity.

"You shall have no other gods before me" (Ex. 20:3). "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is ***one***" (Deut. 6:4). "O LORD Almighty, God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, ***you alone*** are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth … so that all kingdoms on earth may know that ***you alone***, O LORD, are God" (Isa. 37:16–20). "I am the LORD, and there is no other" (Isa. 45:18). "Did not ***one God*** create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another?" (Mal. 2:10). "The most important [commandment] … is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, ***the Lord is one***' " (Mark 12:29). "***There is only one God***, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same

faith” (Rom. 3:30). “We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that ***there is no God but one***. For even if there are so-called gods … yet for us there is but ***one God***, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live” (1 Cor. 8:4–6). There is “***one God*** and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:6). “There is ***one God*** and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5). “You believe that there is ***one God***. Good!” (James 2:19). (Author emphasis added, this paragraph.)

In summation, it is evident from these many verses that there is, absolutely, only one God. But if God is absolutely one, then He cannot be divided into many gods. Combined with God’s immateriality (see chapter 6), this lends further support to His simplicity. Even though the Hebrew word for “one” (
echad
) leaves room for a plurality of persons ***within a unity of substance***,[1] in the monotheistic and anti-polytheistic context in which it was used, there is no implication of a ***plurality of beings or parts within a being***. This would be tantamount to the polytheism that Jewish monotheism vehemently opposed from the very beginning (cf. Ex. 20:3; Deut. 6:4).

Verses That Speak of God’s Immateriality

Material beings are made of parts. Since God is immaterial, God cannot have any material parts.

“Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost [spirit] ***does not have flesh and bones***, as you see I have” (Luke 24:39). “***No one has ever seen God***” (John 1:18). “***God is spirit***, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). “For since the creation of the world ***God’s invisible qualities***—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made” (Rom. 1:20). “[Christ] is the image ***of the invisible God***, the firstborn over all creation” (Col. 1:15). “Now to ***the King eternal, immortal, invisible***, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever” (1 Tim. 1:17). “How much more should we submit to ***the Father of our spirits*** and live!” (Heb. 12:9). (Author emphasis added, this paragraph.)

According to these verses, God is invisible, immaterial, and an immortal spirit. As such, He does not have temporal or material parts by which He could be

divided or destroyed. Thus, as opposed to material things, He is simple, and as opposed to temporal things, He is imperishable (cf. Heb. 1:11–12). Taken together, these passages strongly argue for God's simplicity (indivisibility).

Verses That Speak of God's Aseity (Self-Existence)

Contemporary neotheistic protests to the contrary (see Volume 1, chapter 3), the self-identity of God as the great "I AM" in Exodus 3:14 is a declaration of His self-existence, His Pure Actuality. When Moses asked for His name, God said, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.' " Again, the name Yahweh (YHWH), usually translated LORD in the Old Testament, is probably a contraction of "I AM WHO I AM" (see "Response to Objection Four" above).

> *To whom, then, will you compare God?*
> What image will you compare him to? ... He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth.... "... Or who is my equal?" says the Holy One. Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.... Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the *everlasting* God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. (Isa. 40:18–28, emphasis added)

This lofty picture of God includes that He is the eternal, self-sufficient Creator of all things. He is the Uncreated Creator, the self-existent and incomparable One who has no equals.

"He is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else" (Acts 17:25). This is a God who gives life and existence to all but has it—***is*** it—in and of Himself: "For in him we live and move and ***have*** our being" (17:28, emphasis added), but He is being. We are His "offspring" (17:29), but He is the offspring of none. He simply is, and always was, the self-existent One.

> For *by him all things were created:* things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. *He is before all things, and in him all things hold together*. (Col. 1:16–17, emphasis added)

"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for

you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being" (Rev. 4:11). 'I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God, 'who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty' " (Rev. 1:8).
God always was, always is, and always will be. He neither came into existence nor will He go out of existence. He simply is existence.

Verses That Speak of God As Intrinsically Immortal

"Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen" (1 Tim. 1:17). "Who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen" (1 Tim. 6:16).

> For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.... Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. (
>
> Rom. 1:20
>
> ,
>
> 22–23
>
>)

According to these verses, God is not only absolutely one but also is intrinsically and essentially immortal; He is spiritual and incorruptible. In contrast to God's ***intrinsic*** immortality, ours is an ***extrinsic*** gift from Him (Rom. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:10; 1 Cor. 15:52–54). God ***alone*** is immortal as such, and whatever is immortal is indivisible. Therefore, God is indivisible.

Summary of the Truths of All These Verses

The doctrine of God's simplicity is based on all the verses supporting His unity, immateriality, pure actuality, and immortality. Everything else that exists is from Him (John 1:3; Col. 1:16), and what exists is material, multiple, and destructible. God cannot be any of these, since He is their Cause. If God had these characteristics, then He too would need a cause. As a result, God must be not

only immaterial and immortal but also indivisible. Unlike His creatures, God does not have potentiality, and whatever has no potentiality cannot be separated into various parts—there is nothing by which Pure Actuality can be divided. Whatever cannot be divided is indivisible; hence, God is indivisible.

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S SIMPLICITY

Based on other attributes grounded in Scripture, there are many theological reasons for accepting the classical doctrine of God's simplicity. Several will be listed here briefly. For a more detailed discussion, see the arguments of Thomas Aquinas below.

Simplicity Follows From Pure Actuality

As we have seen, the God of Scripture is self-existent, having no potentiality for nonexistence. What has no potentiality for nonexistence cannot be divided, since it has no potential, including no potential for division or destruction. And what has no possibility of division is indivisible (i.e., simple). Pure Actuality is unlimited and unique; it is one of a kind.

To state it another way, there cannot be two beings who are entirely the same—what is entirely the same is absolutely one, and what is absolutely one is simple (indivisible). Therefore, God has absolute simplicity. As Pure Actuality, with no admixture of anything else, God must be simple.

The only two ways a being can differ is either by being or nonbeing (see Volume 1, chapter 2). However, to differ by nonbeing is to differ by nothing, and to differ by nothing is not to differ at all. Furthermore, this is the reason that there cannot be two beings who are absolutely the same: to be two, they must differ. It follows that a God of pure actuality, with no potentiality, must be absolutely one.

Simplicity Follows From Immutability

God's unchangeability (immutability) is solidly grounded in both Scripture and good reason (see chapter 4). God cannot change (Mal. 3:6; Heb. 1:12; James 1:17), and whatever cannot change cannot be divided, for division is a form of change. When something changes there must be a division between what remains the same and what does not. Otherwise, there would be no change; it would remain the same.
In other words, what is unchangeable is indivisible. God is unchangeable; thus, God is indivisible. So God's simplicity flows from His immutability.

Simplicity Follows From Infinity

God is infinite in His Being (see chapter 5); on this, both classical theists and neotheists agree. An infinite Being cannot be divided—if it could, it would have to have parts. There cannot be an infinite number of parts, since no matter how many there are, one more can always be added, and there cannot be one more than infinity. Hence, an infinite Being cannot have parts; it is absolutely simple.

Simplicity Follows From Uncausality

Both classical theists and neotheists accept the fact that God is the Uncaused Cause of all that exists. As the First Cause, God has no cause of Himself.[2]
Every composite being has a cause, for things diverse in themselves cannot unite unless something causes them to unite. Since God is uncaused, He cannot have diverse elements in Himself.
To rephrase this in more contemporary terms, many evangelical thinkers, including neotheists who reject God's simplicity, are proponents of some form of intelligent design theory (see Volume 3), regardless of how much natural evolution they may allow for as a result of this intelligent design (see Behe, ***DBB***). However, intelligent design proponents point out that irreducible complexity, such as is found in even the smallest living things, is evidence of an

Intelligent Designer. If this is so, then God could not have complexity, or else He must have been designed by something above and beyond Himself. As all theists agree that God is the First Cause and that there is no cause beyond Him, it would follow, therefore, that God cannot be complex. If He were complex, He would have been designed by an intelligent designer beyond Himself. There is no such being (see Volume 1, chapter 2), so God cannot be complex—He must be absolutely simple.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S SIMPLICITY

The argument for God's simplicity has an early, firm, and continuous support in the history of the Christian church. This backing begins with the patristic Fathers and creeds.

The earliest Fathers of the church spoke with a united voice in favor of the indivisibility (simplicity) of God. This is true of both Eastern and Western Fathers.[3]

Early Church Fathers on God's Simplicity

Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)

> By their manner of speaking, they ascribe those things which apply to men to the Father of all, whom they also declare to be unknown to all; and they deny that He himself made the world, to guard against attributing want of power (1) to Him; while, at the same time, they endow Him with human affections and passions. But if they had known the Scriptures, and been taught by the truth, they would have known, beyond doubt, that God is not as men are; and that His thoughts are not like the thoughts of men. (2) For the Father of all is at a vast distance from those affections and passions which operate among men. *He is a simple, uncompounded Being, without diverse members,* (3) and altogether like, and equal to himself, since He is wholly understanding, and wholly spirit, and wholly

thought, and wholly intelligence, and wholly reason, and wholly hearing, and wholly seeing, and wholly light, and the whole source of all that is good—even as the religious and pious are wont to speak concerning God. (*AH*, 2:13:3 in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, I)

Clement of Alexandria (150–c. 215)

Nor are any parts to be predicated of Him. For the One is indivisible; wherefore also it is infinite, not considered with reference to inscrutability, but with reference to its being without dimensions, and not having a limit. And therefore it is without form and name. And if we name it, we do not do so properly, terming it either the One, or the Good, or Mind, or Absolute Being, or Father, or God, or Creator or Lord. (S, 5.12 in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, II)

Origen (c. 185–c. 254)

God, therefore, is not to be thought of as being either a body or as existing in a body, but as *an uncompounded intellectual nature*, admitting within Himself no addition of any kind; so that He cannot be believed to have within him a greater and a less, but is such that He is in all parts, and is the mind and source from which all intellectual nature or mind takes its beginning. But mind, for its movements or operations, needs no physical space, nor sensible magnitude, nor bodily shape, nor colour, nor any other of those adjuncts which are the properties of body or matter. Wherefore *that simple and wholly intellectual nature* (1) can admit of no delay or hesitation in its movements or operations, lest the simplicity of the divine nature should appear to be circumscribed or in some degree hampered by such adjuncts, and lest that which is the beginning of all things should be found composite and differing.… But God, who is the beginning of all things, *is not to be regarded as a composite being*, lest perchance there should be found to exist elements prior to the beginning itself, out of which everything is composed, whatever that be which is called composite. (*DP*, 1:1:6, in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, IV)

Apollinarius (c. 310–c. 390)

"The divine spirit … ***is one, of single form, single character, single substance, indivisible***" (Prestige, ***GPT***, 10).

Gregory of Nazianzen (c. 329–c. 389)

“To be utterly sinless belongs to God, and to the first and ***uncompounded nature*** (for ***simplicity*** is peaceful, and not subject to dissension)” (***ITO***, XL in Schaff, ***NPNF***, 2:VII).

Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–c. 395)

Gregory believed and taught that both God the Father and God the Son are simple, which he understood to be “***free from all compositeness***” (***AE***, in Schaff, ***NPNF***, 2:V).

> But from the appellation of Ungenerate *we have been taught that He Who is so named is without origin, and from the appellation of simple that He is free from all admixture* (*or composition*), and these terms cannot be substituted for each other. There is therefore no necessity that, because the Godhead is by its nature simple, that nature should be termed ungeneracy; but in that He is indivisible and without composition, He is spoken of as simple, while in that He was not generated, He is spoken of as ungenerate.
>
> Furthermore we hold that we are bound to believe that the Son of God, being Himself God, is Himself also simple, because God is free from all compositeness; and in like manner in speaking of Him also by the appellation of Son we neither denote simplicity of substance, nor in simplicity do we include the notion of Son, but the term Son we hold to indicate that He is of the substance of the Father, and the term simple we hold to mean what the word bears upon its face. Since, then, the meaning of the term simple in regard to essence is one and the same whether spoken of the Father or of the Son, differing in no degree, while there is a wide difference between generate and ungenerate (the one containing a notion not contained in the other), for this reason we assert that there is no necessity that, the Father being ungenerate, His essence should, because that essence is simple, be defined by the term ungenerate. (*AE*, in Schaff, *NPNF*, 2:V)

Ambrose (339–397)

> The Arians blaspheme Christ, if by the words “created” and “begotten” they mean and understand one and the same thing. If, however, they regard the words as distinct in meaning, they must not speak of Him, of Whom they have read that He was begotten, as if He were a created being. This rule is upheld by the witness of St. Paul, who, professing himself a servant of Christ, forbade worship of a created being. God being a substance *pure and uncompounded*, there is no created nature in Him; furthermore, the Son is not to be degraded to the level of things created, seeing that in Him the Father is well pleased. (*DF*, 1.16 in ibid., 2:X)
>
> The passions and human arts which are ascribed to the unchanging and incorporeal God … without horrible profanity these things cannot be

> understood literally of Him who is declared by the authority of Holy Scripture to be invisible, ineffable, incomprehensible, inestimable, *simple, and uncompounded*, so neither can the passion of anger and wrath be attributed to that unchangeable nature without fearful blasphemy. (Cassian, *TBJC*, 8.4 in ibid., XI)

The Patristic Creeds on God's Simplicity

Not only the early Fathers but also the early creeds of Christendom affirm God's absolute simplicity. This begins even before the Council of Nicea (A.D. 325): an ante-Nicene creed (A.D. 270) of Gregory Thaumaturus declares, "There is one God … a perfect Trinity ***not divided***." Later the ***Athanasian Creed*** (A.D. 373) speaks of "neither confounding the Persons ***nor dividing the substance***" [of the Trinity].

Gregory of Nyssa believed and taught that both God the Father and God the Son are simple, which he understood to be "free from all compositeness" (***AE*** in Schaff, ***NPNF***, 2). Some of the early creeds also spoke of God's substance as not divided.

Medieval Fathers on God's Simplicity

The great theologians of the Middle Ages set forth the case for God's simplicity in no uncertain terms. This is particularly true of Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas.

Augustine (354–430)

Augustine affirmed that nothing "can have existence apart from Him ***whose existence is simple and indivisible***. He declared, "I say 'other than,' not 'different from,' because, equally with them, ***He is the simple***, unchangeable, co-eternal God. This Trinity is one God. And, although it is a Trinity, it is nonetheless ***simple***." Thus, "Our reason for calling it ***simple*** is because it is what it has with the exception of the real relations in which the Persons stand to each other" (***CG***, 11:10). He added, "This Trinity is ***indivisible*** and each of the

Persons is substantial, although there are not three Gods but only one" (ibid., 11:29).

Anselm (1033–1109)

Anselm also affirmed that God is absolutely indivisible: Immutability and simplicity are directly connected, for the "supreme Nature is in no wise composite, but is supremely simple, supremely immutable" (***SABW***, 77). "But, if it [the supreme Being] exists by parts in individual places or times, it is not exempt from composition and division of parts; which has been found to be in a high degree alien to the supreme Nature" (ibid., 74). "[The] supreme Nature ***is in no wise composite, but is supremely simple***, supremely immutable" (ibid., 77), for its "eternity, which is nothing else than itself, is immutable and ***without parts***" (ibid., 83). In brief, "It is evident that this supreme Substance is without beginning and without end.… [It] is immutable and without parts" (ibid.).

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)

Aquinas listed no less than five arguments for God's simplicity in his magnum opus, *Summa Theologica*[4] He stated categorically:

> I answer that the absolute simplicity of God may be shown in many ways. *First* … [since there are no ways God could differ] it is clear that *God is in no way composite*, but *is altogether simple*. *Second* … every composite is posterior to its component parts, and is dependent on them; but God is the first being, as has been shown above. *Third* … every composite has a cause, for things in themselves diverse cannot unite unless something causes them to unite. But God is uncaused … since He is the first efficient cause. *Fourth* … in every composite there must be potentiality and actuality (this does not apply to God).… *Fifth* … nothing composite can be predicated of any one of its parts.… And so, since God is absolute form, or rather absolute being, He can be in no way composite. (*ST*, 1:3:7)

The Reformation View of God's Simplicity

The great Reformers did not deviate from their patristic and medieval

predecessors on the absolute indivisibility (simplicity) of God. Rather, they continued the virtually unbroken tradition.

Martin Luther (1483–1546)

Luther affirmed God's simplicity by insisting that "the sacred article of the holy Trinity teaches us to believe and say that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three distinct persons, yet each person is ***the one God***" (ibid., 37:297).

John Calvin (1509–1564)

Calvin declared, "When we profess to believe in one God, under the name of God is understood ***a single, simple essence***, in which we comprehend three persons, or hypostases" (***ICR***, 1:20).

Jacob Arminius (1560–1609)

Arminius insisted,

> *Simplicity is a pre-eminent mode of the essence* of God, by which he is void of all composition, and of component parts whether they belong to the senses or to the understanding. He is without composition, because without external cause; and He is without component parts, because without internal cause. (*WJA*, 2:115)

Further, the "essence of God is devoid of all cause, from this circumstance arise, in the first place, simplicity and infinity of Being in the essence of God" (ibid.). "Also, that God is destitute of all movement in His essence, because He is immortal; in His power because He is pure and simple action; and in intellect" (ibid., Volume 3, "Answer of Junius to the Sixth Proposition"). "For since the essence of God is entirely simple, justice, nature, essence, and His other attributes are, in fact, one, though a distinction is made in them in our usage" (ibid., "Answer of Junius to the Twentieth Proposition").
Summarizing many of the metaphysical attributes of God, Arminius wrote,

> Hence, it follows that *this essence is simple* and infinite; from this, that it is eternal and immeasurable; and, lastly, that it is unchangeable, impassable and incorruptible, in the manner in which it has been proved by us in our public theses on this subject, (ibid., Volume 2, Disputation 15:7)

The Post-Reformation View of God's Simplicity

The followers of the Reformers also affirmed God's simplicity; this is true right up to modern times. Even the Reformation creeds made reference to it.
The ***Augsburg Confession*** (1530) says, "There is ***one divine essence, which is called*** God … ***indivisible***."
The ***French Confession*** (1559) adds, "We believe and confess that there is one God, who is one sole and ***simple essence***."
The ***Westminister Confession of Faith*** (1648) declares, "There is but one God who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, ***without body, parts***, or passions, immutable, immense, eternal" (in Schaff, ***CC***).

Stephen Charnock (1628–1680)

Charnock, the great Puritan divine, held:

> *God is the most simple being*
> ; for that which is first in nature, having nothing beyond it, cannot by any means be thought to be compounded; for whatsoever is so, depends upon the parts whereof it is compounded, and so is not the first being: now God being infinitely simple … He being His own essence and existence. (*EAG*, 1:333)

He added, "Since, therefore, ***God is without all composition*** … His understanding is not distinct from His essence" (ibid., 1:328).
"God, being ***infinitely simple***, hath nothing in himself which is not himself, and therefore cannot will any change in himself, he being his own essence and existence" (ibid., 1:333).

> Therefore [it is] impossible [for God] to be diminished in any particle of his essence; nor can he be diminished by anything in his own nature, because his *infinite simplicity* admits of nothing distinct from himself, or contrary to himself, (ibid., 1:321)

Francis Turretin (1623–1687)

Turretin systematized the Reformation view on simplicity in these words:

> The *simplicity of God* considered not morally, but physically, is his incommunicable attribute by which the divine nature is conceived by us not only as free from all composition and division, but also as incapable of composition and divisibility.

He argued,

> (1) from his independence, because composition is of the formal reason of a being originated and dependent (since nothing can be composed by itself, but whatever is composed must necessarily be composed by another; now, God is the first and independent being, recognizing no other prior to himself); (2) from his unity, because he who is *absolutely one* is also *absolutely simple* and therefore can neither be divided nor composed; (3) from his perfection, because composition implies imperfection inasmuch as it supposes passive power, dependency and mutability; (4) from his activity, because God is a most pure act having no passive admixture and therefore rejecting all composition (because in God there is nothing which needs to be made perfect or can receive perfection from any other, but he is whatever can be and cannot be other than what he is) … He is usually described not only by concrete but also abstract names—life, light, truth, etc. (*IET*, 1:191–92)

William G. T. Shedd (1820–1894)

The Simplicity of God denotes that his being is *uncompounded*, *incomplex*, and *indivisible*: "a most pure spirit, without parts." *Simplicity does not belong to angels and men*. They are complex, being composed of soul and body: two substances, not one. They are not unembodied and mere spirit. The angels, like the redeemed after the resurrection, have a spiritual body, which does not mean a body made of spirit, but one adapted to a spiritual world. A spiritual body belongs to the world of extended form, not of unextended mind. The simplicity of the Divine being is not contradictory to the trinity or his essence, because trinity does not denote three different essences, but one essence subsisting in three modes. The trinitarian distinctions no more conflict with the simplicity of the essence than do the attributes. The essence is not divided into either hypostases, or attributes. The whole essence is in each person, and in each attribute. The theory of external emanation is incompatible with the simplicity of the Divine essence. A substance which by efflux of particles can flow out into new forms, like rays from the sun, is compounded and complex. When it is said, in

Romans 11:36

, that “all things are of him,” it is not meant that the universe is an effluent portion of the Divine essence, but that it originates from him as its creator. When it is said, in Acts 17:29, that man is the offspring (*genos*) of God, it is not meant that man participates in the Divine essence, but possesses a nature similar to that of God. (*DT*, 339)

Herman Bavinck (1854–1921)

“***Every attribute is identical with God’s being.*** He ***is*** what he ***has*** … When we speak about God, we must maintain that each of his attributes is identical with his being.… Whatever God is he is completely and simultaneously” (***DG***, 1, 121).

SOME OBJECTIONS TO GOD’S SIMPLICITY

Despite its strong biblical and theological basis, as well as its continuous confirmation by the Fathers of the church, many contemporary theologians, including some evangelicals, have leveled strong objections against the doctrine of divine simplicity.

Objection One—Based on Its Alleged Unintelligibility

Some protest that the “divine timelessness is strongly dependent … on divine simplicity (whose intelligibility has been strongly challenged)” (Pinnock, ***OG***, 129). The grounds for the alleged unintelligibility are not made clear here. It may be one or more of the reasons listed below. In any case, this objection fails for several reasons.

Response to Objection One

First, divine simplicity cannot be unintelligible in an absolute sense, for the very

fact that people deny it is evidence for the intelligibility of divine simplicity. Otherwise, they are denying that which they do not understand.

Second, that something may not be totally ***comprehensible*** (e.g., God's uncausality, infinity, necessity, eternality, immutability, simplicity, etc.) does not mean it is not ***apprehendable***. Even many objectors admit that at least the first three of these are intelligible. For example, infinity cannot be comprehended (though it can be apprehended) by a finite mind, yet all theists affirm that God is infinite.

Third, a thing may be unintelligible in one of two ways. It may be unintelligible ***in itself***, such as a square circle. Or, it may be unintelligible ***to us*** (Thomas Aquinas, ***ST***, la.2.1), as in the case of a sentence in a language we do not understand. Hence, simply to affirm that divine simplicity is unintelligible does not ***demonstrate*** that it is unintelligible in itself. At best, it merely shows that it is unintelligible to those who are making the claim.

Objection Two—Based on Alleged Identity of All Properties

Alvin Plantinga asserts,

> There are two difficulties, one substantial and the other truly monumental. In the first place, if God is identical with each of his properties, then each of his properties is identical with each of his properties. This seems flatly incompatible with the obvious fact that God has several properties. (*DGHN*, 47—see the second "difficulty" under "Objection Three" below)

Response to Objection Two

Thomas Aquinas addressed this objection over seven hundred years earlier (in ***OPG***, 7). He pointed out that there is no contradiction in holding that God has many attributes and only one essence, for many things can be true of one and the same object. To cite an example we have already seen, a stone can be hard, round, and gray. None of these are the same attribute, but each of them refers to one and the same stone. In the same way, God's many attributes are not the same, but the same God has all these attributes. Since no single attribution reveals everything about His infinite nature, it is necessary to say many things of

God in order to understand Him better. That is to say, the reason we have to attribute many different things to God is that no finite concept can exhaust what can be known about His infinite nature. Thus, in order to know more about God, we must truly predicate more things of Him.

While these many attributes are not synonymous; nevertheless, they are coordinated in Him. God is both loving and holy. Thus, He is loving holiness and holy love. So the many attributes in God can be different and yet refer to one and the same thing. Again, the many radii have reference to one and the same center of the circle.

Finally, like many other contemporary philosophers, Plantinga does not see the coherence of God's simplicity and His many attributes because he assumes all attributes are predicated of God ***univocally*** and, therefore, must mean the same thing. However, if, as Aquinas noted, God's many attributes are predicated ***analogically*** of His one essence, then the alleged incoherence vanishes (see Volume 1, chapter 9). Hence, to demonstrate the intrinsic incoherence of God's simplicity, one must demonstrate that analogous predication is contradictory. But neither Plantinga nor anyone else has accomplished this feat. In fact, Plantinga passes on this crucial issue, contenting himself with the claim that proponents of simplicity must also have an analogous understanding of simplicity (***DGHN***, 59). This by no means destroys its coherence or intelligibility.

Objection Three—Based on Incompatibility of Property and Person

Plantinga next offers what he calls a "truly monumental" objection to God's simplicity, namely, "If God is identical with each of his properties, then, since each of his properties is a property, he is a property—a self exemplifying property. Accordingly, God has just one property: himself." Plantinga believes that "this view is subject to a difficulty both obvious and overwhelming. No property could have created the world; no property could be omniscient, or, indeed, know anything at all." In short, "If God is a property, then he isn't a person but a mere abstract object; he has no knowledge, awareness, power, love or life. So taken, the simplicity doctrine seems an utter mistake" (ibid., 47).

Response to Objection Three

The key to this response is Plantinga's phrase "so taken." The simple fact is that one does not have to take property and person the way Plantinga does. Of course, if God is a person, then He can't be an abstract object, and if a property is an abstract object, then God cannot have properties. However, rather than this being an objection to simplicity (as it is traditionally understood), it may be a revelation of the incoherency of the view of the objector.

If, on the other hand, "property" is understood as an attribute of real things that are predicated of (attributed to) God in an analogous sense (because He is the Creator of them and, so, they must somehow resemble Him—the effect preexists in its efficient Cause [see Volume 1, chapter 10]), then there is no reason that God cannot have many "properties" or attributes. Only if properties are considered atomically separate and different realities (that exist necessarily and eternally in themselves) does one have the difficulty Plantinga envisions. This more likely is a problem with his own form of platonism (see Volume 1, chapter 2) rather than with God's simplicity.[5]

Finally, there appears to be a serious problem of incoherence in Plantinga's system, which is used as a basis for criticizing God's simplicity. He has great difficulty in explaining how God has a nature rather than being a mere bundle of properties. His solution is to claim that "the nature of an object can be thought of as a conjunctive property, including as conjuncts just those properties essential to that object" (***DGHN***, 7). But what is a "conjunctive property"? How can properties that are essentially different be conjoined? How does this avoid the charge of incoherence that Plantinga leveled against Aquinas: that different things cannot be the same, and the same thing cannot be different?

It would seem that on a univocal concept of "properties" or attributes (such as Plantinga embraces) there cannot be a "conjunctive property" other than in the loose sense that this phrase is a way of describing a mere collection of properties. But in this sense there is no ultimate unity in God, and there is no way to explain why these components are composed. How did they get composed without a Composer (who is not composed)? In short, we are led right back to a basic argument for God's simplicity.

Objection Four—Based on the Trinity

Trinitarian theists affirm a multiplicity in God of three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Consequently, it would seem that God cannot be absolutely One, or else He could not also be three persons, for if the persons are really different, then God cannot be absolutely the same. If the persons are not truly distinct (but only distinct in our minds), then modalism (sabellianism) follows rather than trinitarianism.

Response to Objection Four

The first thing to note about this objection is that it confuses person and essence. Simplicity refers only to God's essence; clearly, the orthodox view of the Trinity has a plurality of persons within the unity of one essence. The early creeds were very careful to distinguish the persons in the Godhead without dividing His essence (Schaff, ***CC***, I).

As Aquinas noted in reference to the divine essence, each person is identical to the essence, while in respect to each other, each person is mutually distinct and not united with each other (***OPG***, 3.7.1). Therefore, the Trinity and simplicity are not contradictory.

Classical theists do not deny relationships in God; relationships really exist in Him. The distinctions in God are not according to essence, but according to what is relative, namely, to personhood. Therefore, relationality in God does not entail composition (***ST***, la.28.3).

Objection Five—Based on Many Attributes

In this same vein, it is objected that all things identical to the same thing are identical to each other. For example, if A is identical to B, and C is identical to B, then A must be identical to C. But all the members of the Godhead are identical to the same thing (viz., God's essence). Hence, it would seem to follow

that all the members of the Trinity are identical to each other.

Response to Objection Five

First, no trinitarian (as neotheists profess to be) would want to make this claim, for it denies the plurality of persons in God. It is, in fact, the claim made by modalistic (sabellian) heretics.
Second, Thomas Aquinas responded to this very objection in his *Summa Theologica* (la.28.4). Citing Aristotle, Aquinas noted that this objection is telling only where there is identity between object and meaning. But such is not the case in God, for while Fatherhood and Sonship in reality refer to the same thing, yet their meaning implies opposing relationships.
Third, God can be one and have two or more relations in the same way that there can be one road between two different cities. The relation between Father and Son is the same relationship, yet Father and Son are not the same (ibid.): They are different persons within the same God. Likewise, one and the same triangle has three corners. This neither destroys the unity of the nature of the triangle, nor does unity do away with its three corners. The same is true of the Trinity.

Objection Six—Based on God's Many Actions

How can God be absolutely one and do many things? If He is one, then He cannot have many acts, for every act springs from His nature, which is absolutely one.

Response to Objection Six

The many things God ***does*** all come from the one Being He ***is***. So these actions are one in their ***source***, but many in their ***sequents***: Their cause is one, but their effects are many. God's many actions spring from the oneness of Himself. A

doctor can will all at once (and in advance) the cure of his patient by planning for the patient to take a pill a day for seven days. Although the patient's actions will occur on seven successive days, they were willed at once before they happened. Likewise, God has willed in one decree—from all eternity—all of the many things that will happen in successive moments in time.

Objection Seven—Based on an Alleged Source in Greek Philosophy

According to neotheists, the Jewish philosopher Philo, known for his platonic leanings, is said to have misunderstood Exodus 3:14 to mean, "My nature is to be, not to be described by a name" (Pinnock, ***OG***, 69). Origen is alleged by neotheists to have been responsible for passing this (allegedly false) view on to subsequent church Fathers (ibid., 106). The root of this was supposedly the Greek (Septuagint) translation of the dynamic "I am" of the Hebrew text: It became the impersonal "Being who is there" (ibid., 108). This is said to have set the stage for a "static" view of God in terms of an eternal, unchangeable, and simple Being.

Response to Objection Seven

There are many reasons to reject this argument.

First, most major movements in modern philosophy find their source in Greek philosophy, particularly the view from which this objection springs. (Neotheism is a descendant of the process thought of Heraclitus [c. 504/ 501 B.C.–c. 444/441 B.C.])

Second, it is a genetic fallacy to reject something simply because of its source. The question is not whether the view is Hellenic, but whether it is authentic. The vast majority of all philosophers accept the law of noncontradiction, even though it came from the Greek philosophy of Aristotle.

Third, if the implication is that one is to reject this alleged Greek view because of its antiquity, then the objector has engaged in the "fallacy of chronological snobbery." The truth of a view is not determined by its age; the question is not

one of time, but of truth.
Fourth, and finally, the Christian view of God is not Greek in origin. No Greek ever had a triunity of three persons in one eternal essence. In fact, no Greek philosopher ever identified his ultimate metaphysical principle with his God or gods (see Gilson, ***GP***, chapter 1). This was the unique contribution of theistic thinkers.

CONCLUSION

God's pure actuality is fundamental to the classical orthodox view of God; from it all the other basic metaphysical attributes can be derived. It has a firm basis in both Scripture and theology, and its expression in the history of the church is virtually unanimous from the beginning to modern times with the rise of liberal process theology.
The simplicity (indivisibility) of God is also a fundamental attribute of classical theism. Simplicity undergirds not only many of the other crucial attributes of God but also all the other doctrines based on them. Despite its rejection by contemporary process thought (and neotheism), this attribute is based in solid biblical and theological arguments and has a long and venerable tradition. From the patristics to the medievals and into modern times, both Catholic and Protestant theologians alike have defended this doctrine. And although challenges continue to surface up to the present, no one has demonstrated its philosophical incoherence or its lack of biblical and theological foundation.

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CHAPTER THREE

GOD'S ASEITY AND NECESSITY

Aseity and necessity are kindred attributes. Aseity has to do with God's existence, and necessity has to do with the impossibility of His non-existence.

DEFINITION OF GOD'S ASEITY

"Aseity" comes from the Latin *aseite*, meaning literally "of oneself." Used of God, it denotes that He exists in and of Himself, independent of anything else. He is self existent.

Being self existent, however, is not the same as being self-caused (*causa sui*). It is impossible to cause one's own existence, since, again, a cause is ontologically prior to its effect, and something cannot be ontologically prior to itself. Thus, a self existent Being (a Being with aseity) is not a ***self-caused*** being; rather, a self-existent Being is an ***uncaused*** Being. It simply has no cause, since only beings who can possibly ***not be*** need a cause. Hence, a Being who cannot possibly ***not be*** must be an uncaused (necessary) Being.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S ASEITY

The biblical basis for God's aseity is found in the facts that (1) He existed prior

to and independent of creation and that (2) He brought into and sustains in existence everything else that is. Many of the verses that support God's aseity have already been utilized to demonstrate His pure actuality. "In the beginning God …" (Gen. 1:1). "Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God" (Ps. 90:2). "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.… Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:1, 3). "He is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else" (Acts 17:25). "From him and through him and to him are all things" (Rom. 11:36). "He is before all things" (Col. 1:17). "He has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe" (Heb. 1:2). "God, for whom and through whom everything exists …" (Heb. 2:10). "By your will they were created and have their being" (Rev. 4:11).

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S ASEITY

God's aseity follows from several of His other attributes. These include His pure actuality, His uncausality, His necessity, and His immutability.

Aseity Follows From Pure Actuality

As was shown earlier (in chapter 2), God, as Pure Actuality, has no potentiality not to exist. What has no potential for nonexistence must exist in and of itself; that is to say, it is self existent. So God is self-existent, which is what is meant by His aseity.

Aseity Follows From Uncausality

As the First Cause of all things (see part 2—"Creation"), God is an uncaused Being. What is uncaused exists in and of itself, which is what is meant by aseity.

Aseity Follows From Necessity

God is a necessary Being (see under main headings below). A necessary Being by nature is one who cannot not exist, and what cannot not exist has existence in and of itself. Hence, God is self existent (has aseity).

Aseity Follows From Immutability

An immutable Being cannot change (see chapter 4). Ceasing to be is a form of change; in fact, it is a substantial change. Therefore, an immutable Being cannot cease to exist. In addition, what cannot cease to exist must exist in and of itself. What exists in and of itself has aseity.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S ASEITY

There is a strong historical basis for the Christian belief that God is the self-existing, uncaused Cause of all else that exists. It begins with the early (ante-Nicene) church Fathers and continues to modern times.

Early Church Fathers on God's Aseity

Mathetes (c. 130)

> For while the Gentiles, by offering such things to those that are destitute of sense and hearing, furnish an example of madness; they, on the other hand, by thinking to offer things to God as if He needed them, might justly reckon it

> rather an act of folly than of divine worship. For He that made heaven and earth, and all that is therein, and gives to all the things of which we stand in need, certainly requires none of those things which He Himself bestows on such as think of furnishing them to Him. (*EMD*, 3 in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, 1)

Ignatius (d. c. 110)

"Honor thou God indeed, as the Author and Lord of all things.… For there is no one superior to God, or even like Him, among all the beings that exist" (***EIS***, 9 in ibid.). "Look for Him that is above the times, Him who has no times" (***SVIE***, 3 in ibid.).

Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)

> It is proper, then, that I should begin with the first and most important head, that is, God the Creator, who made the heaven and the earth, and all things that are therein (whom these men blasphemously style the fruit of a defect), and to demonstrate that there is nothing either above Him or after Him; nor that, influenced by any one, but of His own free will, He created all things, since He is the only God, the only Lord, the only Creator, the only Father, alone containing all things, and Himself commanding all things into existence. (*AH*, 2.1.1 in ibid.)

Tatian (120–173)

"Nor even ought the ineffable God to be presented with gifts; for He who is in want of nothing is not to be misrepresented by us as though He were indigent" (***ATG***, 4.2 in ibid.).

Medieval Church Fathers on God's Aseity

During the Middle Ages, the doctrine of God's self existence was elaborated with greater philosophical sophistication. This is increasingly true of the

medieval Fathers from Augustine through Aquinas.

Augustine (354–430)

> God is Absolute Being and, therefore, all other being that is relative was made by Him. No being that was made from nothing could be on a par with God, nor could it even be at all, were it not made by Him. (C, 11.5)

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)

"Since therefore the divine being is not a being received in anything, but He is His own ***subsistent being*** … it is clear that God Himself is infinite and perfect" (***ST***, la.7.1). Further, "The fact that the being of God is self-subsisting, not received in any other, and is thus called infinite, shows Him to be distinguished from all other beings, and all others are to be apart from Him" (ibid., 7.1, 3).

John Calvin (1509–1564), The Reformer, on God's Aseity

> From the power of God we are naturally led to consider his eternity, since that from which all other things derive their origin must necessarily be self-existent and eternal. Moreover, if it be asked what cause induced him to create all things at first, and now inclines him to preserve them, we shall find that there could be no other cause than his own goodness. (*ICR*, 1.5.6)
>
> Here we may observe, *first*, that his eternity and self-existence are declared by his magnificent name twice repeated; and, *second*, that in the enumeration of his perfections, he is described not as he is in himself, but in relation to us, in order that our acknowledgment of him may be more a vivid actual impression than empty visionary speculation, (ibid., 1.10.2)

Post-Reformation Theologians on God's Aseity

After the Reformers and on to modern times, there is no significant deviation on

the doctrine of God's aseity. Indeed, it is largely assumed.

Jacob Arminius (1560–1609)

> He is without beginning and without cause, either external or internal. For since there cannot be any advancement in *infinitum* (for if there could, there would be no Essence, no Knowledge), there must be one Essence, above and before which no other can exist: But such an Essence must be that of God; for, to whatsoever this Essence be attributed, it will by that very act of ascription be God himself. (*WJA*, Vol. 2, 114–15)

Francis Turretin (1623–1687)

> Nature proves the being of God since she proclaims that she not only is, but is from another and could not be without another. For if it is certain and indubitable that out of nothing, nothing is made and that nothing can be the cause of itself (for then it would be before and after itself), it is also certain that we must grant some first and unproduced being from whom all things are, but who is himself from no one. (*IET*, 170)

" 'From everlasting to everlasting thou art God. Thou hast always been God, and no time can be assigned as the beginning of thy being' " (in Charnock, ***EAG***, 1:277).

Stephen Charnock (1628–1680)

> God is without beginning. "In the beginning" God created the world [Gen. 1:1]. God was then before the beginning of it; and what point can be set wherein G began, if he were before the beginning of created things? God was without beginning, though all other things had time and beginning from him. (ibid., 1:281)
>
> God is of himself, from no other. Natures, which are made by God, may increase, because they began to be; they may decrease, because they were made of

> nothing, and so tend to nothing; the condition of their original leads them to defect, and the power of their Creator brings them to increase. But God hath no original; he hath no defect, because he was not made of nothing: he hath no increase, because he had no beginning. He was before all things, and, therefore, depends upon no other thing, which, by its own change, can bring change upon him. (ibid., 1:321)
>
> He who hath not being from another, cannot but be always what he is: God is the first Being, an independent Being; he was not produced of himself, or of any other, but by nature always hath been, and, therefore, cannot by himself, or by any other, be changed from what he is in his own nature, (ibid., 1:319)

John Miley (1813–1895)

"God is for human thought an incomprehensible Being, existing in absolute soleness, apart from the categories of genus and species" (***ST***, I, 59).

William G. T. Shedd (1820–1894)

> The Self-existence of God denotes that the ground of his being is in himself. In the reference, it is sometimes said that God is his own cause. But this is objectionable language. God is the uncaused Being, and in this respect differs from all other beings. (*DT*, 338)

Herman Bavinck (1854–1921)

> Every attribute is identical with God's being. He *is* what he *has*.... When we speak about God, we must maintain that each of his attributes is identical with his being.... Whatever God is he is completely and simultaneously. (*DG*, 121)

OBJECTIONS TO GOD'S ASEITY

Objections to God's self-existence are not as numerous as those to some of His other attributes. This is primarily due to the fact that God's aseity flows from the

most basic Christian belief that God is the First Cause of everything else that exists. Nonetheless, in modern times aseity has led some to object to the point of atheism.

Objection One—Based on the Idea That Aseity Leads to a Logical Contradiction

Beginning at least as early as Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), it was argued that speaking of God as an uncaused Being leads to a paradox (see ***CPR***). If everything needs a cause, then there must be a First Cause to start the causing. On the other hand, if everything needs a cause, then so does the First Cause, and so on forever. So positing God as an uncaused First Cause leads also to positing that there is no uncaused First Cause—an antinomy or logical contradiction.

Response to Objection One

Kant's paradox, which he called an antinomy, is based on a mistaken view of causality. This fundamental law of thought does not state, as Kant suggested, that "***Everything*** needs a cause." Rather, it asserts that "Everything that is finite, contingent, or has a beginning needs a cause." When stated in its correct form, there is no contradiction. If only finite things need a cause, then when one reaches an infinite Cause there is no need for a further cause.

Objection Two—Based on the Impossibility of Self-Existence

Another objection to the aseity of God is based on the nature of aseity itself. According to this objection, a self-existent Being is a self-caused Being. But a self-caused Being is impossible, for it would be ontologically prior to itself. Therefore, self-existence is impossible.

Response to Objection Two

The fallacy in this objection is a mistaken definition of a self-existent Being. God is not a ***self***-caused Being (which is impossible), but an ***un***-caused Being (which is possible). A self-caused Being is contradictory, but self-caused existence is not the same as self-existence. God exists ***in*** Himself, but not ***of*** Himself; that is, a self-existent Being is not the cause of Himself because He needs no cause of Himself. In short, God is the uncaused Cause of all else that exists; He is not the self-caused Cause of His own existence.

GOD'S NECESSITY

Again, aseity and necessity are closely related: Both are incommunicable or nontransferable attributes of God; both refer to God's unique kind of Being. Aseity and necessity are often lumped together by theologians, even though they are distinguishable concepts.
A necessary Being is one whose nonexistence is impossible; that is, if a necessary Being exists, then He must exist necessarily. This can be stated in at least four ways. A necessary Being is

(1) a Being whose nonexistence is not possible;
(2) a Being whose existence is essential;
(3) a Being whose essence is to exist;
(4) a Being whose essence and existence are identical.

In contrast to a necessary Being, a contingent being is

(1) a being whose nonexistence is possible;
(2) a being whose existence is not essential;

(3) a being whose essence is not to exist;
(4) a being whose essence and existence are not identical.

Hence, a necessary Being is one who is not contingent, and a contingent being is one who is not necessary. A contingent being is one who ***can*** not exist, and a Necessary Being is one who ***cannot*** not exist.

THE BIBLICIAL BASIS FOR GOD'S NECESSITY

The biblical basis for God's necessity is found in the same verses that speak of His aseity (see under main headings above). God is the beginning-less Beginner (Gen. 1:1; John 1:3); He brought everything else into existence, but He never came into existence Himself (Ps. 90:2; John 1:3; Col. 1:16). He is the absolute First Being, before which there was nothing else (Col. 1:17; Rev. 1:8; 3:14). He is totally self-sufficient, needing nothing from anything or anyone else (Acts 17:25): "From him and through him and to him are all things" (Rom. 11:36). Such a Being who is the ground of all other beings but needs no ground for His being is a necessary Being.

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S NECESSITY

God's necessity follows from several of His other attributes. These include His pure actuality, His uncausality, His aseity, and His immutability.

Necessity Follows From Pure Actuality

God is Pure Actuality with no passive potentiality whatsoever (see chapter 2). Pure actuality has no potential not to exist, and what has no potential for nonexistence must exist. Thus, what is pure actuality is a necessary existence; God is a necessary existence.

Necessity Follows From Uncausality

The necessity of God's Being also follows from the fact that He is an uncaused Being. What is uncaused exists independently, and what exists independently is a necessary existence. Consequently, God is a necessary existence.

Necessity Follows From Aseity

That God is a necessary Being also follows from the fact that He has self-existence or aseity (see above). God as a self-existent Being is an independent Being, and what has an independent existence is a necessary existence. Hence, God ***is*** necessary existence.

Necessity Follows From Immutability

An immutable Being cannot change. Again, ceasing to be is a form of change. Therefore, an immutable Being cannot cease to exist, and what cannot cease to exist must exist. What must exist (i.e., cannot not exist) is a necessary Being.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S NECESSITY

The concept of a necessary Being was implicit from Christianity's earliest times. The doctrine of God's necessity became explicit in the thought of later classical theists.

Early Church Fathers on God's Necessity

Irenaeus

> How can there be any other Fullness, or Principle, or Power, or God, above Him, since it is a matter of necessity that God, the *Pleroma* (Fullness) of all these, should contain all things in His immensity, and should be contained by no one?

He added,

> In like manner, there is an absolute necessity that He should experience the very same thing at all other points, and should be held in, bounded, and enclosed by those existences that are outside of Him. For that being who is the end downwards, necessarily circumscribes and surrounds him who finds his end in it. (*AH*, 2.1.2 in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*)

Ignatius

"Honor thou God indeed, as the Author and Lord of all things.… For there is no one superior to God, or even like Him, among all the beings that exist" (***EIS***, 9 in ibid.). "Look for Him that is above the times, Him who has no times" (***SVIE***, 3 in ibid.).

Mathetes

> For while the Gentiles, by offering such things to those that are destitute of sense and hearing, furnish an example of madness; they, on the other hand by thinking to offer things to God as if He needed them, might justly reckon it rather an act of folly than of divine worship. For He that made heaven and earth, and all that is therein, and gives to all the things of which we stand in need, certainly requires none of those things which He Himself bestows on such as think of furnishing them to Him. (*EMD*, 2 in ibid.)

Medieval Church Fathers on God's Necessity

God's necessity came into its own as a doctrine during the Middle Ages. Being a concomitant of aseity, the great theologians before the Reformation gave more attention to this crucial metaphysical attribute.

Augustine

> Anything whatsoever, no matter how excellent, if it be mutable has not true being; for true being is not to be found where there is also non-being. Whatever hath in it the possibility of change, being changed is not what it was. If that which is not, a kind of death hath taken place there; something that was there, and is not, has been destroyed.… Something is changed and is that which was not. I see there a kind of life in that which is, and death in that which has been.… Examine the mutations of things and thou wilt everywhere find "has been" and "will be." Think on God and thou wilt find "is" where "has been" and "will be" cannot be. (*OGJ*, 38.10)

For "all substance that is not a created thing is God, and all that is not created is God" (***OT***, 1.6).
Since God is supreme Being; that is, since He supremely is and, therefore, is immutable, it follows that He gave "being" to all that He created out of nothing; not, however, absolute Being (***C***, 11.2).

Anselm

In his famous ontological argument for God's existence, Anselm spoke of God as a necessary Being. "And it assuredly exists so truly, that it cannot be conceived not to exist" (***SABW***, 8). He went on, "So, then, no one who understands what God is can conceive that God does not exist" (ibid., 10). "This being alone … cannot be conceived not to exist.… So, then, of God alone can it be said that it is impossible to conceive of his non-existence" (ibid., 160–61).
He continued,

> Therefore, since all things exist through this one thing, beyond a shadow of a doubt this one thing exists through itself. Therefore all the other things exist through something other than themselves, while this alone exists through itself. But what exists through something other than itself, is less than that through which all other things exist, and which alone exists through itself.

Further,

> That which exists through itself, exists most of all. There exists, therefore, some one thing, which alone of all things most exists and exists supremely. But that which exists most of all, that through which whatever is good is good, whatever is great is great, and indeed through which whatever exists exists—this is necessarily supremely good, supremely great, and is of all the things that exist, the supreme. Therefore there is some thing which, whether it is called an essence, a substance, or a nature, is the best and the greatest, and of all the things that are, the supreme. (*ACMW*, 4)
>
> It is to the supreme essence alone that we properly give the name God. For if you say that God exists, irrespective of whether you say that one or many Gods exist, this is an idea that you cannot make sense of unless you think of God as that substance which is superior to every nature that is not God.... For the supreme essence alone is that through which anything good is good, without which nothing is good, and out of, through and in which all things exist, (ibid., 210–11)

Thomas Aquinas

In his "third way" to prove God's existence, Aquinas concluded, "Therefore, not all beings are merely possible, but there must exist something the existence of which is necessary." He added, "Therefore, we cannot but admit the existence of some being having of itself its own necessity, and not receiving it from another" (***ST***, la.2.3). He continued elsewhere, "Since therefore the divine being is not a being received in anything, but He is His own ***subsistent being*** … it is clear that God Himself is infinite and perfect" (ibid., la.7.1).

In addition, "The fact that the being of God is self-subsisting, not received in any other, and is thus called infinite, shows Him to be distinguished from all other beings, and all others are to be apart from Him" (ibid.). He went on, "It is against the nature of a made thing for its essence to be its own existence; because a subsisting being is not a created being; hence it is against the nature of a made thing to be absolutely infinite." Therefore, as God, although He has infinite power, cannot make a thing to be not made … so likewise He cannot make anything to be absolutely infinite (ibid., la.7.2 ad 1).

The Reformation and Post-Reformation Theologians on God's Necessity

Like a number of other metaphysical attributes of God, the Reformers spent little time explaining God's necessity. By and large, they simply assumed its meaning and validity.

Martin Luther

> God is not to be excluded from, or limited to, any place. He is everywhere and nowhere. If it is asked whether He is everywhere only according to the exercise of His power (*potentialiter*) or according to His essence (*substantialiter*), I reply: He is in every creature in both ways; for while a creature works through its attribute (*per qualitatem*), God does not work through His attribute but through His essence (*essentialiter*). (*WLS*, 543–44)

John Calvin

> From the power *of* God we are naturally led to consider his eternity, since that from which all other things derive their origin must necessarily be self-existent and eternal. Moreover, if it be asked what cause induced him to create all things at first, and now inclines him to preserve them, we shall find that there could be no other cause than his own goodness. But if this is the only cause, nothing more should be required to draw forth our love towards him; every creature, as the Psalmist reminds us, participating in his mercy. "His tender mercies are over all his works" [Ps. 145:9] (ibid.).

Jacob Arminius

> As we ought to enunciate negatively the mode by which the Essence of God pre-eminently both is and is spiritual, above the excellence or all Essences even of those which are spiritual; so this may be done first and immediately in a single phrase, “He is … without beginning and without cause either external or internal.” … For since there cannot be any advancement *in infinitum*, (for if there could, there would be no Essence, no Knowledge,) there must be one Essence, above and before which no other can exist: But such an Essence must that of God be; for, to whatsoever this Essence may be attributed, it will by that very act of ascription be God himself. (*WJA*, II, 114–15)

Post-Reformation Theologians on God’s Necessity

Some of the post-Reformers discussed God’s necessity in a bit more detail. It became of particular interest to those who used the argument from contingency to God’s existence or the second form of the ontological argument.

Francis Turretin

> The newness of the world with the commencement of motion and of time proves the necessary existence of God. For if the world began, it must necessarily have received its beginning from someone. Inasmuch as it could not be from itself, it could be from no other than God. (*IET*, 170)

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758)

> It no more argues any dependence of God’s Will, that his supremely wise volition is necessary, than it argues a dependence of his being, that his existence is necessary. (*WJE* I, 71)

Stephen Charnock

" 'From everlasting to everlasting thou art God.' Thou hast always been God, and no time can be assigned as the beginning of thy being" (***EAG***, 1:277). Further,

> God is of himself, from no other. Natures, which are made by God, may increase, because they began to be; they may decrease, because they were made of nothing, and so tend to nothing; the condition of their original leads them to defect, and the power of their Creator brings them to increase. But God hath no original; he hath no defect, because he was not made of nothing: he hath no increase, because he had no beginning. He was before all things, and, therefore, depends upon no other thing, which, by its own change, can bring change upon him. (ibid., 1:321)

Charles Hodge (1797–1878)

> The first argument to prove that the world as a whole is not self-existent and eternal, is, that all its parts, everything that enters into its composition, is dependent and mutable. A whole cannot be essentially different from its constituent parts. An infinite number of effects cannot be self-existent. If a chain of three links cannot support itself, much less can a chain of a million links. Nothing multiplied by infinity is nothing still. If we do not find the cause of our existence in ourselves, nor our parents in themselves, nor their progenitors in themselves, going back
>
> *ad infinitum*
>
> is only adding nothing to nothing. What the mind demands is a sufficient cause, and no approach to it is made by going back indefinitely from one effect to another. We are forced, therefore, by the laws of our rational nature, to assume the existence of a self-existent cause, *i.e.*, a Being endued with power adequate to produce this ever-changing phenomenal world. (*ST*, I, 211)

R. L. Dabney (1820–1898)

> It [the design argument] aids us in showing the personality of God, as a being of intelligence and will; and it greatly strengthens the assault we shall be enabled to make on Pantheism, by showing, unless there is a personal and divine first Cause prior to the universe, this must itself be, not only uncaused, eternal,

> independent, *necessarily existent*, but endued with intelligence. (*LST*, 1.14)

Herman Bavinck

> Every attribute is identical with God's being. He *is* what he *has*.... When we speak about God, we must maintain that each of his attributes is identical with his being. Whatever God is he is completely and simultaneously. (*DG*, 121)

OBJECTIONS TO GOD'S NECESSITY

Several objections to God as a necessary existence have emerged in modern philosophy. The two most important are as follows.

Objection One—Based on the Idea That Necessity Applies to Logic but Not to Being

There is even an attempted disproof of God based on this premise (see Findlay, "CGED" in Plantinga, ***OA***). It goes like this: God is by definition a necessary Being. Necessity is a term that cannot apply to being, but only to concepts. Therefore, there cannot be a God.

Response to Objection One

The error in this objection is exposed in the self-defeating nature of its basic premise. The statement that "Necessity cannot apply to existence" (or "being") is itself a necessary statement about existence. Thus, it is self-destructive, since it cannot avoid doing itself what it says cannot be done, namely, to make necessary statements about existence.

Further, speaking about a necessary existence is no more meaningless than speaking about a contingent existence; necessary ***means*** "not contingent." As

was shown earlier (in chapter 1), the way of negation (*via negativa*) is necessary when speaking about an infinite Being. We must remove all limitation in our concepts before they can be properly applied to an infinite Being.

Objection Two—Based on the Alleged Meaninglessness of the Concept of a Necessary Being

This objection is founded on the argument that we have nothing in our experience that is necessary. Since all meaningful statements must have some reference to experience, it seems to follow that the concept of a necessary Being makes no sense.

Response to Objection Two

This same argument is leveled against the concept of an uncaused Being. However, this backfires on the objector.

First, if an uncaused God is meaningless, then so is an uncaused universe, which many atheists posit. Since nothing cannot produce something, then ultimately something must be uncaused—either the universe or its Cause. But, as was demonstrated earlier (see Volume 1, chapter 2), the universe cannot be eternal, since it is running down. Hence, the ultimate Cause of the universe must be uncaused. The same applies to the concept of a necessary Being, which can be derived from an uncaused Being (see above).

Second, the very sentence "A necessary Being has no meaning" would be meaningless unless there were some meaning to the words "necessary Being" in it. In short, the atheist assumes the phrase has meaning, otherwise his claim that it is meaningless is self-defeating.

Third, there is nothing incoherent about the term "necessary" as applied to existence, since it is not contradictory. We know what "contingent being" means (viz., what exists but can not exist), and necessary is the opposite of contingent (viz., what cannot not exist).

Fourth, and finally, the meaning of these terms is derived from their relationship

to what is dependent upon them. This meaning is twofold: For one thing, terms like “necessary” or “infinite” are negative terms; they describe what God is not. God is not limited (He is unlimited) and not contingent (He is necessary). Further, we know what these limitations mean from experience and so, by contrast, we know that God does not have any of these limitations.

It is important to mention here once again that a negative term does not denote a negative attribute. It is not the affirmation of nothing; rather, it is the negation of all contingency and limitation in the First Cause. The positive content of what God is derives from the causal principle. He is actuality because He causes all actuality. He is Being, since He is the Cause of all being. However, as the Cause of all being, His Being cannot be caused. As the ground of all contingent being, He cannot be a contingent being.

SUMMARY

God has both aseity and necessity; His existence is inherent and necessary. He exists in Himself, and He cannot not exist. Unlike creatures, whose existence is derived from another and is contingent, God’s existence is both uncaused and independent.

These characteristics are founded on solid biblical, theological, and historical grounds. The objections to these classical attributes are unfounded and self-defeating.

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CHAPTER FOUR

GOD'S IMMUTABILITY AND ETERNALITY

Immutability and eternality are two of the most hotly debated attributes of God in contemporary theology. Not so for the first nineteen hundred years of church history—both properties have been considered essential to orthodox theism down through the centuries. This historic belief is well grounded in both biblical and theological reasoning.

GOD'S IMMUTABILITY

That God is unchangeable in His nature has solid support in biblical, historical, and philosophical theology. Despite many anthropomorphic expressions (see chapter 1), the Bible has clear and repeated references to God's immutability.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S IMMUTABILITY

The biblical basis for God's unchangeability is found in numerous texts.

Consider the following: “God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind” (Num. 23:19). “He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man, that he should change his mind” (1 Sam. 15:29). “They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment.… But you remain the same, and your years will never end” (Ps. 102:26–27; cf. Heb. 1:10–12). “I the Lord do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed” (Mal. 3:6). “[They] exchanged the glory of ***the immortal God*** for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles” (Rom. 1:23, emphasis added). “God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie …” (Heb. 6:18). “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb. 13:8). “Resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time” (Titus 1:2). “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows” (James 1:17).

It is clear from these verses that not only does God not change, but it is also ***impossible*** for Him to change. There are things He ***cannot*** do, namely, He cannot act contrary to His immutable (unchangeable) nature.

The Use of Anthropomorphism and Figures of Speech

To be sure, the Bible often speaks of God in temporal terms, but this is from a human point of view. It is said that God “***foreknew***” (Rom. 8:29), as though He is standing at one moment of time and looking forward to the future. However, these expressions are anthropomorphisms (speaking of God in human terms) that are no more to be taken literally than, as we have seen, when the biblical text says God has “wings” (Ex. 19:4), “arms” (Num. 11:23), or “eyes” (Heb. 4:13). Likewise, God’s “repenting” or being “sorry” (Gen. 6:6) is no more to be taken literally than God’s “forgetting” (Isa. 43:25).

There are no objective criteria by which one can accept one of these as literal and the other as anthropomorphic. Neotheist Greg Boyd offers “ridiculousness” as a criterion for determining what is figurative and what is not. But this is a subjective criterion. What is ridiculous to one person from one perspective is not necessarily ridiculous to another person from a different perspective. Certainly one is hard pressed to take God’s “repenting” as any less ridiculous (if taken

literally) than His “forgetting.” This is particularly true, since the Bible says God “is not a man, that He should repent” (1 Sam. 15:29 RSV; cf. Num. 23:19 RSV). If this is literal, then it is ridiculous to say that God actually repents. Furthermore, if we take literally God’s question to Adam: “Where are you?” (Gen. 3:9), then we have to come to the startling conclusion that God is not omniscient; after all, in such a case, He could not see Adam hiding from Him in the Garden. Suddenly, by neotheistic thinking, a whole cluster of orthodox attributes of God come tumbling down, laying bare a finite God behind their claim to believe in an infinite one.

Speaking of God as ***fore***knowing is another example of anthropomorphic language. Of course, an eternal God does not really ***fore***know; He simply knows in His eternal present. The biblical speech presenting Him as foreknowing is simply speaking from a human perspective. This is no more difficult to explain than other anthropomorphisms agreed upon by neotheists, such as God having arms, legs, eyes, or even wings. One would expect that a book written by humans and for humans would often speak to humans from a human perspective. (See Volume 1, chapters 13 and 27, on the doctrines of biblical inspiration and inerrancy.)

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR GOD’S IMMUTABILITY

The great Fathers of the church, especially Thomas Aquinas, have set forth solid arguments for God’s immutability. Several of them will be briefly summarized here.

The Argument From Pure Actuality

Aquinas offered several arguments in favor of God’s unchangeability (***ST***, la.13.7). The first argument is based on the fact that a God of pure actuality (“I AM-ness”) has no potentiality. Everything that changes has potentiality, but there can be no potentiality in God, for He is Pure Actuality. It follows, therefore, that God cannot change.

The Argument From Simplicity

The second argument for God's immutability follows from His simplicity. Everything that changes is composed of what changes and what does not change. But there can be no composition in God—He is an absolutely simple being. Hence, God cannot change.

The Argument From Perfection

The third argument for God's unchangeability reasons from His absolute perfection. Briefly put, whatever changes acquires something new. God cannot acquire anything new, since He is absolutely perfect; He could not in any way be better. Therefore, God cannot change.

The Argument From Infinity

There is another attribute by which one can argue for immutability, namely, the attribute of infinity. An infinite Being has no parts; if it did, it could not be infinite, since an infinite number of parts is impossible. No matter how many parts one has, it is always possible to add one more. But there cannot be more than an infinite number of parts. Thus, it is not possible for an infinite Being to have parts. And what has no parts cannot change, for change involves the loss or gain of parts. An infinite Being cannot change.

The Argument From Necessity

Further, immutability follows from necessity, for a necessary Being cannot

change in its being. The being that it has, it has necessarily. If it did not have being necessarily, then it would not be a necessary Being. It follows, therefore, that a necessary Being cannot change.
Of course, it could be argued that God may have being necessarily, but there may be other characteristics that He has only accidentally. This can be rejected on two different grounds.
First, God is simple and cannot have any parts (see chapter 2).
Second, even if God has accidents, He must still be necessary in His basic Being, for that is what is meant by a necessary ***Being***. If God is necessary in His Being, then He must be unchanging in His Being, as the above argument shows. An accident is what is not essential to a being, so God must still be changeless in His essential Being.

The Argument From Change

Aquinas argued that whatever changes passes from a state of potentiality for that change to a state of actually being changed (***ST***, 1.2.3). No potentiality for being can actualize itself. For example, pigments and canvas have the potential to be a great painting, but they cannot actualize themselves; it takes a cause (artist) outside of that potential to actualize it.
The mere potential for a changeable thing to change cannot account for the change; there must be an actualizer outside the potential to actualize it. Ultimately, though, this actualizer cannot have the potential for change, for if it did, then it too would need a cause. There cannot be an infinite regress of such causes, since there would be nothing to do the actualizing, every cause being actualized but none doing the actualizing. Hence, there must be an unchangeable First Actualizer of all change.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S IMMUTABILITY

The history of the Christian church is virtually unanimous on the unchangeability of God's nature, from the beginning to modern times. While

lively debate has occurred over how God relates to a changing world, particularly in the present, nonetheless, there has been unity on God's immutability.

The Patristic View of Immutability

Although the early Fathers were engaged in other issues, they did refer to God's unchangeableness. This is evident from the following citations.

Navatian (c. 200–c. 258)

Novatian said that God never changes "Himself into any forms, lest by change He should appear to be mortal.…"

> Thus there is never in Him any accession or increase of any part or honour, lest anything should appear to have ever been wanting to His perfection, nor is any loss sustained in Him, lest a degree of mortality should appear to have been suffered by Him. (*CT*, 4 in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, V)

This immutability is true because

> what He is, He always is; and who He is, He is always Himself; and what character He has, He always has.... And therefore He says, "I am God, I change not"; in that, what is not born cannot suffer change, holding His condition always. For whatever it be in Him which constitutes Divinity, must necessarily exist always, maintaining itself by its own powers, so that He should always be God. (ibid.)
>
> He is therefore also both immortal and incorruptible, neither conscious of any kind of loss nor ending. For because He is incorruptible, He is therefore immortal; and because He is immortal, He is certainly also incorruptible, each being involved by turns in the other, with itself and in itself, by a mutual connection, and prolonged by a vicarious concatenation to the condition of eternity; immortality arising from incorruption, as well as incorruption coming from immortality, (ibid.)

For God to experience change is for Him to cease to be God:

> Because if He does not contain all that is, whatever it is—seeing that what is found in that whereby it is contained is found to be less than that whereby it is

> contained—He will cease to be God, being reduced into the power of another, in whose greatness He, being smaller, shall have been included. And therefore what contained Him would then rather claim to be God. (ibid.)

Aristides (fl. 2nd century)

Aristides distinguished immutability as an evidence that someone truly is a god. He spoke of those who are

> not gods, but a created thing, liable to ruin and change, which is of the same nature as man; whereas God is imperishable and unvarying [immutable], and invisible, while yet He sees, and overrules, and transforms all things. (*AAP*, 4 in ibid. X)

Melito of Sardis (fl. 2nd century)

Melito had a similar standard (as did Clement of Alexandria). He chided individuals for serving what does not really exist, in contrast to the true God:

> He, I say, really exists, and by His power doth everything subsist. This being is in no sense made, nor did He ever come into being; but He has existed from eternity, and will continue to exist for ever and ever. He changeth not, while everything else changes. (*PRSTC*, 1 in ibid., VIII)

Gregory Thaumaturgus (c. 213–275)

Gregory Thaumaturgus said that normal human passions of grief and distress are not properties “of the immutable Divinity.” The Incarnate Word in His human nature

> exhibited in Himself the exercise of the affections and susceptibilities proper to us, having endued Himself with our passibility, even as it is written, that “He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows” (*TTF*, 11, in ibid, VI).

Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria (d. 328)

Alexander said, “Concerning whom we thus believe, even as the Apostolic

Church believes, in one Father unbegotten, who has from no one the cause of His Being, who is unchangeable and immutable, who is always the same, and admits of no increase or diminution." Moreover, the Son, as of the essence of the Father, is also immutable: "He is equally with the Father unchangeable and immutable, wanting in nothing" (***EAH***, 1.12 in Roberts and Donaldson, ***ANF***, VI).

The Medieval View of God's Immutability

The doctrine of divine immutability came into its own in the Middle Ages. From the powerful pens of Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas, this attribute was given a permanent place in orthodox theology. Following the rise of process theology (neotheism), those recent evangelicals who challenge this venerable property are on shaky ground historically (as well as biblically and theologically).

Augustine

Augustine affirmed that God is the unchanging Is, the I AM of Exodus 3:14. For "God is supreme being, that is, since He supremely is and, therefore, is immutable" (***CG***, 12.2). "There is a Good which alone is simple and, therefore, which alone is unchangeable—and this is God." In addition, "This Good has created all goods; but these are not simple and, therefore, they are mutable" (ibid., 11.10). "For that which is changed does not retain its own being.… And therefore that which not only is not change, but also is even incapable of being changed at all, alone falls most truly and indubitably under the category of Being" (***OT***, 5.2).

Only God is immutable, for "no created nature can be immutable. Every such nature is made, indeed, by God, the supreme and immutable Good who made all things" (***CG***, 22.1). "Thus, there can be no unchangeable good except our one, true, and blessed God" (ibid., 21.1). Augustine argued that "there must be some reality in which the form was ultimate, immutable and, therefore, not susceptible to degrees" (ibid., 8.6).

Likewise, God's mind cannot change, for "all thought which is thus varied is mutable, and nothing mutable is eternal; but our God is eternal" (***C***, 12.15). Nor

can God's will change, for "the will of God, therefore, pertaineth to His very Substance. But if anything hath arisen in the Substance of God which was not before, that Substance is not truly called eternal" (ibid., 11.10). Thus, God is forever identical with Himself: "What then is 'the same,' save that which is? What is that which is? That which is everlasting.… Behold 'The Same: I AM THAT I AM' " (***EBP***, 122.5).

Anselm

Anselm affirmed that God's absolute unchangeability is rooted in His perfection, for if God changed He would have to gain or lose some perfection that He has. An absolutely perfect Being cannot either gain or lose perfection. Hence, God cannot change (***M*** in ***SABW***, 2).

"Likewise, immutability and simplicity are directly connected, for the supreme Nature is in no wise composite, but is supremely simple, supremely immutable" (***SABW***, 77). Further, immutability is the basis for God's eternality:

> It is evident that this supreme Substance is without beginning and without end; that it has neither past, nor future, nor the temporal, that is, transient present in which we live; since its age, or eternity, which is nothing else than itself, is immutable and without parts, (ibid., 83)

Therefore, God's "Essence is always, in every way, substantially identical with itself; and is never in any way different from itself, even accidentally" (ibid., 85).

Thomas Aquinas

In his epic *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas asked "Whether God Is Altogether Immutable" (la.13.7) and offered three basic arguments in favor of God's unchangeability (see below). Further, he also argued that God alone is immutable (ibid.); this is necessary since all creatures exist only because of the will of the Creator. It was His power that brought them into existence, and it is His power that keeps them in existence. Therefore, if He withdrew His power, they would cease to exist. Whatever can cease to exist is not immutable, for ceasing to exist is a change, and immutable beings cannot change. Therefore, God alone is immutable; everything else could cease to exist.

In Aquinas's own words,

> It was shown above that there is some first being, whom we call God; and that this first being must be pure act, without any admixture of any potentiality, for the reason that, absolutely, potentiality is prior to act. Now, everything which is in any way changed, is in some way in potentiality. Hence, it is evident that it is impossible for God to be in any way changeable, (ibid., Ia.9.1)
>
> Thus in every creature there is potentiality to change either as regards substantial being as in the case of things corruptible; or as regards locality only, as in the case of the celestial bodies; or as regards the order to their end, and the application of their powers to diverse objects, as is the case with the angels; and universally all creatures generally are mutable by the power of the Creator, in Whose power is their existence and non existence. Hence, since God is in none of these ways mutable, it belongs to Him alone to be altogether immutable, (ibid., Ia.9.2)
>
> Eternity is nothing but God Himself. Hence God is not called eternal, as if He were in any way measured; but the idea of measurement is there taken according to apprehension of our mind alone, (ibid., Ia.10.2)
>
> Eternity truly and properly so called is in God alone, because eternity follows on immutability; as appears from the first article. But God alone is immutable, as was shown above [Q. 9, A. 1]. (ibid.)

The Reformers on God's Immutability

Calvin and Luther did not dissent on the immutability of God. To the contrary, they stressed God's essential unchangeableness.

Martin Luther

Luther spoke of "the immutable truth of God so that the truth of God's threatening is the cause of contrition, and the truth of His promise the cause of consolation, if it be believed" (1955–86, ***WL***, 3:178). He wrote also of "the immutable truth of God's threatening and promise, to the awakening of faith—so that men may learn to pay more heed to the truth of God" (ibid.). He added,

> God is not magnified by us so far as His nature is concerned—He is unchangeable—but He is magnified in our knowledge and experience, when we greatly esteem Him and highly regard Him, especially as to His grace and goodness, (ibid., 86, 3.117)

John Calvin

Calvin wrote,

> For [the apostle] John [in his gospel] at once attributes to the Word a solid and abiding essence, and ascribes something uniquely His own, and clearly shows how God, by speaking, was Creator of the universe. Unchangeable, the Word abides everlastingly one and the same with God, and is God himself. (*ICR*, 1.13.7)

He added,

> Here [the psalmist] asserts that, no matter how many strong enemies plot to overthrow the church, they do not have sufficient strength to prevail over God's immutable decree by which he appointed his Son eternal King. Hence it follows that the devil, with all the resources of the world, can never destroy the church, founded as it is on the eternal throne of Christ, (ibid., 2.15)

Calvin instructed: "Pray according to His will, not that hidden and unchangeable will but the will that He inspires in them, that He may hearken to them in another way, as He wisely decides" (ibid., 3.20).

The Post-Reformers on God's Immutability

The strong theological tradition on God's immutability from ancient to modern times carries on after the Reformation. This is true for both Calvinists and Arminians.

Jacob Arminius

> Immutability is a pre-eminent mode of the Essence of God, by which it is void of all change; of being transferred from place to place, because it is itself its own end and good, and because it is immense; of generation and corruption; of alteration; of increase and decrease; for the same reason as that by which it is incapable of suffering [

Psalm 102:27

;

Mal. 3:6

;

James 1:17

]. (*WJA*, I, 440–41)

Francis Turretin

Turretin affirmed that in the epistle of James “not only change is denied of him, but even the shadow of change.… Immutability of the divine will and counsel in particular is often asserted,” as in Numbers 23:19 (1992 ***ET***, 1:11:3:205). Further, “Reason confirms it for He is Jehovah, and so a necessary and independent being that can be changed by no one” (*Dialogus Contra Manichaeos*, 68 ***PG***, 94:1568). God is immutable because “He can neither be changed for the better (because He is the best) nor for the worse (because He would cease to be the most perfect)” (op. cit, 1.11:4:205).
Turretin noted, “God’s creation of the world does not bring change to Him, but it does bring change to creatures, who pass from non-existence to existence.”

> When God became the Creator, He was not changed in Himself (for nothing new happened to Him, for from eternity He had the efficacious will of creating the world in time), but only in order to the creature (because a new relation took place with it), (ibid., 1:11:5:205)

Likewise in the Incarnation God was not changed: “The Word (***logos***) was made flesh, not by a conversion of the Word (***tou logou***) into flesh, but by an assumption of the flesh to the hypostasis of the Word [meaning, Jesus did not change from being divine into being human—rather, He added humanity to His divinity]” (ibid., 1:11:6:205).
In the same way,

> God can will the change of various things (as [with] the institution and abrogation of the Levitical worship) without prejudice to the immutability of his will because even from eternity he had decreed such a change.… [So] from eternity he decreed to create the world and preserve it until a certain time, but afterwards to destroy it with a flood. In the same manner, we must reason concerning his knowledge. The knowledge of God does not change with the thing known because God who knew it not only knew that this change would take place, but even decreed it. (ibid., 1:11:7:205–06)

In speaking about God not changing His mind, Turretin said,

> Repentance is attributed to God after the manner of men (*anthropopathos*) but must be understood after the manner of God (*theoprepos*): not with respect to his counsel, but to the event; not in reference to his will, but to the thing willed; not to affection and internal grief, but to the effect and external work because he does what a penitent man usually does" (ibid., 1:12:11:206).

Similarly, that God did not fulfill some promises and threatenings does not mean He changed, for "although the condition may not often be expressed, it must be understood as tacit and implied" (ibid., 1:12:12:206). Thus, when Isaiah predicted the death of Hezekiah and God granted the king fifteen more years, there was not a declaration of what would happen according to the will of GOD, but of what (according to the nature of second causes) would happen unless GOD interposed, (ibid., 1:12:12:206)

Jonathan Edwards

Edwards showed the futility of the idea of a mutable God:

> From this notion … [that] God is liable to be continually repenting [of] what he has done, so he must be exposed to be constantly changing his mind and intentions as to his future conduct; altering his measures, relinquishing his old designs, and forming new schemes and projections. (*FW*, 2:11:4111)

The consequences of God being mutable would be that

> He must be continually putting his system to rights, as it gets out of order, through the contingence of the actions of moral agents: he must be a being, who, instead of being absolutely immutable, must necessarily be the subject of infinitely the most numerous acts of repentance and changes of intention, of any being whatsoever; for this plain reason, that his vastly extensive charge comprehends an infinitely greater number of those things which are to him contingent and uncertain. He must have little else to do but to mend broken tides as well as he can, and be rectifying his disjointed frame, and disordered movements, in the best manner the case will allow. (ibid., 2:11:4:111)

John Wesley (1703–1791)

John Wesley spoke of “the great decree of God, eternal, unchangeable” (***CW***, 336).

Stephen Charnock

Charnock wrote,

> Since, therefore, mutability is essential to a creature as a creature, this changeableness cannot properly be charged upon God as the author of it; for it was not the term of God’s creating act, but did necessarily result from the nature of the creature, as unchangeableness doth result from the essence of God. (*EAG*, 2:141)
>
> God is unchangeable in his essence. He is unalterably fixed in his being, so that not a particle can be lost from it, not a mite added to it.… He who hath not being from another, cannot but be always what he is: God is the first Being, an independent Being; he was not produced of himself, or of any other, but by nature always hath been, and, therefore, cannot by himself, or by any other, be changed from what he is in his own nature, (ibid., 1:319)
>
> All that we consider in God is unchangeable, for his essence and his properties are the same, and, therefore, what is necessarily belonging to the essence of God, belongs also to every perfection of the nature of God; none of them can receive any addition or diminution, (ibid., 1:318)

Further,

> God is immutable in regard to knowledge. God hath known from all eternity all that which he can know, so that nothing is hid from him. He knows not at present any more than he hath known from eternity: and that which he knows now he always knows: “All things are open and naked before him” [Heb. 4:13] (ibid., 1:321–22).

J.I. Packer

> [God] exists forever, and is always the same. He does not grow older. His life does not wax or wane. He does not gain new powers nor lose those that He once had. He does not mature or develop. He does not get stronger, or weaker, or wiser, as time goes by. “He cannot change for the better,” wrote A. W. Pink, “for

he is already perfect; and being perfect, he cannot change for the worse" (*KG*, 77).

OBJECTIONS TO GOD'S IMMUTABILITY

Many arguments have been offered against God's immutability, some biblical and others theological.

Objection One—Based on God's Alleged Repentance

The Bible says God "repented" on several occasions. He repented (was sorry) that He had created human beings (Gen. 6:6 KJV); He repented that He had made Saul king (1 Sam. 15:11 RSV); He repented about His promise to destroy Nineveh (Jonah 3:10 RSV). Repentance involves a change of mind; hence, it would appear from Scripture that God can change.

Response to Objection One

When the Bible says God "repents," it is speaking anthropomorphically, that is, in human terms. God ***appears*** to change, when humans actually do, just as the wind appears to change when we turn in the opposite direction. God has unchanging anger at our sin and unchanging pleasure in our repentance. When we repent, we simply move from under one unchanging attribute of God to another. When a person moves in relation to a pillar, the pillar does not move.

Objection Two—Based on Prayer

If God cannot change, then why should we pray? After all, the Bible affirms, "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective" (James 5:16). Indeed,

Jesus said, “The Father will give you whatever you ask in my name” (John 15:16). When Moses prayed, God changed His mind about destroying Israel (Ex. 32:32f.).

Response to Objection Two

God is omniscient (see chapter 8), and an all knowing Being cannot change His mind. If He does, He is not really all knowing. Therefore, God cannot change His mind in answer to prayer. When we pray (or have prayed), God not only knew what we were going to pray, but He ***ordained*** our prayer as a means of accomplishing ***His*** purpose. Prayer is not a means by which we change God; it is a means by which God changes us. Prayer is not a means of our overcoming God’s reluctance; it is a way for God to take hold of our willingness. Prayer is not a means of getting our will done in heaven, but a means of God getting His will done on earth.

Objection Three—Based on the Notion That an Unchangeable God Is Not Personal

It is also objected that an unchangeable God is both impersonal and unapproachable. Why approach someone whom you know in advance will not change His mind? Such a God is impersonal, since He cannot respond to our personal needs.

Response to Objection Three

This objection wrongly assumes that God does not know about our needs and that He does not care about them even before we ask Him. On the contrary, the Bible declares that God ***is*** all-knowing (Ps. 147:5) and all caring (1 John 4:16; 1 Peter 5:7); He even answers before we call on Him (Isa. 65:24). God is not

reluctant to answer; rather, we are reluctant to ask. The Bible says, “You do not have, because you do not ask God” (James 4:2).
Further, God is unchanging love (1 John 4:16), and, as such, He is eminently approachable. We can have more confidence in a God who does not change than in one who does. Malachi proclaimed, in the name of God, “I the LORD do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed” (Mal. 3:6). The writer of Hebrews declared, “God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. [For] we have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure” (Heb. 6:18–19). Clearly, an infinitely loving and unchanging person is the most personal of all.

Objection Four—Based on Immutability Being Rooted in Greek Philosophy

According to some theologians, the belief that God is unchangeable is based in Greek philosophy, not in biblical theology. It is claimed that the platonic Jewish philosopher Philo misunderstood Exodus 3:14 as a reference to God’s unchangeable Being (see Pinnock, ***OG***, 69). As we have seen, Origen is said to have been responsible for passing this view on to Christian theism, and the other early Fathers allegedly joined him (ibid., 106). Neotheists claim that “Greek philosophers were looking for that which was stable and reliable in contrast to the earthly world of chance.… This leads to the distinction between being and becoming or reality and appearance” (ibid., 6, 66, 106). Thus, it is supposed, in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (LXX) the dynamic “I AM” of the Hebrew text became the impersonal “Being who is there” (ibid., 108). This set the stage for a static (unchanging) view of God in terms of an unchangeable Being.

Response to Objection Four

Careful analysis of this argument from Greek philosophy exposes serious flaws. *First*, as was shown above, there is a solid basis in the Bible for attributing

immutability to God. So one need not seek any source elsewhere. Indeed, the early Fathers of the church offered biblical support, not just philosophical arguments, for their views. The New Testament alone was quoted by the Fathers of the first few centuries over 36,000 ***times***, including all verses except eleven! (see Geisler and Nix, ***GIB***, 431).

Second, Christian theologians of every age have been influenced to one degree or another by the prevailing philosophy of their day. But neotheists themselves are not immune from this: They reveal the influence of the prevailing process theology of our time. This in itself does not make their view of God wrong; neither does any influence by Greek philosophy make the classical view of God wrong. In the final analysis, the question is whether it was a good influence or a bad one—whether there are biblical and rational grounds for it or not. Rejecting a view because of its source is the genetic fallacy. It is not a matter of whether the reason is Greek, but whether it is good.

Third, even those who object to immutability accept views held by Greek philosophy. This includes their ideas of process, which are rooted in Heraclitus, who said, "No man steps into the same river twice." Likewise, they use logic, which finds its source in the Greek philosopher Aristotle (384–322 B.C.). They also carry on the tradition of Plato (c. 427–347 B.C.) by their belief in an eternal world of properties (forms). Indeed, the father of process theology, Alfred North Whitehead, commented that Western thought is largely "a series of footnotes to Plato" (***PR***, 63).

Fourth, there are many things about the traditional Christian view of God that are contrary to Greek thought, including the concept of a Trinity of one essence and three persons. Further, the Greeks never identified their God(s) with their ultimate metaphysical principle. The ultimate in Plato's system was not God (the *Demiurgos*), but the Good (the *Agathos*). Likewise, Aristotle never considered his many unmoved movers to be the object of worship, but simply to be the explanation for movement in the universe. The unique (but not Greek) contribution of Christian thinkers was to identify their ultimate metaphysical principle with the God they worshiped (see Gilson, ***GP***, chapter 1).

In summation, the argument from Greek philosophy fails. ***Formally***, it is a genetic fallacy. ***Actually***, it is groundless. And ***substantially***, it boils down not to whether the reasoning behind the classical view of God is Hellenic, but whether it is authentic. This must be determined by Scripture and good reason.

Objection Five—Based on a Challenge to the Perfect Being Argument

One argument used by classical theists to establish the immutability of God (though by no means the only one) is the argument from degrees of perfection in the world. Both Anselm and Aquinas used forms of it (see Thomas Aquinas, ***ST***, 1:2:3).

However, some theologians reject the classical view of God's immutability because of what they call "the difficulties of a perfect being theology" (Pinnock, ***OG***, 132). They argue, "It rests on the assumption that all change is either for the better or for the worse, an assumption that is simply false" (ibid., 132). They offer the "immutable watch" as a counterexample: It registers the same time, day in and day out, because it is stopped. By contrast, the "extremely accurate watch" always registers the correct time even though it is constantly changing. When it changes, its change is not for the better or worse: It remains the same in its changes, namely, an extremely accurate watch.

Response to Objection Five

This objection is based on a confusion of categories by comparing a changing being with an unchanging Being: It only shows how one changing thing (the clock) is not better than another changing thing (time). This begs the question in favor of a non-immutable view of God. The clock illustration does not tick if one assumes that God does not change, for in that case anything that represented Him as changing would be inaccurate because it changes.

In addition, even the objector implies that God does not really change, claiming that whatever changes in God is "consistent with and/or required by a ***constant state of excellence***," (Pinnock, ***OG***, 133, emphasis added). What is this "constant state of excellence," but the equivalent of an unchanging nature?

Furthermore, neotheists speak of the possibility of an unchanging God suffering from "imperfection" (ibid., 132), because a worshiper may become disappointed with worshiping a God who cannot change. But how could one know God was

imperfect unless he presupposed an absolute, unchanging standard of perfection (which theists claim God is)?
Finally, even if one were to grant that the argument from perfection has difficulties, it is not the only argument for immutability in the theist's arsenal. There are the other arguments stated above from simplicity, infinity, necessity, and pure actuality. Taken together, the biblical, theological, and historical arguments represent a formidable defense for God's immutability.

Objection Six—Based on God's Alleged Unrelatability to a Changing World

Another argument used by process thinkers is that an eternal, immutable God cannot have a real relationship with a changing world, such as the God of the Bible has. The essence of the argument is this:

(1) All real relationships involve change.
(2) An unchanging God cannot change.
(3) Therefore, an unchanging God cannot have a real relationship with a changing world.

They even cite Aquinas as saying that God's relationship to the world is not real, but only ideal.

Response to Objection Six

Aquinas anticipated this objection and treated it extensively. First, he argued that there is a real relationship between the changing world and the unchanging world (***ST***, la.13.7). He observed that there are three kinds of relations: one where both terms are ideas (e.g., the same is the same as itself); another where both terms are real (e.g., a small thing compared to a large thing); and one where one term is real and the other is an idea (e.g., on the right side).
Now, since creatures are really dependent on God but God is not really

dependent on them, they are related as real to an idea. That is, God ***knows*** about the relationship of dependence, but He does not ***have*** it. Only the creature has ontological dependence; thus, when there is a change in the creature's dependence on God, there is no change in God. Just as when a person changes his position from one side of the pillar to the other, the pillar does not change; only the person changes in relation to the pillar. So while the relationship between God and creatures is real, God is in no sense dependent on that relationship.

It is important to note here that Aquinas is only denying a dependent relationship and not all real ones. He is denying that God changes in His relationship with the world, but not that there are no real changes in the world's relation to God. The person's relation to the pillar changes when he moves, but the pillar does not change. But when the person moves, there is no longer the same relationship with the pillar.

Neotheists should not have any difficulty grasping this, since they believe in *ex nihilo* ("out of nothing") creation, in which God was not related to the world before it was created, but He was after. Yet they believe that both before and after creation God is independent of the world. That is, like a concrete floor on which the chair depends does not change when the chair is removed, even so God remains independent of creation both before and after creation. The fact that there is a change from there being no creation to there being a creation does not change the Creator.

Once creatures are created (but not before), God is really related to His creatures as their Creator. And creatures are really related to God because He is their Creator. However, the real relation of ***dependence*** is in the creature, not in the Creator. Therefore, the relationship of creatures to God is real and not merely ideal. Nonetheless, it is a real relationship of dependence on the part of the creatures, but not one of dependence on the part of God (ibid., Ia.13:7 ad 5).

Objection Seven—Based on God's Alleged Inability to Know a Changing World

If God is absolutely unchangeable, how can He know a changing world? According to classical theism, God's knowledge is identical to Himself. Yet He is said to be unchangeable. Hence, His knowledge would also have to be

unchangeable. But how can He have unchangeable knowledge of what is changing? For example, when time changes, God's knowledge would have to change too, otherwise He would not know what time it is. And if He did not know what time it is, then He would not be all knowing. Consequently, God cannot be omniscient and unchangeable and yet know a changing world.

Response to Objection Seven

God ***is*** unchanging, and His knowledge is identical with His essence, but does this mean that God cannot know changing things? God knows everything in one eternal now, including the past, present, and future. God knows the future before it happens in time. Therefore, when time changes, God's knowledge does not change, since He had unchanging knowledge in advance that it would change. In other words, God knows ***what*** we do, but not in the same ***way*** that we know it, i.e., in successive time frames. God knows the whole of time from (in) eternity, but He knows what is before and what is after the temporal now of human history (Thomas Aquinas, ***ST***, la.14–15). God is, as it were, looking "down" on the whole calendar of time in which He sees what days are before and after others. But God is not standing on the present day of the calendar looking back at the days that are past and forward to the days yet to come.[1]
So God knows the changing times, but He does not know them in a changing way. He has unchanging knowledge of the changing, and eternal knowledge of the temporal. Each being must know in accordance with its own being: Temporal beings know in a temporal way, and an immutable Being knows in an immutable way. Further, as the cause of all things, God knows all things as they preexist in Him. So His knowledge of time is not affected by time. He knows time from beyond time, not from within it. He knows the temporal in His eternal Self as the cause of it. Thus, He knows the changing world in an unchanging way, since it is known in His unchanging nature as an effect that can and will flow from its cause. By knowing Himself perfectly, God knows everything He will create that will thereby participate in the likeness of Him in some way. Hence, God does not have to "wait" for time to change before He can know it has; rather, He knows the whole of time, with all its changing sequences, in His unchanging Self from all eternity.

Objection Eight—Based on God's Free Will

Another objection to God's unchanging nature is based on the classical theist's belief that since God is simple (see chapter 2), God's will is identical to His nature. But if His nature is necessary, then His will must be necessary. And if it is necessary, then His will, which is identical to it, cannot be free. Hence, if God is free, then He cannot be an immutable Being.

Response to Objection Eight

In response, the classical theist points out that what is willed freely can also be necessary. There is a difference between antecedent necessity, which would eliminate free will, and consequent necessity, which does not. God's will has antecedent freedom; namely, He could have done otherwise. However, once He wills something, then it is consequently necessary that it occurs the way in which He willed it. There was no antecedent necessity that God will things the way He did. However, once He freely willed them, then it is necessary that they happen. In like manner, God's will is immutable, once He wills it, but it was not necessary that He will it that way to begin with.

As to how free will can be identical to God's unchangeable nature, it can be a necessary part of God's nature that He can do certain things freely, such as create. Likewise, His will can be free but still immutable. What he freely wills is willed immutably. God made free but unchangeable decisions from all eternity that things would change in the manner and order in which they do. So change can be willed by God without His changing.

Of course, God wills other things ***because of*** His own goodness, but not as ***necessitated by*** it. God can exist without willing other things; God need only will His own goodness necessarily and other things contingently. Therefore, these other things need not be willed with absolute necessity. To be sure, it is necessary to God's will that He will His own nature necessarily, but it is not necessary to God's will that He will created goods necessarily. Hence, it was not

necessary that God will anything other than Himself. However, God did will things other than Himself. God willed these other things voluntarily (see Thomas Aquinas, ***ST***, la.19.3, ad 3).

Also, God's will is unchangeable because He is omniscient, and so what He knows will be, will be. God's will is in perfect accord with His knowledge; therefore, God's will is unchangeable. This does not mean that God does not will that some things change—it means that God's will does not change, even though He does will that other things change (ibid., la.19.7).

Of course, the Bible speaks of God repenting, but God repents only in a metaphorical sense, as humans view it. Actually, God knew from eternity whether people would repent, and God's will includes intermediate causes, such as human free choice. God knows what the intermediate causes will choose to do, and God's will is in accord with His unchangeable knowledge. Therefore, God's will never changes, since He wills what He knows will happen. That is to say, what is willed by conditional necessity does not violate human freedom, since what is willed is conditioned on humans freely choosing it. So God can will unchangeably things that can change.

Objection Nine—Based on the Nature of God's Love

Some neotheists claim that "the statement ***God is love*** is as close as the Bible comes to giving us a definition of the divine reality" (Pinnock, ***OG***, 18). Again, "Love is the essence of the divine reality, the basic source from which ***all*** of God's attributes arise" (ibid., 21). Their argument for the possibility of change in a God of love goes like this:

(1) Essentially, God is love.
(2) Love, of necessity, involves the possibility of change.
(3) Therefore, God's love necessitates the possibility of change.

The crucial second premise is supported by a raft of attempts to show that God's love is a dynamic, interactive activity whereby God engages in a give-and-take interaction with His creatures. Love suffers with the loved one (ibid., 46), and,

hence, God cannot be impassible, as traditional theism affirms.

Response to Objection Nine

At the outset there is something strangely self-defeating about this argument against God's unchangeableness—the very first premise begins with a God who cannot change: God is "essentially" love. If God by His very nature is love and cannot be otherwise, then God cannot change in His nature. Indeed, neotheists admit the same when they affirm that "God's essential nature and His ultimate purpose did not change" (ibid., 28). But is the premise that "God cannot change in His essential nature as love" consistent with their conclusion from this premise that God must be able to change because He is love?

Further, the second premise appears to be a classic example of the quip that God made man in His own image, and man returned the compliment! Who says God has to love the way we love? To be sure, human love is changing, because human beings are changing beings. However, theism affirms that God is an unchanging Being and, therefore, He must love in an unchanging way. God can do whatever good we can do, but He does not do it in the ***way*** we do it. He does it in an infinitely better way than we do—an unchanging way. Even neotheists acknowledge that God is infinite, ontologically independent, uncreated, and transcendent. But even granting that God is infinite demands that He is and does things differently than finite beings do. Hence, the argument against immutability from the nature of God's love fails to prove its point.

GOD'S ETERNALITY

Another battlefront in the current debate about the nature of God is the traditional attribute of eternality (or nontemporality). Classical theism affirms that God is above and beyond time. Again, God has no past, present, or future; He simply has an enduring eternal present. This attribute of nontemporality is unanimously rejected by contemporary process thought, both outside and inside evangelicalism.

DEFINITION OF ETERNALITY

For traditional theism, eternality does not mean time without beginning and endless time. An infinite number of moments is impossible: If an infinite number of moments occurred before today, then today would never have come, since it is impossible to traverse an infinite number of moments (yet the time up to today has been traversed).
There is no end of an infinite, but today is the end of all previous moments. Today has arrived; hence, an infinite number of moments could not have occurred before today. Eternality means nontemporality or timelessness.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S ETERNALITY

From beginning to end, the Bible declares that God is beyond time. That God existed beyond time is clear from the very first verse: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). Since time does not begin until the universe does, this places God beyond time. Indeed, according to Hebrews, God created time: "In these last days he has spoken to us by his Son … through whom he framed the ages" (Heb. 1:2 ***Rotterdam***). The word ***ages*** (Gk: ***aionos***) is not a reference to the material nature of the universe (Gk: ***kosmos***), but to its unfolding temporal periods. In Exodus 3:14 God said to Moses, "I am who I am." In contrast to many contemporary linguists (who are heavily influenced by process thought), this is best taken as a reference to God's self-existence. Jesus sanctioned this meaning when He said, "Before Abraham was born, I am!" (John 8:58). It would have made no sense to say, "Before Abraham was born, I will become what I will become," as many current scholars would like to translate Exodus 3:14. As the self-existent One before anything else existed, God is prior to time (nontemporal). Psalm 90:2 says, "Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God."
Isaiah 57:15 declares, "For this is what the high and lofty One says—he who lives forever.…" First Corinthians 2:7 says, "We speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began." In Jesus' great high priestly prayer in John 17:5, He declared, "Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world

began." Before the world began is before time began; thus, Jesus is proclaiming God's timelessness.

Paul spoke of "this grace [that] was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time" (2 Tim. 1:9). He also spoke of "the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time" (Titus 1:2). The word ***time*** (Gk: ***chronos***) is time as we experience it; that is, a succession of changing moments that forms a past, a present, and a future. Christ is said to be before all of this; He is literally ***eternal*** (not temporal); He brought the temporal world into existence (John 1:3; Col. 1:16). Hebrews 1:2 informs us that "he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe" (lit: "***framed the ages***"). Jude 25 proclaims God's eternality in these words: "To the only God our Savior be glory … through Jesus Christ our Lord, ***before all ages***, now and forevermore!" (emphasis added).

God not only created the ages, but He was also before the ages. To be before time and to have made time is not to be in time. Therefore, the Bible teaches that it was not a creation ***in*** time, but a creation ***of*** time that God accomplished at the beginning. The Creator of time can be no more temporal than the Creator of the contingent can be contingent or the Creator of an effect can be an effect Himself.

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S ETERNALITY

God's eternality can be inferred from several other attributes. These include His immutability, infinity, pure actuality, and necessity. Time involves characteristics that are incompatible with these attributes.

Eternality Follows From Immutability

God is an immutable Being (see under main headings above), and an immutable Being cannot change. Whatever is in time changes, for time is a measurement based on change. Therefore, God cannot be in time; if He were, then He would be changing.

Eternality Follows From Infinity

Further, God is an infinite Being, and an infinite Being has no limits. A temporal being has limits; it is limited by time. Hence, God cannot be a temporal being—He must be nontemporal.

Eternity Follows From Pure Actuality

God is Pure Actuality; as such He has no potentiality. Whatever is temporal has potentiality; thus, God is not temporal—if He were, then He too would have potentiality, which a Being of pure actuality does not have. So unlike time, God has no past or future, only a present: He is an eternal Now. Consequently, God does not foresee the future; He simply sees the future in His eternal present (or Now).

Eternality Follows From Necessity

A necessary Being has no possibility (potentiality) in its being not to exist. What has no potentiality in its being cannot change. Time involves change; it follows, therefore, that a necessary Being cannot be temporal—it must be eternal.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S ETERNALITY

From earliest times the Fathers of the church have been virtually unanimous in their declaration that God is a timeless Being. This is evident in their writings as well as their creeds.

The Patristic View of God's Eternality

Irenaeus

Irenaeus said, "Look for Him that is above the times, Him who has no times" (***SVIE***, 3 in Roberts and Donaldson, ***ANF***, 1).

Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 150–c. 215)

Clement said, "God is without beginning, and produces both the beginning and the ending" (***S***, 5.14).

Tertullian (c. 155–c. 225)

Tertullian referred to God's eternality in his discussion of fasting: "If the eternal God will not hunger, as He testifies through Isaiah [40:28, 70], this will be the time for man to be made equal with God, when he lives without food" (***OF***, 8.6).

Peter, Bishop of Alexandria (d. 311)

Peter said, "For then, as they say, our eternal God also, the Maker and Creator of all things, framed all things" (Tertullian, ***OF*** in Roberts and Donaldson, ***ANF***, IV). Also, various prayers of thanksgiving, prayers over the dead, and other forms of prayers are often made to God, addressing Him as the "eternal God" (***CHA***, 8.2.5, 8.2.9, 8.2.12, 8.3.20, 8.3.22, 8.4.38).
Peter added,

> Since this [eternity] is the property of God, it will belong to God alone, whose property it is—of course, on this ground, that if it can be ascribed to any other being, it will no longer be the property of God, but will belong, along with Him, to that being also to which it is ascribed, (in Tertullian, *AH*, 3 in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, III)

Dionysius the Great (c. 200–264)

Dionysius taught,

> Now this … “I am” [*ego eimi*, in John 8:58] expresses His eternal subsistence. For if He is the reflection of the eternal light He must also be eternal Himself.… God is eternal light, having neither beginning nor end. And along with Him there is the reflection, also without beginning, and everlasting. The Father, then, being eternal, the Son is also eternal, being light of light; and if God is the light, Christ is the reflection. (*OJ*, 8)

Alcuin (c. 732–804)

Alcuin wrote that the Word of God, which “is coeternal with God the Father, was before all time” (in Thomas Aquinas, *Catena Aurea*, John 11).

Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 315–c. 387)

Cyril said, “God is alone, alone unbegotten, without beginning, change, or variation; neither begotten of another, nor having another to succeed Him in His life; who neither began to live in time, nor endeth ever” (***CL***, 2.7, 4.4). The fact that God stands outside of time and is the Creator of it places these Fathers squarely in line with the testimony that we have seen in the Hebrew Scriptures. Cyril reasoned about Christ,

> Two fathers He hath: one, David, according to the flesh, and one, God, His Father in a divine manner. As the Son of David, He is subject to time, and to handling, and to genealogical descent: but as Son according to the Godhead, He is subject neither to time nor to place, nor to genealogical descent: for His generation who shall declare God is a Spirit. “[For] the Son Himself says of the Father, The Lord said unto Me, Thou art My Son, to-day have I begotten Thee. Now this today is not recent, but eternal: a timeless today, before all ages. From the womb, before the morning star, have I begotten Thee” (*First Catechetical Lecture of Our Holy Father Cyril*, 11.5 in Schaff, *NPNF*, 2, 7.208).

Ignatius (d. c. 110)

Ignatius declared that Jesus Christ, as the only begotten Son and Word, existed "before time began, but who afterwards became also man, of Mary the virgin." For

> "the Word was made flesh." Being incorporeal, He was in the body; being impassible, He was in a passible body; being immortal, He was in a mortal body; being life, He became subject to corruption, that He might free our souls from death and corruption.

Ignatius went on to say that the Son of God "was begotten before time began, and established all things according to the will of the Father" (***TE***, 7).

Hilary of Potiers (c. 315–c. 367)

Hilary asserted,

> His [Christ's] nature forbids us to say that He ever began to be, for His birth lies beyond the beginnings of time. But while we confess Him existent before all ages, we do not hesitate to pronounce Him born in timeless eternity, for we believe His birth, though we know it never had a beginning. (*OT*, 9.57 in Schaff, *NPNF*, 2:9)

Hilary added, "Whatever … is created is made in the beginning … [but] the Word was what it is, and is not bounded by any time, nor commenced therein, seeing It was not made in the beginning, but was" (ibid., 100.13 in ibid.).

John Chrysostom (347–407)

Speaking of Christ in regard to John 1:1, Chrysostom said,

> But are not "made" and "was" altogether different? For in like manner as the word is, when spoken of man, signifies the present only, but when applied to God, that which always and eternally is; so too was, predicated of our nature, signifies the past, but predicated of God, eternity, (in Thomas Aquinas, *CA*,

John, 7)

The Medieval View of God's Eternality

From the fourth to the thirteenth century (and beyond), there was virtually unanimous consent on the nature of God as an a-temporal Being. Augustine set the stage with his extensive references to God's eternality.

Augustine

According to Augustine, God possesses eternality because He possesses aseity (self-existence). "What is 'that which ***is***'? That which is everlasting.… But what is that 'which ***is***,' save He who when He sent Moses, said unto him, I Am Who Am (Ex. 3:14)?" (***EBP***, 121.5). "God always is, nor has He been and is not, nor is but has not been, but as He never will not be; so He never was not" (***OT***, 14.15).

As to how God relates to time, Augustine asserted,

> The distinguishing mark between time and eternity is that the former does not exist without some movement and change, while in the latter there is no change at all.

Now,

> since God, in whose eternity there is absolutely no change, is the Creator and Ruler of time, I do not see how we can say that He created the world after a space of time had elapsed unless we admit, also, that previously some creature had existed whose movements would mark the course of time. (*CG*, 11.6)

God did not create in time, for there *was* no time before He created a changing world. His act was not a creation *in* time, but a creation *of* time. Augustine declared,

> The world was made not in time but together with time. For, what is made in time is made after one period of time and before another, namely, after a past and before a future time. But, there could have been no past time, since there was nothing created by whose movements and change time could be measured, (ibid., 11.6)

God's eternity is qualitatively different from time:

> In the Eternal nothing passeth away, but that the whole is present; but no time is wholly present; and let him see that … both past and future [are] created and issue from that which is always present. (*C*, 11.11)

What God does in time He willed from eternity:

> Thou callest us, therefore, to understand the Word, God with Thee, God, which is spoken eternally, and by it are all things spoken eternally. For what was spoken was not finished, and another spoken until all were spoken; but all things at once and for ever. For otherwise have we time and change, and not a true eternity nor a true immortality, (ibid., 11.7)

Thus, God created time from eternity. Augustine asked,

> For whence could innumerable ages pass by which Thou didst not make, since Thou are the Author and Creator of all ages? Or what times should those be which were not made by Thee? Or how should they pass by if they had not been? [But] if before heaven and earth there was no time, why is it asked, What didst Thou then? For there was no "then" when time was not. (ibid., 11.13)

Temporal creation "is compatible with the immutability of God's decision. This being so, they should also believe that the world could be made in time without God who made it having to change the eternal decision of His will" (***CG***, 11.4). As the Creator of time, God existed beyond time, but not in time. Augustine wrote,

> Nor dost Thou by time precede time; else wouldest not Thou precede all times. But in the excellency of an ever-present eternity Thou precedest all times past, and survivest all future times.… [Hence,] it is silly for them to excogitate a past time during which God was unoccupied, for the simple reason that there was no such thing as time before the universe was made, (ibid., 11.5)

Furthermore, according to Augustine,

> God does not see things in time.… God declared, "O man, that which My Scripture saith, I say; and yet doth that speak in time; but time has no reference to My Word, because My Word existeth in equal eternity with Myself.… And so when ye see those things in time, I see them not in time; as when ye speak them in time, I speak them not in time" (*C*, 13.29).

What is more, God's knowledge is independent of time:

> Neither does His attention pass from thought to thought, for His knowledge embraces everything in a single spiritual contuition. His knowledge of what happens in time, like His movement of what changes in time, is completely independent of time.... He could not have been so perfect a Creator without so perfect a knowledge that nothing could be added to it by seeing what He created. (*CG*, 11.21)

Anselm

Anselm argued,

> It is evident that this supreme Substance is without beginning and without end; that it has neither past, nor future, nor the temporal, that is, transient present in which we live; since its age, or eternity, which is nothing else than itself, is immutable and without parts. (*SABW*, 83)

Thus, "He exists before all things and transcends all things. … The eternity of God is present as a whole with him: while other things have not yet that part of their eternity which is still to be and have no longer that part which is past" (ibid., 26). God "does not exist finitely, at some place or time, it must exist everywhere and always, that is, in every place and at every time" (ibid., 73). For Anselm,

> True eternity belongs only to that substance which alone, as we have proved, was not created, but is the creator, since true eternity is conceived to be free from the limitations of beginning and end; and this is proved to be consistent with the nature of no created being, from the very fact that all such have been created from nothing, (ibid., 83)

Further, what God knows is known eternally:

> This is true whether God's willing and causing are understood in terms of the immutable present of eternity or in terms of the temporal order. According to the former, nothing is past or future, but everything exists together without any change. (*TIR*, 159)

For “all things are always present to Him, and so He does not have ***foreknowledge*** of future things, but ***knowledge*** of present things” (***TFE***, 185). God’s present is like our past:

> In this respect the temporal past is more like the eternal present than is the temporal present. For what is temporally past can never be not-past, just as what is eternally present can never be not-present; but all temporally present things which pass away with time do become not-present. (*TIR*, 162)

What is more,

> A thing’s existence in time is so different from its existence in eternity that at a given moment something may not be present in time which is present in eternity, or something may not be present in time which is present in eternity, or something may be past in time without being past in eternity, or may be future in time without being future in eternity. [So] when we realize this, we have no basis for denying that something can be mutable in time while being immutable in eternity, (ibid., 163)

God sees all of time at once: “This is due to the very nature of eternity, which encompasses all time and everything whatsoever that exists at any time” (ibid., 164). “For yesterday and today and tomorrow have no existence, except in time; but thou, although nothing exists without thee, nevertheless dost not exist in space or time, but all things exist in thee” (***SABW***, 25).

> As an age of time contains all temporal things, so thy eternity contains even the ages of time themselves. And these are indeed an age, because of their indivisible unity; but ages, because of their endless measurability. (ibid., 27)

Thomas Aquinas

Aquinas affirmed that “eternity is nothing but God Himself. Hence God is not called eternal, as if He were in any way measured; but the idea of measurement is there taken according to apprehension of our mind alone” (***ST***, la.10.2). “Eternity truly and properly so called is in God alone, because eternity follows on immutability; as appears from the first article. But God alone is immutable” (ibid.).

Aquinas offered several arguments in support of this conclusion. The first argument goes like this: Whatever exists in time can be computed according to

its befores and afters. However, a changeless Being has no befores or afters; it is always the same. Consequently, God must be timeless.

Time is duration characterized by substantial (e.g., burning wood) and accidental changes; aeviternity (or *aevum*) is duration characterized by accidental changes (e.g., angels can increase in knowledge by divine infusion, and they have changeableness with regard to choice, intelligence, affections, and places—***ST***, la.10.6, body), but with no substantial changes in aeviternity (angels are immutable in their level of grace and charity). What is true of the angels is also true of the elect in heaven.

Again, time is defined as a measurement in terms of befores and afters. God has no before or after, since He is changeless. It follows, then, that He must be timeless, for if he were in time, He could be measured according to a before and an after, which implies change.

In addition, whatever is in time has succession of one state after another. From this Aquinas concluded that whatever is immutable is not temporal. This argument stresses another aspect of time: Whatever is temporal has successive states, one after the other. But as an immutable being God has no changing states, one after another; therefore, God cannot be temporal.

In brief, total immutability necessarily implies eternity (ibid., la.10.2), for whatever changes substantially is in time and can be computed according to befores and afters. Whatever does not change cannot be in time, since it has no different states by which befores and afters can be computed; all are the same—it never changes. Therefore, whatever does not change is not temporal; God is eternal.

Not only is God eternal, but He ***alone*** is eternal (ibid., la.10.3). The reason for this is that God alone is essentially immutable, since all creatures can cease to exist. But, as we have seen, eternity necessarily follows from immutability, and from this, that God alone is essentially eternal.

Aquinas (ibid., la.10.4) distinguishes eternity from endless time for several reasons (see Geisler, ***TAEA***, chapter 8).

First, whatever is essentially whole is essentially different from what has parts. Eternity differs from time in this way (eternity is a Now; time has now and then); hence, eternity is essentially different from time. In other words, God's eternity is not divided; it is all present to Him in His eternal Now. So it must be essentially different from time, which comes only a moment at a time.

Second, endless time is not eternity; it is simply more of time. Eternity differs in kind from time; that is, it differs essentially, not merely accidentally, from time.

Endless time differs only accidentally from time because it is only an elongation of time. Since endless time is simply time—just more of it—eternity must differ from it essentially. To state it another way, more of the same thing is essentially the same thing; therefore, endless time does not differ essentially from time.
Third, an eternal Being cannot change, whereas time involves change by which the measurements of befores and afters can be made. Thus, an eternal Being, such as God is, cannot change. In other words,

(1) Whatever can be computed according to befores and afters is not eternal.
(2) Endless time can be computed according to befores and afters.
(3) Hence, endless time is not the same as eternity.

The eternal is changeless, but what can be computed by its befores and afters has changed. It follows, then, that the eternal cannot be endless time. It must be something qualitatively different, not just different in quantity.
Fourth, Aquinas argued that there is a crucial difference in the "now" of time and the "Now" of eternity (ibid., la.10.4, ad. 2). The now of time is movable, but the Now of eternity is not. Eternity is not movable in any way; therefore, the Now of eternity is not the same as the now of time. The eternal Now is unchanging, while the now of time is ever changing. There is only an analogy between time and eternity, not an identity. God's Now has no past or future; time's now does.
God is Pure Act (Actuality) as such, unmeasured by any potentiality. Angels are acts as received in pure forms that wholly receive their actuality from creation. Man is act as received in form/matter (soul/body) that progressively receives his actuality. In brief, God actually endures, but He endures as Pure Actuality. Since He has no potentiality, He cannot endure progressively. He endures in a much higher way.
Another way to understand the difference between God's eternity and time is to recognize that time is an accidental change, not a substantial change. A substantial change is a change in what something ***is***, an accidental change is a change in what something ***has***. Aquinas pointed out that time is an accidental change, and only humanity, not God or angels, has accidental change. So only humanity is in time. Angels undergo substantial change (creation), but this does not involve time. The only mode of being that existed before angels began was an eternal mode (God).

A substantial change (for men or angels) is not a change in time, for no substantial change has both a before and after in time. Eternity is one pole, and time the other. Hence, substantial change for man is a change into or out of time, but not a change in time. God cannot change substantially ***or*** accidentally. Since He is a necessary Being, He cannot go out of existence. Since He is a simple Being, He has no accidents. Therefore, God cannot be temporal in any way, since time involves change.

The Reformers on God's Eternality

The Reformers are consistent with the views of earlier orthodox theologians. They insisted that God is beyond time and experiences no sequential changes.

Martin Luther

Luther explained that God does not count time in sequence or consecutively, one year before another:

> God grasps everything in a moment, the beginning, the middle, and the end of the entire human race and of all time. And what we consider and measure according to the sequence of time as a very long, extended tapeline, He sees in its entirety, as though wound together into a ball. And so both the life and the death of the last and the first human being are no farther apart for Him than a single moment. (*WLS*, 542)

He added,

> Look crosswise at a long tree that lies before you. Then you can bring into the range of your vision both ends at once. This you are unable to do if you look at it lengthwise. By our reason we are able to look at time only according to its duration (
> *nach der Lange*
>). We must count one year after another from Adam to history's last day. But to God all is atone point. (*WL*, 542)

John Calvin

Calvin compared such a view with that of biblical history on which the "faith of the Church might lean without seeking any other God than Him whom Moses sets forth as the Creator and Architect of the world." He then said that this history may be contrasted with the fables of the ancient world "as a means of giving a clearer manifestation of the eternity of God as contrasted with the birth of creation, and thereby inspiring us with higher admiration" (***ICR***, 1.14.1). He added,

> We necessarily understand that the Word was begotten of the Father before all ages. [The apostles] tell us that the worlds were created by the Son, and that he sustains all things by his mighty word (Heb. 1:2). For we here see that *word* is used for the nod or command of the Son, who is himself the eternal and essential Word of the Father. (ibid., 1.13.7)

The Post-Reformation Theologians on God's Eternality

Right on into the modern world, the traditional view of God's eternality held sway. This is true from the Reformers until the rise of process theology in the twentieth century. Indeed, most of the great theologians have understood that God's eternality and His immutability went hand in hand. No significant interruption in this position is observable until the introduction of process theology by Alfred North Whitehead.

Jacob Arminius

Arminius wrote, "So that what man so ever is called in time, was from all eternity predestinated to be called, and to be called in that state, time, place, mode, and with that efficacy, in and with which he was predestinated" [Eph. 3:5, 6, 9–11; James 1:17, 18; 2 Tim. 1:9] (***D***, 16.15). He added the evidence of Acts 15:18 and Ephesians 1:4 that God's decrees are from the beginning of the world. "If it were otherwise, God might be charged with mutability" (ibid.).

Francis Turretin

Turretin said,

> The infinity of God follows his simplicity and is equally diffused through the other attributes of God, and by it the divine nature is conceived as free from all limit in imperfection: as to essence (by incomprehensibility) and as to duration (by eternity) and as to circumscription, in reference to place (by immensity). (*IET*, 1.3.8.1)

He believed that the concept of eternity is related to the immenseness of God's Being:

> After the infinity of God with respect to essence, the same is to be considered with respect to place and time by which he is conceived as uncircumscribed by any limits (*aperigraptos*) of place or time. The former is called immensity, the latter eternity, (ibid., 1.3.9.1)

He added, "We maintain that God is free from every difference of time, and no less from succession than from beginning and end" (ibid., 1.3.10.1). Elsewhere he elaborated:

> The eternity of God cannot have succession because his essence, with which *it* is really identified, admits none. This is so both because *it* is perfectly simple and immutable (and therefore rejects the change of former into latter, of past into present, of present into future, which succession involves), and because it is unmeasurable, as being the first and independent. However that which continues by succession can in some way be measured, (ibid., 1.3.10.5)

Jonathan Edwards

Edwards declared,

> Corollary 1. How impossible is it, that the world should exist from Eternity, without a mind.
>
> Corollary 2. Since it is so, and that absolute Nothing is such a dreadful contradiction; hence we learn the necessity of the Eternal Existence of an All-comprehending Mind; and that it is the complication of all contradictions to

deny such a mind. (*NM*, 28)

Elsewhere he added,

> Because it is evident, by both Scripture and reason, that God is infinitely, eternally, unchangeably, and independently glorious and happy: that he cannot be profited by, or receive any thing from, the creature or be the subject of any sufferings or diminution of his glory and felicity, from any other being. (*EWGCW* in *WJE*, 97)

John Wesley

Wesley believed that God is eternal. As we have seen, he wrote, "In the evening I published the great decree of God, eternal, unchangeable" (***CW***, 336).

Stephen Charnock

> He [God] neither began with the beginning of time, nor will expire with the end of it; he did not begin when he made himself known to our fathers, but his being did precede the creation of the world, before any created being was formed, and any time settled. (*EAG*, 1:278)
>
> His eternity is evident, by the name God gives himself [Ex. 3:14]: "And God said unto Moses, I am that I am; thus shalt thou say to the children of Israel, 'I Am hath sent me unto you.' "This is the name whereby he is distinguished from all creatures; I Am is his proper name. This description being in the present tense, shows that his essence knows no past, nor future; if it were *he was*, it would intimate he were not now what he once was; if it were *he will be*, it would intimate he were not yet what he will be; but *I Am*; I am the only being, the root of all beings; he is therefore, at the greatest distance from not being, and that is eternal, (ibid., 1:287)

Further,

> Eternity is a perpetual duration, which hath neither beginning nor end; time both. Those things are said to be time that have a beginning, grow up by degrees, have succession of parts; eternity is contrary to time, and is therefore a permanent and immutable state; a perfect possession of life without any variation; it comprehends in itself all years, all ages, all periods of ages; it

> never begins; it endures after every duration of time, and never ceaseth; it doth as much outrun time, as it went before the beginning of it: time supposeth something before it; but there can be nothing before eternity; it were not then eternity, (ibid., 1:279–80)

OBJECTIONS TO GOD'S ETERNALITY

Virtually all objections leveled against God's timeless eternality are similar to those leveled against His immutability (see under main headings above); the heart of the objections against God relating to time is that an unchangeable Being cannot relate to a changing world. However, time is a computation based on change; hence, if God can relate to a changing world, He would have no problem relating to a temporal world, which is a world of change. Nonetheless, a few more objections can be discussed at this point.

Objection One—Based on the Creation of a Temporal World

Among other things, all forms of theism believe "that God has the power to intervene in the world, interrupting (if need be) the normal causal sequences" (Pinnock, ***OG***, 109). But if God can act in time then, argue neotheists, God must be temporal, for whatever acts in the temporal world is part of the temporal process, and the temporal process involves a past, a present, and a future. When God acted in bringing Israel from Egypt, there was a time before and a time after that redemptive act. Thus, God is tainted with time by the very fact that He acts in time.

Response to Objection One

First of all, it should be pointed out that there is a difference between saying God created ***in*** time and that He is the Creator ***of*** time. There was no time before God made the temporal world; time began with its creation. God "framed the ages" (Heb. 1:2 ***Rotherdam***; cf. John 17:5), so God was ***ontologically*** prior to time, but

not ***chronologically*** prior to it. Therefore, this is no impediment to God's creating a world in time without Himself being temporal. No temporal continuum existed before He created the world; hence, it was not necessary for Him to choose a moment in time in which to create. Rather, from all eternity, God chose to create the temporal continuum itself, which has a beginning.

It is also worthy of note that it is equally incoherent to speak of God being eternal before creation and temporal after creation.[2] For a theist, creating the world does not change the nature of God. The world is not created *ex deo* ("out of God"); that is pantheism. And for theism, the world is created *ex nihilo* ("out of nothing"). Consequently, God does not change "internally," that is, in His essence, by creating something else. The only thing that changes is "external," the relationship of the world to Him.

Prior to creation, the world had no relationship to God, since it did not exist. At creation and after, God became "Creator" for the first time. (It is not possible for God to be a Creator until He creates something.) Prior to creation, He was God, but not Creator. That is, at creation God gained a new ***relationship***, but not any new ***attributes***. He did not change in His ***essence***, but in His external ***activity***. There is no change in what God ***is***, but in what He ***has done***. The change is only in the effect, not in the Cause (God), since He caused from eternity all that was later to be effected in time. Failure to make this distinction leads to the neotheistic confusion of speaking of God changing in His nonessential nature.

Further, this objection makes the same errors that were noted in the previous response. It assumes that to act in time is to be temporal. It does not demonstrate that the ***Actor*** is temporal; only that His ***acts*** are temporal. Classical theists do not deny that God's ***actions*** are temporal—they only insist that God's ***attributes*** are not temporal. God cannot have a "nonessential" nature. "Nonessential" means something God has but does not need to have. "Nature" is what is essential to a thing. For example, human nature is essential to humans; without it we would not be human. So a nonessential nature is a contradiction in terms. Since nature means essence, it would be a nonessential essence, which is nonsense.

To state the point another way, even neotheists recognize that there is a real difference between an uncreated Creator and a created world. One has no beginning and the other does. One has no temporal starting point, and the other does. In this same way, classical theists insist that God is beyond time, even though He made time. This should not be difficult to understand. After all, every

creator is beyond his creation the way an artist is beyond his painting or a composer is beyond his composition. As Stephen Charnock put it,

> The eternity of this decreed [creation] did not make the world to be in being and actually created from eternity; so God decreed immutably that the world so created should continue for such a time; the decree is immutable if the world perish at that time, and would not be immutable if the world did endure beyond that time that God hath fixed for the duration of it.... Though there be a change in the effects, there is no change in the will [of God]. (*EAG*, 1:328)

Objection Two—Based on the Notion That Statements Cannot Be Made About a Nontemporal God

It is argued that no references from our temporal perspective can be made to a nontemporal Being:

(1) All statements made by a temporal being are temporal;
(2) But God is nontemporal;
(3) Therefore, none of our statements about God can really apply to Him.

(Yet we do believe statements can be made about God, such as those in both special revelation [the Bible] and general revelation—Rom. 1:19–20; Acts 14:17. See Volume 1, chapter 4.)

Response to Objection Two

This objection fails to see that it is not really an argument against all talk about God, but only against talking about Him in temporal terms. Of course, a nontemporal Being cannot properly be referred to in temporal terms. Neither can an uncreated Being be referred to in terms appropriate only to a creature. But the objector believes that the Creator can be spoken of in some terms. So rather than eliminate all God-talk, it calls for analogous God-talk (see Volume 1, chapter 9).

Temporal language does not fit a nontemporal Being. But it does not follow from this that no language is appropriately used of a nontemporal God.
It's true that temporal statements cannot be applied to God univocally. If they could, then God would have to be nontemporal. On the other hand, unless we are willing to accept the total (self-defeating) agnostic view that no statements can be applied to an eternal God (including this statement), then we must accept some form of analogy. This is precisely what classical theists argue, namely, that all finite and limited temporal conditions must be removed from a term before it applies to God. Hence, if we say that God is good, He cannot be good in any temporal or changing sense of the term—He can only be eternally and unchangeably good.

Objection Three—Based on the Incarnation

The Bible declares that Jesus is God (Col. 2:9; Heb. 1:8) and that He entered this temporal world (John 1:14; 1 Tim. 3:16). By simple logic it would seem to follow that in Christ God lived a temporal life: To deny this would appear to be a denial of the deity of Christ. But this would mean that God is a temporal being—here the Creator became part of His creation. Hence, it would seem that the incarnation of God in human flesh is evidence that God, at least in Christ, became a temporal being. In point of fact, the premises seem to be true (according to orthodox Christianity), and the conclusion is validly drawn from them:

(1) God became human in the incarnation of Christ.
(2) Human beings are by nature temporal beings.
(3) Therefore, God by nature became a temporal being in the Incarnation.

Response to Objection Three

As persuasive as this argument may seem, it is based on an unorthodox assumption, namely, that the divine nature became human in the Incarnation.

The Eternal did ***not*** become temporal, nor did the divine nature become human at the Incarnation any more than the human nature became divine. As a matter of fact, this is the monophysite heresy condemned at the Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 454: It is a confusion of the two natures of Christ. In the Incarnation, the divine nature did not become a human nature or vice versa. Rather, the divine ***person***—the second person of the Trinity—became human; that is, He assumed a human nature in addition to His divine nature. Notice carefully the words of Scripture: "The Word was God.… The ***Word*** became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:1, 14, emphasis added). It does not say that ***God*** became flesh. It is as impossible for God to become man as it is for an infinite to become a finite or an uncreated to become created. As Athanasius (c. 293–373) would say, the Incarnation was not the subtraction of Deity, but the addition of humanity. God the Son did not change His divine nature; rather, He added a distinct human nature to it. So the plausibility of the neotheist's argument is based on heresy. Once one rejects the monophysite like-error, this argument against God's immutability falls apart.

CONCLUSION

God's immutability and eternality are firmly grounded in Scripture, church history, and sound reasoning. Contemporary attempts to undermine these fundamental teachings about God have not made their case. Other than the fallacious procedure of taking anthropomorphism literally, there is no biblical support for a changing God. On the contrary, there are numerous affirmations that God does not and cannot change. Furthermore, in the whole history of the Christian church until modern times, one looks in vain for any major orthodox teacher who affirmed that God can change in His nature. Indeed, there are solid biblical, philosophical, and historical arguments from God's pure actuality, simplicity, necessity, infinity, and perfection that God is unchangeable and eternal by nature.

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CHAPTER FIVE

GOD'S IMPASSIBILITY AND INFINITY

Impassibility is a largely misunderstood and, currently, greatly debated attribute of God. Impassibility affirms that God is without changing ***passions***, but it does not deny that He has different ***feelings***.

DEFINITION OF IMPASSIBILITY

The root meaning of "impassibility" is that God is not passible or subject to passion (im = not and passible = having passion). God cannot undergo passion or suffering; nothing in the created universe can make God feel pain or inflict misery on Him.

This does not mean that God has no feelings, but simply that His feelings are not the results of actions imposed on Him by others. His feelings flow from His eternal and unchangeable nature (see chapter 4).

Neither does impassible mean immobile: God can and does act. However, others do not move Him, for He is the Unmoved Mover of all else. Nor is God "the Most Moved Mover" (see Pinnock, ***MMM***); rather, He is the Most Moving Mover, since ultimately everything is moved by Him. All action in the universe springs ultimately from God: "In him we live and move and have our being"

(Acts 17:28). “He is not served by human hands, ***as if he needed anything***, because he himself gives all men life and breath and ***everything*** else” (Acts 17:25, emphasis added).

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR GOD’S IMPASSIBILITY

The biblical basis for impassibility is found in many verses on His self-sufficiency and immutability.

Verses on God’s Self-Sufficiency

That God cannot be changed by external causes is based in part on His self-sufficiency. Scripture affirms repeatedly that God needs absolutely nothing. “To the LORD your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it” (Deut. 10:14). “Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand” (1 Chron. 29:14). “Can a man be of benefit to God? Can even a wise man benefit him? What pleasure would it give the Almighty if you were righteous? What would he gain if your ways were blameless?” (Job 22:2–3). “If you sin, how does that affect him? If your sins are many, what does that do to him? If you are righteous, what do you give to him, or what does he receive from your hand?” (Job 35:6–7). “The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it” (Ps. 24:1). “Every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills.… If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it” (Ps. 50:10–12). “Who has understood the mind of the LORD, or instructed him as his counselor? Whom did the LORD consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way? … Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom” (Isa. 40:13–14, 28). “Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen” (Rom. 11:35–36).

Verses on God's Immutability

Not only is God so totally self-sufficient that He is unaffected by anything or anyone else, but He is also completely unchanging in His being, will, and purposes. "God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind" (Num. 23:19). Indeed, "It is impossible for God to lie" (Heb. 6:18) or change any other attribute (see chapter 4). Hence, God cannot undergo changing feelings; how He feels is determined by His own unchangeable Being.

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S IMPASSIBILITY

In addition to the biblical basis for impassibility, there are many theological reasons that God cannot undergo passion, suffering, or any other change. The most basic ones include the following.

Impassibility Follows From Absolute Perfection

All passion involves a desire for what is lacking. However, God lacks nothing, since He is absolutely perfect (see chapter 14). It follows, therefore, that God cannot have passion. Thus, God is not only impassible in that He cannot suffer action upon Himself by another, but He is also impassible in the sense that He has no passion or craving for something He does not possess. As an absolutely perfect Being, God lacks nothing and, hence, He craves nothing.
In answer to the question "What do you give to the person who has everything?" the most appropriate response is "Admiration!" What can we give to the God who has everything? Worship! This is all we can give Him, and this is all He wants (John 4:24). One thing is certain: We cannot add to God's attributes or perfections by anything we do. We can magnify them, but we cannot multiply them.

Impassibility Follows From Sovereignty

As is shown elsewhere (see chapter 23), God is in sovereign control of the entire universe. God is over all things and not under anything. What is passible is ***under*** something; therefore, God is not passible. Put another way, God controls all creation, but creation does not control Him. That which is not controlled by anything else cannot be subjugated by anything else. Consequently, God does not experience subjugation from any creature; He is literally impassible.

Impassibility Follows From Uncausality

Since God is the Cause of all things (including the power of free choice),[1] He cannot be caused by anything. He is the uncaused Cause, and as such He is not caused by anything else. An uncaused Cause is never acted upon; rather, it acts upon other things. Whatever undergoes suffering is acted upon by another; therefore, God cannot suffer—He is impassible.

Impassibility Follows From Pure Actuality

As was demonstrated earlier (in chapter 2), God is Pure Actuality; He has no potentiality. Whatever has no potentiality cannot be acted upon by another, for to be acted upon by another cause is to have some potentiality that can be actualized. God has no potentiality to be actualized; therefore, it follows that God, as Pure Actuality, cannot undergo passion or suffering.

Impassibility Follows From Immutability

Also, as noted above, God cannot change. All suffering involves change in the sufferer; consequently, God cannot undergo suffering. That suffering involves change is clear from the fact that a state of non-suffering is different from a state of suffering. Whatever changes moves from a state of potentiality to a state of actuality, and given that God cannot change, it follows that He cannot suffer.
In addition to the strong biblical and theological bases for God's impassibility, there is very substantial historical confirmation of this doctrine. The evidence begins with the early Fathers and continues with some misunderstanding and little interruption until modern times.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S IMPASSIBILITY

As with the other attributes of God, the doctrine of impassibility is discussed by numerous Fathers of the church as well as the Reformers and Puritan writers. Contrary to what opponents are currently saying, the evidence of church history shows that impassibility was held to be true.

Early Church Fathers on God's Impassibility

With commendable insight, even the earliest Fathers of the church were able to see the importance of the doctrine of God's impassibility. Often this was because of denials (made by non-Christians) of this teaching.

Ignatius (d. c. 110)

Ignatius wrote in his ***Letter to Polycarp***: "Look for Him who is above all time, eternal and invisible, yet who became visible for our sakes; impalpable and impassible, yet who became passible [in His human nature] on our account" (***LP***, 3 in Roberts and Donaldson, ***ANF***, I).

Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 150–c. 215)

Clement wrote in his ***Miscellanies***: “Be ye perfect as your father, perfectly, by forgiving sins, and forgetting injuries, and living in the habit of passionlessness” (***M***, 7:15 in ibid., II).

Origen (c. 185–c. 254)

Origen affirmed that “God is altogether impassible, and is to be regarded as wholly free from all affections of that kind” (***AFC*** in ***DP***, 2.4.4, Vol. 4:277). He added,

> All these sayings in which God is spoken of as sorrowing or rejoicing or hating or being glad are to be understood as uttered by the Scripture after an allegorical and human manner. The divine nature is altogether separated from every affection of passion and change, and remains unmoved and unshaken forever on that peak of blessedness. (*HN*, 23.2 in Mozley, *IG*, 62)

Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)

Irenaeus wrote against heretics who

> endow Him [God] with human affections and passions. But if they had known the Scriptures, and been taught by the truth, they would have known, beyond doubt, that God is not as men are.... For the Father of all is at a vast distance from those affections and passions which operate among men. (*AH*, 2.13.3 in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, I)

Tertullian (c. 155–c. 225)

Tertullian devoted an entire chapter in ***Against Praxis*** to explaining that the Father did not and could not suffer Himself, but all suffering was endured through the Son. (***AP***, 1.6 in Roberts and Donaldson, ***ANF***, III)

Athenagoras (fl. 2nd century)

Athenagoras declared, “God is uncreated, and, impassible, and indivisible” (***WAPC***, 8 in Roberts and Donaldson, ***ANF***, II).

Dionysius of Alexandria (c. 200–264)

Dionysius insisted that “God is impassible, immutable, unmovable, active in work, but in matter on the contrary subject to passion, changeable, unstable, experiencing modification” (in Mozley, ***IG***, 72).

Gregory Thaumaturgus (c. 213–c. 270)

Gregory Thaumaturgus,[2] in his ***Twelve Topics on the Faith***, explicitly addresses the question “Is God impassible?” with these words:

> If anyone affirms that He who suffered is one, and that He who suffered not is another, and refuses to acknowledge that the Word, who is Himself the impassible and unchangeable God, suffered in the flesh which He had assumed really, yet without mutation, even as it is written, let him be anathema. (*TTF*, 6 in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, VI)

Novatian (c. 200–c. 258)

Novatian, in chapter 5, of his treatise on the Trinity, argued that God is not morally corrupted by emotions such as anger, wrath, or indignation (***CT***, 5 in Roberts and Donaldson, ***ANF***, V).

Methodius (c. 827–869)

Methodius, describing the Incarnation, asserts, “With power He suffered, remaining impassible” (TFHCPC, 3 in Roberts and Donaldson, ***ANF***, V).

Lactantius (c. 240–c. 320)

Lactantius affirmed “the perfection of God, His incorruptibility, impassibility and freedom from all external control” (in Mozley, ***IG***, 48–49). He added, “There is, then, one God, perfect, eternal, incorruptible, incapable of suffering, subject to no circumstance or power” (***EDI***, 3 in op. cit., VII).

Arnobius (fl. 4th century)

Arnobius, in ***Seven Books of Arnobius Against the Heathen***, stated, “Our salvation is not necessary to Him, so that He would gain anything or suffer any loss, if He either made us divine, or allowed us to be annihilated and destroyed by corruption” (***SBAAH***, 2.64 in ibid., VI).

Salvian the Presbyter (c. 400–480)

Salvian, commenting on God’s alleged repentance (in Genesis 6), asserted, “This does not mean that God is affected by emotion or is subject to any passion” (in Louth, ***ACCSOT***, 1.127).

Medieval Church Fathers on God’s Impassibility

The doctrine of God’s impassibility was strongly defended by the great Fathers of the Middle Ages. From Augustine, through Anselm, and culminating in Aquinas, there was an unbroken catena of praise for this attribute of God.

Augustine

Augustine declared,

> Although in God there can be no suffering, (1) and “patience” hath its name in *patiendo*, from suffering, yet a patient God we not only faithfully believe, but also wholesomely confess. But the patience of God, of what kind and how great it is, His, Whom we say to be impassible, (2) yet not impatient, nay even most

> patient, in words to unfold this who can be able? Ineffable is therefore that patience, as is His jealousy, as His wrath, and whatever there is like to these.

He added,

> But be it far from us to surmise that the impassible nature of God is liable to any molestation. But like as He is jealous without any darkening of spirit, (3) wroth without any perturbation, pitiful without any pain, repenteth Him without any wrongness in Him to be set right; so is He patient without aught of passion. (*OP*, 1)

Anselm

Anselm said,

> We affirm that the Divine nature is beyond doubt impassible, and that God cannot at all be brought down from his exaltation, nor toil in anything which he wishes to effect. But we say that the Lord Jesus Christ is very God and very man, one person in two natures, and two natures in one person. [Therefore, when] we speak of God as enduring any humiliation or infirmity, we do not refer to the majesty of that nature, which cannot suffer; but to the feebleness of the human constitution which he assumed. And so there remains no ground of objection against our faith. In this way we intend no debasement of the Divine nature, but we teach that one person is both Divine and human. In the incarnation of God there is no lowering of the Deity; but the nature of man we believe to be exalted. (*CDH*, Book 1, chapter 8)

Thomas Aquinas

Aquinas wrote,

> The passions in question are in sinners in one way; in the just, both the perfect and the imperfect, in another way; in Christ as man in another; and in the first man and the blessed in still another. They are not in the angels or in God at all, because in them there is no sense appetite, of which such passions are movements. (*OT*, 26, 8)

Reformation and Post-Reformation Theologians on God's Impassibility

The doctrine of God's impassibility is not limited to early and medieval Fathers. It continued in and through the Reformation to modern times.

Martin Luther

Luther's statements on this subject are not easy to harmonize. According to Luther's so-called "theology of the cross," there is no God beyond the God revealed in Jesus. He boldly asserts that in Jesus of Nazareth God suffered and was crucified. He is well aware that this is an affront to both philosophical thought and political experience, as kings do not voluntarily suffer for their subjects. Some believe that Luther's theology of the cross allows him to return to the "fatherhood" of God by which he contrasts the God of the Bible with the God of Greek metaphysics. ***On the one hand***, there is God in Himself, the absolute God apart from the world. ***On the other hand***, there is the God of Israel, who reveals Himself to us, binds Himself to His Word, manifests Himself in Jesus, and limits Himself to our understanding. All this is done for us, thus emphasizing God's loving relationship with His creatures (Geisler, ***BFG***, 180–81).

Luther's focus on the "theology of the cross" and his strong emphasis of God's entering into human existence opened him up to the charge of believing that God is ***passible***, rather than ***impassible***, in the incarnation of Christ. At first glance, Luther appears to affirm that God can suffer and die. He said,

> We Christians must allow the *idiomata* [language] of the two natures of Christ, the persons, equally and totally. As a result, whatever is said about him as a human being must also be said of him as God, namely, "Christ has died"—not God in isolation [
> *der abgesonderte Gott*
>], but God united with humanity.… For neither of the statements "Christ is God" and "God has died" are true in the case of God in isolation; both are false, for then God is not a human being. If it seems strange to Nestorius that God should die, he should find it just as strange that God becomes a human being; for by doing so, the immortal God becomes that which must die and suffer, and have all the human *idiomata*.…
> If this was not the case, what kind of human being would God have become united to, if it did not have truly human *idiomata*. It would be a phantom [*Gespenst*], as the Manicheans taught earlier. On the other hand, whatever is said of God must also be attributed to the human being.… "God created the world and is almighty," and the human being Christ is God; therefore, the human being Christ created the world and is almighty." The reason for this is that since God

> and the human being have become one person, this person bears the *idiomata* of both natures in consequence. (Luther 1959, *ET*, 175)

Elsewhere he added that "because divinity and humanity are one Person in Christ, ***Scripture, because of this personal union, ascribes also to divinity everything that happens to humanity and vice versa***" (ibid., 170). Conversely, though, Luther makes this clarification elsewhere: "You must immediately say that ***the Person*** (***meaning Christ***) ***suffers and dies***. Now the Person is true God; therefore it is correctly said: The Son of God suffers. For although the one part[3] … namely, ***the divinity, does not suffer***, yet the Person, who is God, suffers in the other part, namely, in His humanity" (ibid., 170–71, emphasis added).

Were it not for this explanation by Luther, we might understand him to be unorthodox on the issue of God's impassibility. The confusion lies with his strong words against nestorianism and his disagreement with Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531) on ***alloeosis***, so that he did not express himself as clearly as we would desire, but there is no doubt in Luther's subsequent words that he held to the historic teaching of the church and the Scriptures on the doctrine of God's impassibility. Noted Lutheran theologian Francis Pieper says of Luther's view:

> It is these definite doctrines of Scripture and not human speculation, which the Formula of Concord, Luther, and the Lutheran dogmaticians teach, when in agreement with the Scripture passages that ascribe to the Son of God's suffering and death. *This suffering, in the assumed human nature, however, is the suffering of the Son of God*, since the human nature does not constitute a separate person, but belongs to the Person of the Son of God. (*CD*, Volume 2, 140, emphasis added)

In other words, Luther affirmed that the ***person*** of Christ suffered through His human nature; in saying so, Luther was not affirming the heretical notion of patripassianism (that the Father suffered),[4] but rather he was affirming the orthodox notion of Christ suffering in the flesh. Therefore, when one states "God suffered," it is true in one sense and false in another sense. It is true in the sense that the second person of the Godhead, Christ, suffered through His human nature. However, it is false if what is meant is that any other person in the Godhead suffered, for the divine nature is impassible, and neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit has a human nature through which either of them can suffer.

John Calvin

Calvin explained biblical expressions about God's suffering as anthropomorphisms, claiming that God's repentance is

> the very same that is meant by the other forms of expression, by which God is described to us humanly. Because our weakness cannot reach his height, any description which we receive of him must be lowered to our capacity in order to be intelligible. And the mode of lowering is to represent him not as he really is, but as we conceive him.

Likewise,

> Though he is incapable of every feeling of perturbation, he declares that he is angry with the wicked. Wherefore, as when we hear that God is angry, we ought not to imagine that there is any emotion in him, but ought rather to consider the mode of speech accommodated to our sense, God appearing to us like one inflamed and irritated whenever he exercises Judgment, so we ought not to imagine any thing more under the term repentance than a change of action, men being wont to testify their dissatisfaction by such a change. (*ICR*, 1.17.12–13)

Jacob Arminius

Summarizing many of the metaphysical attributes of God, Arminius wrote,

> It follows that this essence is simple and infinite; from this, that it is eternal and immeasurable; and, lastly, that it is unchangeable, impassable and incorruptible, in the manner in which it has been proved by us in our public theses on this subject. (*WJA*, Volume 2, Disputation 15.7)

In Disputation IV, Article XVII, Arminius said,

> Impassability is a pre-eminent mode of the Essence of God, according to which it is devoid of all suffering or feeling; not only because nothing can act against this Essence, for it is of infinite Being and devoid of an external cause; but likewise because it cannot receive the act of anything, for it is of simple Entity. THEREFORE, Christ has not suffered according to the Essence of his Deity (ibid., 2:117)

Article XIII reads,

> From the Simplicity and Infinity of the Divine sense, arises Infinity with regard to time, which is called “Eternity”; and with regard to place, which is called “Immensity,” Impassability, Immutability, and Incorruptibility. (ibid., 2:116)

Francis Turretin

Reformed theologian Francis Turretin shared with John Calvin the same basic understanding of God’s supposed repentance:

> Repentance is attributed to God after the manner of men (*anthropopathos*) but must be understood after the manner of God (*theoprepos*): not with respect to his counsel, but to the event; not in reference to his will, but to the thing willed; not to affection and internal grief, but to the effect and external work because he does what a penitent man usually does. If repentance concerning the creation of man (which he could not undo) is ascribed to God (Genesis 6:6–7), it must be understood not pathetically, but energetically. (*IET*, 1:206.XI)

Jonathan Edwards

Although Edwards did not treat the topic as such, he held that God’s counsel stands fast, and so does His happiness. Edwards taught that God’s will is always done; it follows that God is infinitely happy. Therefore, the misery of men, which must fall within the will of God, cannot destroy the divine happiness but must be a part of it (in Gerstner, ***RBTJE***, 2:61).

OBJECTIONS TO GOD’S IMPASSIBILITY

While there has been both misunderstanding and neglect on this important attribute of God, especially in more recent times; nonetheless, it has been a consistent and confessional part of orthodox belief about God from the beginning. Not until the recent inroads of process thought into Christianity has there been a concerted effort to undermine this teaching. This has come mostly

from those influenced by panentheism and neotheism (see Volume 1, chapters 2 and 5).

Objection One—Based on Christ's Atonement

Evangelicals hold that Christ is God (John 1:1; Heb. 1:8; Col. 2:9) and affirm that He suffered on the cross (1 Peter 2:24; 3:18; Isa. 53:3–5).[5] Given that these are both true, some insist that ***God*** suffered on the cross. If He did, then God is not impassible.

It is claimed that impassibility is the most dubious of the divine attributes, because it suggests that God does not experience sorrow, sadness, or pain. Impassibility appears to deny that God is touched by the feelings of our infirmities, despite what the Bible says about His love and His sorrow. How can God be loving and yet not be pained by evil? How can God be impassible when God the Son experienced suffering and death? (see Pinnock, ***OG***, 118).

Response to Objection One

In response to this objection, one need only point to the orthodox belief in the "hypostatic union" of two natures in one person. The historic creeds affirm that these should neither be separated (as in nestorianism) nor confused (as in monophysitism); this objection does the latter. Jesus had two distinct natures, one divine and the other human. He suffered in and through the latter, not the former. He who suffered was the God-man, yet He did not suffer as God, but as man.

As mentioned previously, this objection is akin to the third-century heresy called patripassianism (lit: "Father-suffering"), which asserts that the Father suffered on the cross when Jesus did. This view fails to recognize that the divine ***nature*** did not undergo suffering; only one ***person*** (Christ), who also shares the divine nature with the Father and the Holy Spirit, suffered on the cross—and that in His human nature. God did not suffer on the cross; only the second person of the

Godhead suffered. To claim otherwise is to confuse the two natures of Christ and to fall into heresy.

Objection Two—Based on the Personhood of God

The commonly accepted definition of a person is one who has intellect, emotions (feelings), and will. Both sides of the impassibility dispute agree that there is personhood in God. All three members of the Trinity are persons, and if this is so, then the Trinity, as persons, must be able to undergo emotions (including suffering). Hence, acknowledging personhood in God is a tacit agreement that God—all three persons—can suffer.

Response to Objection Two

In reply to this objection, two things must be noted.
First, we must agree that God does have feelings, as numerous verses indicate.
Second, it is equally important to point out that God does not change (see chapter 4). From this it follows that God ***cannot*** undergo changing feelings; that is, God is impassible.
However, this does ***not*** mean that God has no feelings: He has ***unchanging*** feelings. Indeed, He even has different feelings. He always feels good about our being good, and He always feels bad about our being bad. Further, God does not change when we repent: He always feels the same about the same. When we change, God does not change. We simply move under another unchangeable attribute of God.
For example, God feels bad about our badness; when we change, God feels good about our new state of being good. As noted above, God experiences feelings, but not in the way we experience them. He experiences them in accordance with His own nature—in an active, eternal, and unchangeable way. In short, like other relations to His creatures, God is not reactive, but proactive in His feelings.

Objection Three—Based on Biblical Statements About God's Feelings

The Bible makes it evident that God has feelings: God's Spirit is grieved at sin (Eph. 4:30); God hates evil (Ps. 45:7); God's jealousy burns with anger against sin (Deut. 29:20).
Zechariah declared, "This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'I am very jealous for Zion; I am burning with jealousy for her.' " Further, God is said to be pleased by faith (Heb. 11:6). How, then, can God be impassible (without passion)?

Response to Objection Three

In response, it should again be emphasized that God has feelings, but these feelings are unchangeable. There are two different senses in which God has feelings. He feels in the sense of ***perception***, but not in the sense of ***passion***. He has ***sensitivity***, but no ***sentimentality***. In summary, He has unchanging feelings, not changing feelings.

Objection Four—Based on Alleged Origin in Greek Philosophy

Proponents of God's passibility attempt to defend their view historically in two ways.
First, in general they argue that Greek philosophy, not the Bible, is the basis for classical theism's view on impassibility.
Second, they attempt to find some antecedents for their deviant view in the writings of the church Fathers. In these ways they attempt to justify their denial of God's impassability.

Response to Objection Four

The same arguments are used against God's eternality and immutability, to which response has already been made (see chapter 4). It is sufficient to note here that this view is not true. As shown above, God's impassibility is derived from sound understanding of the biblical and theological data apart from any thought borrowed from Greek theology. Furthermore, the roots of biblical theism are not found anywhere in Greek thought; as we have seen, no Greeks had an infinite personal God, to say nothing of a triune God of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Objection Five—Based on Luther's "Theology of the Cross"

As noted above, Martin Luther referred to the suffering of Christ being inclusive of His divine nature as well as His human nature.

Response to Objection Five

This is a very weak historical support for God's passibility for several reasons.
First, even if this is what Luther meant, he would have been the first major orthodox teacher in the history of Christianity to hold such a view.
Second, it is not clear that Luther meant to affirm God's passibility so much as to refute nestorianism, which denied that the one and the same Jesus who died was both God and man.
Third, Luther makes other statements to the contrary (see above).
Fourth, as shown above, Lutheran theologians, such as Francis Pieper, deny this view and affirm God's impassibility.

THE INFINITY OF GOD

The Meaning of God's Infinity

The term infinite (“not-finite”) is negative in form, but it denotes a positive attribute of God. God is literally limitless in His Being: He is without boundaries, a Being beyond the limits of the created universe. It is only because of the finite nature of our concepts that this positive attribute must be expressed in negative terms (see chapter 1).

God’s infinity should be distinguished from other concepts of “infinite.” God is not an infinite such as is found in mathematics, where there are an infinite number of points between A and B; this is an abstract infinite, not a concrete one, as God is. God is infinite in a metaphysical way, not in a mathematical way; He is an actual infinite Being, not an abstract one.

Further, God is not an infinite series of real things; He is not an endless series of moments, for example, of one after another. At best, this would only be a potential infinite—where one more could always be added. God is neither a series of moments nor is He capable of being added to them. He is actually Infinite Being (not a series) and cannot be added to in any way.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR GOD’S INFINITY

The biblical grounds for God’s infinity are derived from the fact that He is beyond the finite world—He is the Creator and Sustainer of it. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). “Will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you” (1 Kings 8:27). “Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit” (Ps. 147:5). “Can you probe the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than the heavens—what can you do? They are deeper than the depths of the grave—what can you know? Their measure is longer than the earth and wider than the sea” (Job 11:7–9). “In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple” (Isa. 6:1). “Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance?” (Isa. 40:12). “ ‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,’ declares the LORD. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts’ ” (Isa. 55:8–9).

“This is what the high and lofty One says—he who lives forever, whose name is holy” (Isa. 57:15). “This is what the LORD says: ‘Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?’ ” (Isa. 66:1–2). “Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!” (Rom. 11:33). “He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Col. 1:17).

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR GOD’S INFINITY

The infinity of God flows from several other attributes, such as His pure actuality, uncausality, simplicity, omnipotence, and omniscience.

Infinity Follows From Pure Actuality

God is Pure Actuality (see chapter 2), and pure actuality has no potentiality (potency)—if it did, it would not be pure actuality. Potency is what limits actuality, since actuality as such is unlimited and unique. For example, what limits the amount of water that a gallon jug can hold is its potentiality to hold only a gallon and no more. When all limits are removed, capacity is unlimited. By nature, pure actuality has no limits—it is infinite.

Infinity Follows From Uncausality

Everything that is caused is limited, for if to be caused means to have some potentiality actualized, then everything that is caused has a limitation. Whatever is uncaused is unlimited; hence, God, as the uncaused Cause of all that is caused to exist, must be unlimited in His existence. As established previously, everything else that exists merely ***has*** existence; only God ***is*** existence, pure and

simple. What ***is*** existence is unlimited in its existence; thus, God is unlimited or infinite existence.

Infinity Follows From Simplicity

God is a simple (or uncomposed) Being: He has no parts, poles, or dimensions, and He is without parts or particles. What He is, He is in an undivided and uncomposed way (see chapter 2). This being the case, whatever God "has," that He ***is***. If He "has" knowledge, then He ***is*** knowledge, and if He "has" power, then He ***is*** power, and so on. God "has" being; that is, He ***exists***. Hence, God is Being (existence) in an unlimited (infinite) way.

Infinity Follows From Omnipotence

What is omnipotent is infinite in power. The Bible describes God as being infinite in power, namely, omnipotent (see chapter 7). However, if God is simple, His power is identical with His Being, for again, whatever God "has," that He ***is***. Therefore, if God is infinite in His power, then He must be infinite in His Being.

Infinity Follows From Omniscience

The same argument can be made from God's omniscience. The Bible affirms that God is infinite in His knowledge (see chapter 8). His knowledge is identical to His Being; consequently, God must be infinite in His Being. As Stephen Charnock put it,

> God knows all things from eternity, and, therefore, perpetually knows them; the reason is because the Divine knowledge is infinite, and therefore, comprehends all knowable truths at once. (Turretin, *IET*, 323)

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S INFINITY

The Greek “gods” of Plato and Aristotle were finite beings: They were limited in their very nature. In fact, they were not gods, since they were not worshiped; rather, they were ultimate metaphysical principles. By contrast, the God of the biblical prophets and apostles is infinite (unlimited) in His Being. This conviction is firmly rooted in Scripture and good reason as well as unanimously expressed by the orthodox Fathers of the church.

Early Church Fathers on God’s Infinity

The patristic Fathers may not have been systematic theologians, but they were more theologically astute than is often recognized. Finite godism (see Volume 1, chapter 2) was Greek in origin, and the earliest Fathers saw clearly that it was unchristian.

Ignatius

Ignatius said, “There is no one superior to God, or even like to Him, among all the beings that exist” (***EIS***, 9 in Roberts and Donaldson, ***ANF***, I).

Irenaeus

Irenaeus affirmed,

> If, however, any one does not discover the cause of all those things which become objects of investigation, let him reflect that man is infinitely inferior to God; that he has received grace only in part, and is not yet equal or similar to his Maker; and, moreover, that he cannot have experience or form a conception of all things like God. (*AH* in ibid., 2.25.3)

Tatian (120–173)

Tatian wrote,

> Our God did not begin in time: He alone is without beginning, and He Himself is

> the beginning of all things. God is a Spirit, not pervading matter, but the Maker of material spirits, and of the forms that are in matter, He is invisible, impalpable, being Himself the Father of both sensible and invisible things. Him we know from His creation, and apprehend His invisible power by His works. (*AG*, 4, in ibid., 2.119)

Theophilus

Theophilus asserted,

> He [God] is without beginning, because he is unbegotten; and He is unchangeable, because he is immortal. And he is called God on account of His having placed all things on security afforded by Himself.… But He is Lord, because He rules over the universe; Father, because he is before all things; Fashioner and Maker, because He is creator and maker of the universe; the Highest, because of His being above all. (*TA*, 1.4 in ibid., 2.163)

The Medieval Fathers on God's Infinity

The infinity of God is set forth both clearly and emphatically by the great teachers of the Middle Ages. From Augustine through Aquinas, the doctrine was both declared and defended.

Augustine

As we have seen, Augustine affirmed,

> It is that absolute "IS," that true "IS," that "IS" in the true sense of the word, that I long for; that "IS"; which "is" in that "Jerusalem" which is "the Bride" of my Lord; where there will not be death, there will not be failing; there will be a day that passeth not away, but continueth: which has neither a yesterday to precede it, nor a tomorrow pressing close upon it. (*EBP*, 39.8)

He added,

> Because I said, "I Am WHO I AM" … thou didst understand what Being is, and thou hast despaired to grasp it. Take hope, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob"; thus I am what I am, thus I am Being itself, thus I

> am with Being itself, so that I may not will to be wanting to men. (*SNTL*, 7.7)

"For all substance that is not a created thing is God, and all that is not created is God" (***OT***, 1.6).

Thomas Aquinas

> It is against the nature of a made thing for its essence to be its own existence; because subsisting being is not a created being; hence it is against the nature of a made thing to be absolutely infinite. Therefore, as God, although He has infinite power, cannot make a thing to be not made … so likewise He cannot make anything to be absolutely infinite. (*ST*, la.7.2 ad 1)

Aquinas went on, "The fact that the being of God is self-subsisting, not received in any other, and is thus called infinite, shows Him to be distinguished from all other beings, and all others are to be apart from Him" (ibid., la.7.1 ad 3).

The Reformation Teachers on God's Infinity

The Reformers had no reason to question God's infinity, nor did they. In fact, they repeated both the truth and importance of what their theological predecessors had set forth before them.

Martin Luther

Luther wrote,

> This proud and conceited spirit.… reveals his crude and stupid ideas when he conceives of God's omnipresence as if God were an immense, expansive Being which fills all the world and extends even beyond it, like a bag so full of straw that the straw sticks out at the top and at the bottom; just as though God were present everywhere according to the first, the corporeal, comprehensible manner.… But this is not our language. On the contrary, we deny that God is such an extended, long, broad, thick, high, low Being. We rather contend that God is a supernatural, unfathomable Being, who at one and the same time is in

> every little kernel of grain and also in and above and outside all creatures.... Nothing so large, God is still larger; nothing so short, God is still shorter; nothing so long, God is still longer; nothing so wide, God is still wider; nothing so narrow, God is still narrower, etc. In a word, God is an inexpressible Being, above and beyond everything that may be said or thought. (*LW*, 542–43)

John Calvin

Calvin affirmed, "God, in his infinite mercy, having determined to redeem us, became himself our Redeemer in the person of his only begotten Son" (***ICR*** 2.12.2).

> His [St. Paul's] object was to intimate, that what our mind embraces by faith is every way *infinite*, that this kind of knowledge far surpasses all understanding.... The "mystery which has been hid from ages and from generations" is now "made manifest to the saints" (
>
> Colossians 1:26
>
> —ibid., 3.2.14).

Calvin continued,

> The nature of *God in himself is infinite*, invisible, eternal, almighty; whence it follows that they are mistaken who ascribe to God a visible form. In his one essence there are three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit" (*ICR*, 100, "Aphorisms," 1.8, emphasis added).

The Post-Reformation Teachers on God's Infinity

In the post-Reformation period, the strong tradition of affirming God's infinity continued until recent times. Under the influence of contemporary process theology, some evangelicals have bailed ship on this classical attribute; nonetheless, their predecessors in the post-Reformation period came down strongly in favor of God's infinity.

Jacob Arminius

Arminius wrote,

> Hence, it follows that this essence is simple and infinite; from this, that it is eternal and immeasurable; and, lastly, that it is unchangeable, impassable and incorruptible, in the manner in which it has been proved by us in our public theses on this subject. (*WJA*, 2:117)

Jonathan Edwards

Edwards declared,

> Putting these things together, the infinitely holy GOD.... is a Being who is all possible virtue, in the most absolute purity and perfection, brightness and amiableness, the most perfect pattern of virtue, and from whom all the virtue of other is but as a beam from the sun. (*WJE*, 1.41)

Francis Turretin

Once again, Turretin affirmed,

> The infinity of God follows his simplicity and is equally diffused through the other attributes of GOD, and by it the divine nature is conceived as free from all limit in imperfection: as to essence (by incomprehensibility) and as to duration (by eternity) and as to circumscription, in reference to place (by immensity). We here treat the first, leaving the others for future consideration. (*IET*, 194)

He added,

> The orthodox attribute absolute infinity to GOD with respect to essence. In the first place, Scripture clearly teaches it: “Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised,” and of his greatness there is application to the most simple God, but of the greatness, or better the infinity, of essence and virtue, (ibid., 195)

This is known from God’s perfectness,

> For since he has every perfection which can be possessed, it is evident that nothing can be conceived better and more perfect. Thus he must necessarily be infinite because an infinite good is better than a finite [one]. (ibid.)

Stephen Charnock

Charnock insisted,

> If God were not a Spirit, he could not be infinite. All bodies are of a finite nature; everybody is material, and every material thing is terminated. The sun, a vast body, hath a bounded greatness; the heavens of a mighty bulk, yet have their limits. If God had a body he must consist of parts, those parts would be bounded and limited, and whatsoever is limited is of a finite virtue, and therefore below an infinite nature. Reason therefore tells us, that the most excellent nature, as God is, cannot be of a corporeal condition; because of the limitation and other actions which belong to every body. (*EAG*, I, 185–86)

Charnock affirmed,

> We cannot have an adequate or suitable conception of God: He dwells in inaccessible light; inaccessible to the acuteness of our fancy, as well as the weakness of our sense. If we could have thoughts of him, as high and excellent as his nature, our conceptions must be as infinite as his nature. (*EAG*, 1:196)

Summarizing God's statement to Job, Charnock wrote, " 'I am that I am'; a simple, pure, uncompounded being, without any created mixture; as infinitely above the being of creatures as above the conceptions of creatures [Job 37:23]" (ibid., 1:182–83).
He added,

> Our time is but a small drop, as sand to all the atoms and small particles of which the world is made; but God is an unbounded sea of being. "I am that I am"; i.e., an infinite life; I have not that now, which I had not formerly; I shall not afterwards have that which I have not now; I am that in every moment which I was, and will be in all moments of time, (ibid., 1:287)

R. L. Dabney (1820–1898)

Dabney said,

> Attributes are wholly without bounds. Some divines, indeed, of modern schools, would deny that we mean anything by the term, asserting that infinitude is an idea which the human mind cannot have at all. They employ Sir W. Hamilton's well-known argument that "the finite mind cannot think the unconditioned; because to think it is to limit it." It has always seemed to me that the plain truth on this subject is, that man's mind does apprehend the idea of infinitude (else whence the word?), but that it cannot comprehend it. It knows that there is the infinite; it cannot fully know what it is. God is absolutely without bound, as to His substance (immense), as to His duration (eternal), as to His

> knowledge (omniscience), as to His will (omnipotence), as to His moral perfections (holiness). It is an infinite essence. (*LST*, 173)

William G. T. Shedd (1820–1894)

Shedd held:

> The Infinity of God is the Divine essence viewed as having no bounds, or limits. And since limitation implies imperfection, the infinity of God implies that he is perfect in every respect in which he is infinite. If knowledge in any being has bounds, it is imperfect knowledge; if holiness has degrees or limits in any rational spirit, it is imperfect holiness. Yet finite holiness is real excellence, and limited knowledge is real knowledge. The finiteness of holiness does not convert it into sin; neither does the limitedness of knowledge convert it into error, or untruth. The imperfection or limitation of the finite relates not to *quality*, but to quantity. Infinity is a general term denoting a characteristic belonging to all the communicable attributes of God. His power, his knowledge, his veracity is infinite. It also characterizes the being of God, as well as his attributes. His essence is infinite. In this respect, infinity is like eternity and immutability. These latter, like the former, pervade the essence and all the communicable attributes. (*DT*, 339)

The Westminster Shorter Catechism

This catechism (Q. 4) defines God to be a Spirit who is "infinite, eternal, and unchangeable," first in his essential "being," then in his "wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth." The Divine infinity is taught in Job 11:7–9 (KJV): "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? ***It is*** as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof ***is*** longer than the earth, and broader than the sea."

John Miley

Miley said,

> The doctrine of an infinite essence of being should be carefully guarded in both thought and expression. Otherwise it may become the foundation of pantheism. In all true theism the divine essence is pure, absolute spirit. All sense of magnitude or spatial extension is alien to such a nature, and should be excluded from our notion of the divine ubiquity. (*ST*, 218)

OBJECTIONS TO GOD'S INFINITY

Many objections have been leveled against God's infinity. Among these, the following are the most significant. All are capable of answers from a biblical theistic perspective.

Objection One—Based on the Impossibility of Another Being

It is argued by monists (see Volume 1, chapter 2) that if God is infinite, there could be nothing else, for it is impossible to have more than an infinite, which there would be if there were an infinite Being plus one or more beings. There ***are*** beings other than God—for example, me. My existence is undeniable, since I cannot deny it without existing to make the denial.

Further, it is clear that I am not infinite in my knowledge, since I doubt, make mistakes, learn, and come to know. But an infinite Intelligence cannot do any of these things, and if both an infinite Mind (God) and a finite mind (me) exist, then there is more than an infinite. This is impossible; hence, if I (who have a finite mind) exist, then God cannot be infinite. In other words, to have two or more beings in the universe, both must be finite: If there is an infinite Being, then there is no room for another being. In short, infinite means All, and it is impossible to have more than All.

Response to Objection One

In response, finite creatures are not ***more*** than God; they are simply ***other*** than God. So there is not more than All. Further, when an infinite Being creates other beings, there is not ***more being***; there are only ***more who have being***. In the same way when a teacher teaches a class, there is not more knowledge, there are only more who have it. All finite beings share being only because God gave it to them: "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

God ***gives*** being, but He does not ***give away*** being, just as when an instructor ***gives*** knowledge he doesn't ***give away*** his knowledge. When a creature gets being, he gets it by participation; that is, he has it as an effect of God, not as being part of the infinite Cause (God). An infinite Being cannot have parts, since an infinite number of parts is not possible. Consequently, finite beings are ***other*** than God, but they are not ***more*** than God.

In fact, the very idea of "more" implies that God is not really an infinite Being, for an infinite Being does not have parts or quantities of being: He is Being, pure and simple. Hence, it is meaningless to speak of "more than God." However, there can be beings who are other than God without being more, since this is speaking about ***kind*** of being, not ***quantity*** of being. There is no contradiction in having a finite being and an Infinite Being, since they are different in kind. There can be only one Being with pure actuality, but there can be many beings if the others are composed of actuality ***and*** potentiality, since each has a different potentiality.

Objection Two—Based on an Infinite As a Class of One

It will be remembered (from Volume 1, chapter 2) that the monist Parmenides (fl. c. 485 B.C.) argued that it is impossible to have two or more beings, since they have nothing by which they could differ. If there ***were*** two beings, they would have to differ by either being or nonbeing. But they cannot differ by nothing, since to differ by nothing is not to differ at all.

Response to Objection Two

It was shown that this argument does not follow, since it assumes (without proof) that all beings are the same; that is, it assumes a univocal concept of being versus an analogical one (see Volume 1, chapter 9). If there are different kinds of being (e.g., infinite and finite) that are analogous but not identical, then there can be more than one being: One can be infinite and the other(s) finite; one can be Pure Actuality and the other(s) a composition of actuality and potentiality; one

can ***be*** Being and the other (s) ***have being***.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Along with the other classical attributes of God, God's impassibility and infinity have a firm grounding in Scripture, theology, and church history. (Exceptions are late and explainable.) Indeed, to deny these attributes by claiming that God is finite or that He undergoes changing feelings is unorthodox. Contemporary objections to these attributes are founded in an unjustified process theology and anthropomorphism. They are answerable, as the above discussion indicates.

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CHAPTER SIX

GOD'S IMMATERIALITY AND IMMENSITY

In addition to being eternal, God is also immaterial. Along with being nontemporal, God is also nonspatial. He is absolute Spirit, and as such He has no body and is not extended in space. While all orthodox Christians confess God's immateriality, many cults have denied it.

GOD'S IMMATERIALITY

Positively put, God is pure Spirit. Believers are even forbidden to make any physical image of God (Ex. 20:4). God is not composed of matter, nor is He corporeal (made of body). Few, if any, orthodox scholars have ever challenged this.

Strangely, though, one noted evangelical has ventured recently to break this venerable tradition with a shocking theological innovation: "If he [God] is with us in the world, if we are to take biblical metaphors seriously, ***is God in some way embodied?***" He answers positively, "I do not believe that the idea is as foreign to the Bible as we have assumed." Further, "Is there perhaps something in God that corresponds with embodiment? Having a body is certainly not a negative thing, because it makes it possible for us to be agents. Perhaps God's

agency would be easier to envisage ***if he were in some way corporeal***." He adds, "***I do not feel obligated to assume that God is a purely spiritual being when his self-revelation does not suggest it***" (Pinnock, ***MMM***, 33–34, emphasis added). The evidence, as we shall see, is overwhelmingly to the contrary.

THE DEFINITION OF IMMATERIALITY

Immaterial literally means non-material. This, of course, raises the question of what matter is. Humanity's understanding of matter has undergone considerable change over the centuries. Some Greek philosophers (called atomists) thought of matter as made up of hard little pellets of reality known as atoms. Modern science has knocked a lot of the stuff out of matter, speaking of it more in terms of physical energy. Einstein's famous $e=mc^2$ states that energy equals mass times the speed of light squared.

Regardless of the precise nature of matter, what is commonly understood as matter has certain characteristics—these will enable us to understand what God is not when He is said to be non-material. Besides being finite (limited), matter is said to be extended in space and, traditionally, this meant to have part outside of part. Matter is that which occupies space; no two particles can be in the same location. The current conception of matter is rather like Swiss cheese. Even so, it contains some mass and particles that cause it to be extended in space.

Another property of matter, as currently conceived, is that it is subject to the second law of thermodynamics: The material universe is running out of usable energy. In addition to mass and physical energy, light and physical forces (such as gravity and magnetism) are also part of the physical universe. In all these senses of the word ***material***, God is not material. From an observational point of view, much of matter is visible; hence, the biblical description of God as "invisible" (Col. 1:15; Heb. 11:3) also implies that He is immaterial.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S IMMATERIALITY

Many biblical texts affirm that God is immaterial. In addition, all these verses indicate God is beyond the world (see chapter 22); the fact that He created the

material universe implies He is not material.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below" (Ex. 20:4). God said, "You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live" (Ex. 33:20). "Will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you" (1 Kings 8:27). "This is what the Lord says: 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?' " (Isa. 66:1–2). "Look at my hands and my feet. It is I [Jesus] myself! Touch me and see; a ghost [spirit] does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have" (Luke 24:39). "No one has seen God at any time" (John 1:18 NKJV). "God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24).

"For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse" (Rom. 1:20). "He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation" (Col. 1:15). "Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever" (1 Tim. 1:17). "By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:27). "Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live!" (Heb. 12:9). "You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect" (Heb. 12:23).

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S IMMATERIALITY

Not only Scripture but sound reasoning supports the belief that God is immaterial. This conclusion can be drawn from several other attributes of God.

Pure Actuality Implies Immateriality

God is Pure Actuality (see chapter 2). Pure Act has no potentiality, while matter has the potential to change (and does undergo changes). For example, matter changes from usable to nonusable energy under the forces described by the second law of thermodynamics. Therefore, God cannot be material: If He were, then He would have the potentiality to change, just as the universe has (and does).

Immutability Implies Immateriality

For similar reasons, God cannot be material because He cannot change (see chapter 4). Matter can and does change; hence, God cannot be material. If God were material, He would be subject to the second law, meaning He would be running down. Since God is infinite, eternal, and immutable, He cannot be running down; thus, He cannot be material as the universe is (cf. Heb. 1:11–12).

Simplicity Implies Immateriality

God is simple (or indivisible—see chapter 2). What is simple has no parts (or divisibility), but matter has parts; it is divisible. Therefore, God is not material.

Infinity Implies Immateriality

God is the infinite Being (see chapter 5), and the infinite cannot be divided into parts or discrete units. No number of parts or units can add up to an infinite, since no matter how many there are, one more could always be added. There cannot be more than an infinite; however, a material being does have parts or units. It follows that an infinite being cannot be material.

Eternality Implies Immateriality

God is eternal or nontemporal (see chapter 4). What is temporal is also spatial and material, for according to contemporary science, there is no time without space and matter. So what is nontemporal is also nonspatial and non-material. Hence, God, who is nontemporal and nonspatial, must also be non-material.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S IMMATERIALITY

That God is pure Spirit was recognized from the beginning of Christian theology. This was an evident difference between the biblical view of God and the worldview of the pagan idols. God has always been neither visible nor material.

The Early Church Fathers on God's Immateriality

The early Fathers were engaged with polytheists and idol worshipers; as such, they clearly distinguished the biblical God as one who has no matter in His Being. Nor is it appropriate to conceive of Him in those terms or to worship any physical likeness of Him.

Tatian

God is a Spirit, not pervading matter, but the Maker of material spirits, and of the forms that are in matter; He is invisible, impalpable, being Himself the Father of both sensible and invisible things. Him we know from His creation, and apprehend His invisible power by His works. I refuse to adore that workmanship which He has made for our sakes. The sun and moon were made for us: how, then, can I adore my own servants? How can I speak of sticks and stones as gods? … Nor even ought the ineffable God to be presented with gifts; for He who is in want of nothing is not to be misrepresented by us as though He were indigent. (*ATG*, 4 in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, II)

Origen

> God, therefore, is not to be thought of as being either a body or as existing in a body, but as an uncompounded intellectual nature, admitting within Himself no addition of any kind; so that He cannot be believed to have within him a greater and a less, but is such that He is in all parts. (*DP*, 1.1.6 in ibid., IV)
>
> I KNOW that some will attempt to say that, even according to the declarations of our own Scriptures, God is a body, because in the writings of Moses they find it said, that "our God is a consuming fire"; and in the Gospel according to John, that "God is a Spirit, and they who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." Fire and spirit, according to them, are to be regarded as nothing else than a body" (*DP*, 1.1.1 in ibid.).

The Medieval Fathers on God's Immateriality

With the help of philosophy, the Fathers of the Middle Ages found support for their biblical conviction that God is pure Spirit. Augustine found help from the followers of Plato, particularly Plotinus (A.D. 205–270), in conceiving God as immaterial.

Augustine

> The Platonic philosophers, then, so deservedly considered superior to all the others in reputation and achievement, well understood that no body could be God and, therefore, in order to find Him, they rose beyond all material things. Convinced that no mutable reality could be the Most High, they transcended every soul and spirit subject to change in their search for God. They perceived that no determining form by which any mutable being is what it is—whatever be the reality, mode or nature of that form—could have any existence apart from Him who truly exists because His existence is immutable. (*CG*, 8.6)

Further, "Of all visible things, the universe is the greatest; of all invisible realities, the greatest is God. That the world exists we can see; we believe in the existence of God" (ibid., 11.4). He added,

> This is a matter that I intend to debate with these philosophers later on. Yet we prefer them to all others inasmuch as they agree with us concerning one God, the Creator of the universe, who is not only incorporeal, transcending all

> corporeal beings, but also incorruptible, surpassing every kind of soul—our source, our light, our goal, (ibid., 8.10)

Anselm

> Since it is better to be perceptive, omnipotent, merciful, impassible, than not to be so, how are You able to perceive if You are not a body; or how are You omnipotent if You are not able to do everything; or how are You merciful and impassible at the same time? For if only corporeal things are capable of perception, since the senses are involved with the body and in the body, how are You perceptive, since You are not a body but the supreme spirit who is better than any body? But if to perceive is nothing else than to know, or if it is directed to knowing (for he who perceives knows according to the appropriate sense, as, for example, colours are known by sight and flavours through taste), one can say not inappropriately that whatever in any way knows also in some way perceives. So it is, Lord, that although You are not a body You are supremely perceptive, in the sense that You know supremely all things and not in the sense in which an animal knows through a bodily sense—faculty. (*ACMW*, 89–90)

Thomas Aquinas

> There is neither composition or quantitative parts in God, since He is not a body; nor composition of form and matter in God; nor does His nature differ from His *suppositum*; nor His essence from His existence; neither is there in Him composition of genus and difference, nor subject and accident. Therefore, it is clear that God is in no wise composite, but is altogether simple. (*ST* 1a.3.7)

Further,

> God fills every place; not, indeed, like a body, for a body is said to fill place inasmuch as it excludes the co-presence of another body; whereas by God being in a place, others are not thereby excluded from it; indeed, by the very fact that He gives being to the things that fill every place, He Himself fills everyplace, (ibid., la.8.2)
>
> The fact that the being of God is self-subsisting, not received in any other, and is thus called infinite, shows Him to be distinguished from all other beings, and all others are to be apart from Him. (ibid., la.7.1 ad 3)
>
> It is therefore impossible that in God there should be any potentiality. But every body is in potentiality, because the continuous, as such, is divisible to infinity; it is therefore impossible that God should be a body. (ibid., la.3.1)

The Reformation and Post-Reformation Fathers on God's Immateriality

The Reformers had no quibble with their theological predecessors on the immateriality of God. The doctrine was firmly established in both commentary and creed.

Martin Luther

As we have noted before, Martin Luther said,

> We deny that God is such an extended, long, broad, thick, high, low Being. We rather contend that God is a supernatural, unfathomable Being, who at one and the same time is in every little kernel of grain and also in and above and outside all creatures. To think of any limitations here, as the false spirit dreams, is out of order. For a human body is much, much too large for the Godhead, and many thousands of godheads could be in it. On the other hand, it is much, much too small for only one Godhead. Nothing is so small, God is still smaller; nothing so large, God is still larger; nothing so short, God is still shorter; nothing so long, God is still longer; nothing so wide, God is still wider; nothing so narrow, God is still narrower, etc. In a word, God is an inexpressible Being, above and beyond everything that may be said or thought. (*WLS*, 542–43)

John Calvin

> The next words are *WHICH ART IN HEAVEN*. From this we are not to *infer* that he is enclosed and confined within the circumference of heaven, as by a kind of boundary. Hence Solomon confesses, "The heaven of heavens cannot contain thee" (
>
> 1 Kings 8:27
>
>); and he himself says by the Prophet, "The heaven is my throne, and the earth my footstool" (
>
> Isa. 66:1
>
>); thereby intimating, that his presence, not confined to any region, is diffused over all of space. But as our gross minds are unable to conceive of his ineffable glory, it is designated to us by *heaven*, nothing which our eyes can behold being so full of splendour and majesty. While, then, we are accustomed to regard every object as confined to the place where our senses discern it, no place can be assigned to God; and hence, if we would seek him, we must rise higher than all corporeal or mental discernment. Again, this form of expression reminds us

that he is far beyond the reach of change or corruption; that he holds the whole universe in his grasp, and rules it by his power. (*ICR*, III, xx., 40)

Jacob Arminius

On this account, we separate corporeal Essence from God according to the mode of removal, and at the same time all those things which belong to a corporeal Essence *as such*, whether to be simple or compound—such as magnitude, figure, place, or arts, whether *sensible* or *imaginable*. Whence also He cannot be perceived by the corporeal senses, either by those which are external or by the internal, since He is invisible, intactible, and *unimaginably* incapable of being represented (

Deut. 4:12

;

1 Kings 8:27

;

Luke 24:39

;

John 4:24

;

1 Tim. 1:17

.), but we ascribe to Him a spiritual Essence, and that in the mode of preeminen as "the Father of Spirits (

Heb. 12:9

)" (*WJA*, I, 437).

Stephen Charnock

God is a spirit; that is, he hath nothing corporeal, no mixture of matter, not a visible substance, a bodily form. He is a Spirit, not a bare spiritual substance, but an understanding, willing Spirit, holy, wise, good, and just. (*EAG*, 1:178)

Further,

If we grant that God is, we must necessarily grant that he cannot be corporeal, because a body is of an imperfect nature. It will appear incredible to any that acknowledge God the first Being and Creator of all things, that he should be a massy, heavy body, and have eyes and ears, feet and hands, as we have. God is a pure Spirit, he hath nothing of the nature and tincture of a body; whosoever, therefore, conceives of him as having a bodily form, though he fancy the most beautiful and comely body, instead of owning his dignity,

detracts from the super-eminent excellency of his nature and blessedness. (ibid., 1:181, 198)

R. L. Dabney

Is the first Cause, then, to be referred to the class, spirits? Yes; because we find it possessed, in the highest possible degree, of every one of the attributes by which we recognize spirit. It thinks; as we know by two signs. It produced us, who think; and there cannot be more in the effect than was in the cause. It has filled the universe with contrivances, the results of thought. It chooses; for this selection of contrivances implies choice. And again, whence do creatures derive the power of choice, if not from it? It is the first Cause of life; but this is obviously an attribute of spirit, because we find full life nowhere, except we see signs of spirit along with it. The first Cause is the source of force and of motion. But matter shows us, in no form, any power to originate motion. Inertia is its normal condition. We shall find God's power and presence penetrating and inhabiting all material bodies; but matter has a displacing power, as to all other matter. That which is impenetrable obviously is not ubiquitous.

The spirituality of God we argued rationally, first, from the fact that He is an intelligent and voluntary first cause; for our understandings are, properly speaking, unable to attribute these qualities to any other than spiritual substance. We found the same conclusion flowed necessarily from the fact, that God is the ultimate source of all force. It is implied in His immensity and omnipresence. He is Spirit, the fountain of life. This is also emphatically confirmed by the Scriptures. This evidence is greatly strengthened by the fact that not only is the Father, but the divine nature in Christ, and the Holy Ghost, also called again and again Spirit. (*LST*, 43, 151)

John Miley

God is not only our Creator but the Father of our spirits. We are his offspring. The truth of spirituality in God is thus revealed in our own spiritual being. The same truth is deeply wrought into the second commandment. The full sense of Scripture is completed in the explicit words of our Lord: "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." The inevitable logic of materialism is atheism. (*ST*, 145)

Charles Hodge

> It is impossible, therefore, to overestimate the importance of the truth contained in the simple proposition, God is a Spirit. It is involved in that proposition that God is immaterial. None of the properties of matter can be predicated of Him. He is not extended or divisible, or compounded, or visible, or tangible. He has neither bulk nor form. The Bible everywhere recognizes as true the intuitive convictions of men. One of those convictions is that spirit is not matter, or matter spirit; that different and incompatible attributes cannot belong to the same substance. In revealing, therefore, to us that God is a Spirit, it reveals to us that no attribute of matter can be predicated of the divine essence. The realistic dualism which lies at the bottom of all human convictions, underlies also all the revelations of the Bible. (*ST*, I, 378–79)

(For objections to and answers on God's immateriality, see below, following the biblical, theological, and historical support for God's immensity.)

GOD'S IMMENSITY

Immensity is one of the lesser known attributes of God. Indeed, it is sometimes confused with its kindred attribute of immateriality.
Immensity literally means "not measureable"; that is, God is unlimited in extension (or nonspatial). God is not in space, nor is He limited by space: He is present at every point in space, but He is not part of space or limited to it. Indeed, He transcends all space and time (see chapter 22).

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S IMMENSITY

The biblical basis for God's immensity is found in the verses that speak of His Creatorhood, His transcendence, His immateriality, and His being Spirit.

Verses That Speak of God Creating the Material World

God cannot be in space, time, or matter, since He existed before the material space-time world and brought it into existence: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:3). "For by him all

things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him" (Col. 1:16). "By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible" (Heb. 11:3).

Verses That Speak of God Transcending the Material Space-Time World

God is not only before the material world, but He is beyond it. As transcendent over matter, God cannot be material. "Can you probe the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than the heavens—what can you do?" (Job 11:7–8). "O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens" (Ps. 8:1). "Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth" (Ps. 57:5). "For you, O LORD, are the Most High over all the earth" (Ps. 97:9). "This is what the LORD says: 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool.… Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?' " (Isa. 66:1–2). "[There is] one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4:6). "He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Col. 1:17).

Verses That Speak of God As Spirit—Immaterial and Nonspatial

The Bible describes God as pure Spirit, which is said to be immaterial. "God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). "Look at my hands and my feet. It is I [Jesus] myself! Touch me and see; a ghost [spirit] does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have" (Luke 24:39—see more verses above, under "The Biblical Basis for God's Immateriality").
In summation, God cannot be made of matter—He made matter. He cannot be material, since He is above all material things. He is pure Spirit, which is immaterial, and if He is not material, then He is not spatial. He is literally immense, being beyond measurement and beyond space.

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S IMMENSITY

The immensity of God can be derived logically from several other attributes. These include God's infinity, eternality, simplicity, and immateriality.

Immensity Follows From Infinity

Infinite space is impossible, just as infinite time is impossible, for no matter how much space there is, there could always be more. More than an infinite is not possible; however, God is infinite. Hence, it is impossible for God to be spatial: If He were, then He would be limited. God must be immense.

Immensity Follows From Eternality

Immensity can also be derived from God's eternality. According to physics, what is nontemporal is also nonspatial. God ***is*** nontemporal (see chapter 4); it follows, then, that God is also nonspatial.

Immensity Follows From Simplicity

God is a simple Being (see chapter 2) who has no parts, material or otherwise. Different material things are in different parts of space—that is to say, whatever has material parts is spatial. However, God cannot have material parts; therefore, God is not spatial. He is immense.

Immensity Follows From Immateriality

As noted above, what is immaterial, as God is, must also be nonspatial. God is immaterial. So, then, He must also be nonspatial. If God were in space, then He would have to be material. But God is not material. Therefore, He cannot be in space.

Some Implications of God's Immensity

Several implications follow from the doctrine of God's immensity.
First, God is not limited by space.
Second, God is not extended, with part outside of part.
Third, God is not temporal, since space and time go together. God is not material, since in modern physics matter is always found with space and time.
Fourth, and finally, if God were spatial, then He would be material too. If God were spatial, He could not think or move any faster than the speed of light. And if God is material, then He is subject to the second law of thermodynamics (decay), as all matter is. In brief, if God is spatial, then He is not God.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S IMMENSITY

Since immateriality and immensity are related, most of the above citations for God's immateriality also apply to His immensity. However, many other citations speak directly to the latter attribute.

The Early Church Fathers on God's Immensity

In contrast to the materialistic conceptions of the pagan religions, the early Fathers clearly distinguished the God of the Bible as being both immaterial and immense.

Irenaeus

How can there be any other Fullness, or Principle, or Power, or God, above Him, since it is a matter of necessity that God, the Pleroma [Fullness] of all these, should contain all things in His *immensity*, and should be contained by no one? But if there is anything beyond Him, He is not then the Pleroma of all, nor does He contain all. For that which they declare to be beyond Him will be wanting to the Pleroma, or, [in other words,] to that God who is above all things. But that which is wanting, and falls in any way short, is not the Pleroma of all things. In such a case, He would have both beginning, middle, and end, with respect to those who are beyond Him. And if He has an end in regard to those things which are below, He has also a beginning with respect to those things which are above. (*AH*, 2.1.2 in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, I, emphasis added)

Theophilus

You will say, then, to me: "You said that *God ought not to be contained in a place*, and how do you now say that He walked in Paradise?" Hear what I say. The God and Father, indeed, of all *cannot be contained*, and is not found in a place, for there is no place of His rest; but His Word, through whom He made all things. (*TA*, 2.22 in ibid., II, emphasis added)

Clement of Alexandria

If, then, abstracting all that belongs to bodies and things called incorporeal, we cast ourselves into the greatness of Christ, and thence advance into *immensity* by holiness, we may reach somehow to the conception of the Almighty, knowing not what He is, but what He is not. And form and motion, or standing, or a throne, or place, or right hand or left, are not at all to be conceived as belonging to the Father of the universe, although it is so written. But what each of these means will be shown in its proper place. *The First Cause is not then in space, but above both space, and time, and name, and conception*. (*S*, 5.11 in ibid., II, emphasis added)

For on account of His greatness He is ranked as the All and is the Father of the universe. Nor are any parts to be predicated of Him. For the One is indivisible; wherefore also it is infinite, not considered with reference to inscrutability, but with reference to its *being without dimensions* and *not having a limit*. (*S*, 5.12 in ibid., II,

emphasis added)

Origen

> This comparison, of course, of statues, as belonging to material things, is employed for no other purpose than to show that the Son of God, though placed in the very insignificant form of a human body, in consequence of the resemblance of His works and power to the Father, showed that there was in Him an *immense and invisible greatness*, inasmuch as He said to His disciples, "He who sees Me, sees the Father also" and, "I and the Father are one" (*DP*, 1.2.8 in ibid., IV, emphasis added).

The Medieval Church Fathers on God's Immensity

The doctrine of God's immensity was elaborated with more sophistication in the Middle Ages. Beginning with Augustine, there are strong affirmations that God is not spatial.

Augustine

Unlike the changeable world, God has no space or matter that is subject to change:

> If the mind … is perceived to be without any local or material extension …, what must we think or conclude of God Himself, who remains superior to all intetelligent beings in His freedom from perturbation and from change, giving to everyone what is due? (*Against the Epistle of Manichaeus* (Chap. 19, sect. 21)

Anselm

Note the following again:

> Since it is better to be perceptive, omnipotent, merciful, impassible, than not to be so, how are You able to perceive if You are not a body; or how are You omnipotent if You are not able to do everything; or how are You merciful and impassible at the same time? For if only corporeal things are capable of perception, since the senses are involved with the body and in the body, how are You perceptive, since You are not a body but the supreme spirit who is better than any body? But if to perceive is nothing else than to know, or if it is

> directed to knowing … one can say not inappropriately that whatever in any way knows also in some way perceives. So it is, Lord, that although You are not a body You are supremely perceptive, in the sense that You know supremely all things and not in the sense in which an animal knows through a bodily sense-faculty. (*ACMW*, 89–90)

Thomas Aquinas

As we have seen, Aquinas wrote,

> There is neither composition or quantitative parts in God, since He is not a body; nor composition of form and matter in God; nor does His nature differ from His *supposition*; nor His essence from His existence; neither is there in Him composition of genus and difference, nor subject and accident. Therefore, it is clear that God is in no wise composite, but is altogether simple. (*ST*, Ia.3.7)
>
> God fills every place; not, indeed, like a body, for a body is said to fill a place inasmuch as it excludes the co-presence of another body; whereas by God being in a place, others are not thereby excluded from it; indeed, by the very fact that He gives being to the things that fill every place, He Himself fills every place, (ibid., Ia.8.2)

The Reformation Fathers on God's Immensity

During the Reformation, the concept of God not being in space took on new significance in view of the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation (see Volume 4). Nonetheless, the Reformers did not waver on the traditional teaching that the essence of God is nonspatial.

Martin Luther

Read this citation again:

> We deny that God is such an extended, long, broad, thick, high, low Being. We rather contend that God is a supernatural, unfathomable Being, who at one and the same time is in every little kernel of grain and also in and above and outside all creatures. To think of any limitations here, as the false spirit dreams, is out of order. For a human body is much, much too large for the Godhead, and many thousands of godheads could be in it. On the other hand, it is much,

> much too small for only one Godhead. Nothing is so small, God is still smaller; nothing so large, God is still larger; nothing so short, God is still shorter; nothing so long, God is still longer; nothing so wide, God is still wider; nothing so narrow, God is still narrower, etc. In a word, God is an inexpressible Being, above and beyond everything that may be said or thought" (*WLS*, 542–43).

John Calvin

> An earth-born creature, who breathes out his life almost every moment, is able by his own device to confer the name and honor of deity on a lifeless trunk.… Hence, the same prophet [Isaiah], in another place, not only charges idolaters as guilty in the eye of the law, but upbraids them for not learning from the foundations of the earth, nothing being more incongruous than to reduce *the immense and incomprehensible Deity* to the stature of a few feet. (*ICR*, 1.11.4, emphasis added)

"Scripture, in teaching that the essence of ***God is immense*** and spiritual, refutes not only idolaters and the foolish wisdom of the world, but also the Manichees and Anthropomorphites" (ibid., 1.13, intro., emphasis added).
Further,

> The doctrine of Scripture concerning *the immensity* and the spirituality of the essence *of God*, should have the effect not only of dissipating the wild dreams of the vulgar, but also of refuting the subtleties of a profane philosophy. (ibid., 1.13.1, emphasis added)

The Post-Reformation Teachers on God's Immensity

After the Reformation, there are clear and repeated declarations of God's immensity. This begins with the sub-reformers themselves and continues into modern times, interrupted only by the aberrant teachings of process theology, which attribute to God a body.

Jacob Arminius

> IMMENSITY is a pre-eminent mode of the Essence of God, by which it is void of

> place according to space and limits: Being co-extended *space*, because it belongs to simple entity, not having part and part, therefore not having part beyond part: Being also its own encircling *limits*, or beyond which it has no existence, because it is of infinite entity: And, before all things, God alone was both the world, and place, and all things to himself; but He was alone, because there was nothing [*extrinsecus*] outwardly beyond, except himself. (*WJA*, 117, emphasis added)

Francis Turretin

"The orthodox believe and confess the immensity and omnipresence of GOD, not only as to virtue and operation, but principally as to essence" (***IET***, 198).For:

> When GOD is said to be immense (as so everywhere in the world that nevertheless he is not included in the world, which is finite, but may be conceived to be also beyond the world), this ought not to be understood positively (as if certain spaces are to be conceived of beyond the world which God completely fills by his presence), but negatively (inasmuch as the universal spaces of the world do not exhaust the immensity of GOD so as to be contained in and circumscribed by them). He is said, therefore, to be beyond the world because [He is] included in it, not as being in certain imaginary places, but in himself by the infinity of his own essence, as he was before the creation of the world in himself. (ibid., 200)

Stephen Charnock

> If God were not a Spirit, he could not be infinite. All bodies are of a finite nature; everybody is material, and every material thing is terminated. The sun, a vast body, hath abounded greatness; the heavens of a mighty bulk, yet have their limits. If God had a body he must consist of parts, those parts would be bounded and limited, and whatsoever is limited is of a finite virtue, and therefore below an infinite nature. Reason therefore tells us, that the most excellent nature, as God is, cannot be of a corporeal condition; because of the limitation and other actions which belong to every body. (*EAG*, 1, 185–86)

Charles Hodge

> The infinitude of God, so far as space is concerned, includes his immensity and his omnipresence. These are not different attributes, but one and the same attribute, viewed under different aspects. His immensity is the infinitude of his being, viewed as belonging to his nature from eternity. He fills immensity with

his presence. His omnipresence is the infinitude of his being, viewed in relation to his creatures. He is equally present with all his creatures, at all times, and in all places. He is not far from any one of us. “The Lord is in this place,” may be said with equal truth and confidence, everywhere.

Theologians are accustomed to distinguish three modes of presence in space. Bodies are in space circumscriptively. They are bounded by it. Spirits are in space definitively. They have an *ubi*. They are not everywhere, but only somewhere. God is in space repletively. He fills all space. In other words, the limitations of space have no reference to Him. He is not absent from any portion of space, nor more present in one portion than in another. This of course is not to be understood of extension or diffusion. Extension is a property of matter, and cannot be predicated of God. If extended, He would be capable of division and separation; and part of God would be here, and part elsewhere. Nor is this omnipresence to be understood as a mere presence in knowledge and power. It is an omnipresence of the divine essence. Otherwise the essence of God would be limited…. As God acts everywhere, He is present everywhere; for, as the theologians say, a being can no more act where he is not than be where he is not. (*ST*, I, 383–84)

William G. T. Shedd

“God is unextended substance, and his immensity is vaster than that of the whole finite universe” (***DT***, 170).

The Immensity (*in inensum*) of God is his essence as related to space. The Divine essence is not measurable, because [it is] not included in any limits of place. “The heaven of heavens cannot contain thee” (

1 Kings 8:27

;

2 Chron. 2:6

;

Jer. 23:24

). God’s immensity is spiritual, having no extension of substance. (ibid., 339)

R. L. Dabney

Infinitude means the absolutely limitless character of God’s essence. Immensity [means] the absolutely limitless being of His substance. His being, as eternal, is in no sense circumscribed by time; as immense, in no wise circumscribed by space. But let us not conceive of this as a repletion of infinite space by diffusion of particles: like, e.g., an elastic gas released in *vacuo*. The scholastic formula was “The whole substance, in its whole essence, is simultaneously present in every point of infinite space, yet without multiplication of itself.” This is

> unintelligible (but so is His immensity); it may assist to exclude the idea of material extension.... But so far as reason apprehends His immensity, it seems to my mind to be a deduction from His omnipresence. (*LST*, 44)

OBJECTIONS TO GOD'S IMMATERIALITY AND IMMENSITY

The objections to God's immateriality and immensity come from both within and without. From inside evangelical theology, there is the age-old objection that immateriality is a negative term that conveys no real meaning as such. From outside evangelical theology, there are the materialist charges that it makes no sense to speak of an immaterial being.

Objection One—Based on the Idea That Immateriality Is a Purely Negative Concept

Both Christian and non-Christian mystics have pressed this charge. Allegedly, negative concepts convey no knowledge; they simply tell us what the object is not rather than informing us what it is. One cannot know ***not that*** unless he knows what "that" is.

Response to Objection One

This objection was addressed more fully earlier (in Volume 1, chapter 9), where it was shown that negative concepts play an important part in our knowledge of God.

First, while it is true that a negative presupposes a positive, there are positive (analogous) assertions that can be made of God (such as being, goodness, truth, etc.).

Second, negative terms play a crucial role in that they negate all finitude and limitation from a term before it applies to God. For instance, God is love

(positive), but He is not finite love (negative). This is to say He is infinite love, and so on. While completely negative terms do not tell us anything positive about God; nonetheless, they do purify our positive ideas of any limitation before they are appropriately applied to God.

Objection Two—Based on the Presupposition That All Is Matter

Strict materialists deny that anything other than matter exists. If this is true, then God, as a pure Spirit, cannot exist. Thomas Hobbes claimed that "every part of the universe is body, and that which is not body is no part of the universe: and because the universe is all, that which is no part of it is nothing, and consequently nowhere" (***L***, 269). Carl Sagan asserted that "the COSMOS is all that was, is, or ever will be" (***C***). Traditional materialists claimed that matter is eternal, since, according to the first law of thermodynamics, "Energy can neither be created nor destroyed."

Response to Objection Two

Much has happened in the last generation to lay bare the clay feet of materialism (see Sullivan, ***LS***). For one thing, the big bang evidence (see Volume 1, chapter 2) points to a universe that is not eternal but exploded into being from nothing some alleged billions of years ago by a supernatural (non-material) force (see Jastrow, ***GA***).

Further, the anthropic principle (that the universe was fine-tuned from its inception for the emergence of human life) reveals a design imposed upon matter that is not intrinsic to it—this reflects a super-intelligent Mind behind the matter (see Barrow, ***ACP***). The same is true of microbiology's discovery that life's irreducible complexity is best explained by an intelligent Cause (see Behe, ***DBB***).

What is more, the strict materialist view is self-defeating (see Lewis, ***M***, chapter 3). Surely the materialist ***theory*** is not made up of matter; that is, the ***theory*** about matter has no matter in it. The ***idea*** that all is made of molecules does not

itself consist of molecules. Even in less strict forms of materialism, where mind exists as more than matter but is dependent on it, there is a serious problem, for the statement that "mind is dependent on matter" does not claim to depend for its truth upon matter. In fact, it claims to be a truth about matter. No truth about ***all*** matter can be dependent for its truth upon matter, for one cannot stand outside all matter to make an affirmation about all matter and yet simultaneously claim he is really standing inside matter, being dependent upon it.

Objection Three—Based on the Notion of Dependence of Consciousness on the Brain

Materialists argue that in order for there to be a spiritual dimension to life, the spirit or mind must consciously survive death, yet they insist that the mind is dependent on the brain to function—without the brain, it cannot be conscious. However, at death the brain ceases to function; hence, consciousness must cease at this time as well. In this modified form of materialism (known as epiphenomenalism), the mind is not identical to the brain, but it is dependent on the physical brain in the way that a shadow is dependent on a tree.

Response to Objection Three

However, this materialistic argument makes several false assumptions.
First, it assumes that consciousness is a physical function, that "mind" is a function of matter, a process within the brain. But it offers no real proof of this assumption.
Second, it wrongly assumes that simply because a mind and brain function ***together*** that they must be ***identical***. This is not necessarily so—they could interact without being the same.
Third, it assumes that I (my mind) am nothing but my brain. This is a reductionist fallacy. Things that go together are not necessarily the same, any more than my ideas expressed in these words are the same as these words.
Fourth, the materialist's argument is self-defeating, for "nothing but" statements

assume a “more than” knowledge. How could I know I am nothing more than my brain unless I was more than it? I cannot put my brain in a test tube and analyze it unless ***I*** (my mind) am standing outside the test tube.

Fifth, there are several reasons to believe that the mind cannot be reduced to matter. Whatever is material is limited to a particular region of space and time: If it moves, it moves in space and time. But the mind is not so limited—it roams the universe without leaving the room. Even the materialist speaks of “his” thoughts, and I speak of “my” thoughts. If strict materialism were correct, I would have no discrete thoughts: They would be a mere stream of electrons or some other material particles. Only a self-conscious being can make them ***his*** thoughts.

Sixth, and finally, materialists claim their doctrine is true and want others to agree with their conclusions. This implies they are ***free*** to consider their arguments and change their views. However, this would not be possible if they were mere material processes and not free beings.

Objection Four—Based on the Theory That Opposites Cannot Relate

Some insist that opposites cannot relate. Supposedly, if Mind (God) made matter and is the opposite of matter, then the two could never relate. Christians claim Mind (God) did make matter and does relate to the material universe. Indeed, we believe that mind and matter relate in human beings, usually called soul and body. But this seems to be impossible, if mind and matter are opposites.

Response to Objection Four

The assumption of this objection seems to be that mind and matter cannot relate because they are opposites that have nothing in common. However, the material and the immaterial do have something in common—they both exist; they both have being. The fact that the immaterial and the material relate should not be a surprise to anyone who believes that both exist. And, as we have shown above, matter is not all there is. There is a Mind who made it, and there are minds that

know it. If we have both mind and matter, soul and body, then the material and immaterial can and do relate (see Volume 3, chapter 2). To deny this is self-defeating, since materialism itself is an idea that a mind has about matter. Further, my mind is commanding my body (arm and fingers) to write these words. Anyone who denies this has to use his hand or mouth to express these ideas of his mind—which again is self-defeating.

CONCLUSION

God is both immaterial and immense. He is not material, and He is not spatial. Matter is finite, and God is not finite. However, they relate as Cause to effect, since Mind (God) made matter.

Matter is not eternal—it came into being. Nothing cannot cause something; consequently, there must be something that is not matter (viz., Mind) that made matter. As its Creator, God relates to it as Cause to effect, both in bringing it to be (creation) and in causing it to continue to be (sustenance). There is no more problem with the immaterial God relating to the material creation than there is with an infinite God relating to a finite creation, or an uncaused Creator relating to a caused creation, or a necessary Being serving as the ground of a contingent being. The relationship is found in the fact that both have being and that one is the Cause of the other.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

GOD'S OMNIPOTENCE AND OMNIPRESENCE

This chapter discusses two more metaphysical (nonmoral) properties of God: omnipotence and omnipresence. God is ***all-powerful*** and ***everywhere present***.

Both of these attributes are strongly challenged by much of contemporary theology. Traditionally, however, they are at the very core of distinguishing characteristics of the God of classical theism (who is at the basis of orthodox theology). In short, to deny either of these traits is to place oneself outside the orthodox view of God.

There are a couple of popular misconceptions of God's omnipotence. Thus, it is necessary to carefully define omnipotence before discussing it. We will first state what it is, and then what it is not.

THE DEFINITION OF OMNIPOTENCE

Literally, omnipotence means that God has unlimited power (omni=all; potent=powerful). According to the standard Hebrew lexicon, the word ***shadday*** (***shaddai***) means "self-sufficient" or "almighty" (Gesenius, ***HELOT***, 994).

Others concur (Harris, et al., ***TWOT***, 907).[1] The Septuagint (LXX) translated it

by the Greek word ***pantokrator***, which means all-powerful. The same is true in the New Testament, where ***pantokrator*** means "almighty" or "all-powerful" (see Arndt, ***GELNT***, 613).

Theologically, "omnipotent" means that God can do whatever is possible to do. Or, God can do what is not impossible to do. His power is unlimited and uninhibited by anything else.

Negatively, omnipotence ***does not*** mean that God can do what is contradictory. The Scriptures affirm that God cannot contradict His nature (Heb. 6:18; 2 Tim. 2:13; Titus 1:2). He cannot force freedom, for example (Matt. 23:37). He works persuasively, not coercively (see Volume 3, chapter 2).

Further, omnipotence does not mean that God must do all that He can do: It simply means that He has the power to do whatever is possible, even if He chooses not to do some things. God is free not to ***use*** His omnipotence whenever He desires; that is, God is free to limit the ***use*** of His power, but He is not free to limit the ***extent*** of His power. God must know all that He knows, but God does not have to do all He can do.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S OMNIPOTENCE

The biblical basis for omnipotence rests in several facts: the use of the words ***almighty*** and ***infinite*** of God, phrases that imply He has all power, and acts that entail His unlimited power.

"Almighty" Means "All-Powerful"

There are several reasons for taking the biblical words usually translated "almighty" as meaning all-powerful or omnipotent.

First, "almighty" is the standard translation of ***shadday*** (***shaddai***) in the Old Testament.

Second, the Greek word ***pantokrator***, by which the Hebrew word is translated in the Septuagint, means "all-powerful."

Third, the meaning of ***pantokrator***, translated "Almighty" in the New Testament,

means all-powerful each of the times it appears in the New Testament (2 Cor. 6:18; Rev. 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22).
Fourth, the Latin Vulgate uses the word ***omnipotens*** for God, from which we get our English word ***omnipotent***.
Fifth, and finally, the biblical usage of the word supports the meaning of "all-powerful" (see next).

The Use of the Word *Infinite* in Reference to God

At least once God is said to be "infinite" in His understanding (Ps. 147:5 KJV). His knowledge is identical to His Being and His power, since whatever God "has," that He ***is:*** All His attributes refer to His one essence (see chapter 1). Hence, if God is infinite in one attribute, He must be infinite in all attributes, since He is a simple (indivisible) Being (see chapter 2).
Also, the usage of the word ***almighty*** in the Bible reveals that it means "all-powerful." The "Almighty" God is said to be exalted above creatures (great) in power (Job 37:23; cf. Rev. 1:8). He has no limits (Job 11:7–11). He has the power to complete all His promises (Gen. 28:3–4). No one can contend with Him (Job 40:2). He can establish an everlasting covenant (Gen. 17:1, 7). He operates with perfect justice (Job 8:3). He has power to execute final wrath on the world (Rev. 19:15). He operates from a position of supremacy (Job 31:2). He can perform miracles (Rev. 15:3). In summary, He is without limits in His power as well as in His knowledge (Ps. 147:5).

Phrases Implying God's Omnipotence

Numerous biblical passages imply that God is all-powerful. The psalmist wrote, "Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him" (Ps. 115:3). Again, "The LORD does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths" (Ps. 135:6). Isaiah declared of the LORD, "And there is no one who can deliver out of my hand. I work and who will reverse it?" (Isa. 43:13). Jeremiah added, "Ah, Sovereign LORD, you have made the heavens and

the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you" (Jer. 32:17). God asked, "Who is like me and who can challenge me?" (Jer. 49:19). Scripture also speaks of the "surpassing greatness of His power" (Eph. 1:19 NASB) and that He "upholds all things by the word of His power" (Heb. 1:3 NASB): "What is impossible with men is possible with God" (Luke 18:27).

Acts Implying God's Omnipotence (Unlimited Power)

Many actions performed by God imply that His power is unlimited. These include creation from nothing (*ex nihilo*—Gen. 1:1; John 1:3; 2 Cor. 4:6; Col. 1:16–17; Rev. 4:11), truly supernatural acts (John 2:7–11; 6:15ff.; 10:18), and the execution of our salvation (Isa. 46:10–11; Rom. 1:16; Eph. 1:19). None of these activities can be performed by finite power.

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S OMNIPOTENCE

The omnipotence of God follows logically from several other attributes. Among these are His properties of pure actuality, infinity, and simplicity.

Omnipotence Follows From Pure Actuality

As shown earlier, God has no potentiality; only pure actuality. What has no potentiality has no limits at all, since potential is what limits a being. Thus, it follows that God has no limits of any kind. He is unlimited in His power. (That is, He is unlimited in His power according to His nature, which He cannot violate.)

Omnipotence Follows From Infinity

God is infinite in His Being (see chapter 5). God possesses power, as is indicated by His mighty acts. However, as we have seen, whatever God "has," that He ***is***, for He is absolutely one. So whatever applies to Him applies to His whole Being rather than just part of it. Hence, if God is infinite and powerful, then He must be infinitely powerful.

Omnipotence Flows From Simplicity

God is also a simple Being (see chapter 2). Since God has power, God ***is*** power, purely and simply. Whatever is power, purely and simply, is infinitely powerful, for only what ***has*** power is limited—it is limited to the power it has. What ***is*** Power itself is not limited in power. God's power is unlimited.

Some Important Implications of Omnipotence

Many significant elements flow from the omnipotence of God; two are worth noting here. Omnipotence helps solve the problem of evil, and it gives us assurance that God can accomplish what He proclaims.

Omnipotence Solves the Problem of Evil

The classic statement of the problem of evil is as follows:

(1) An all-good God would defeat evil;
(2) an all powerful God can defeat evil;
(3) but evil is not defeated;
(4) hence, there can be no such God.

However, this argument overlooks an important factor implied in omnipotence, which can be restated this way:

(1) An all-good God would defeat evil;
(2) an all-powerful God can defeat evil;
(3) but evil is not ***yet*** defeated;
(4) hence, evil will yet be defeated. It is a fact that an all-good, all-powerful God assures us that this will happen. In short, since God is both all good and all powerful, evil will be defeated.

To put it another way, since God is all-good, He has the ***desire*** to defeat evil. Since He is all-powerful, He has the ***ability*** to defeat evil. Whoever has both desire and ability to defeat evil ***will*** defeat it.

Omnipotence Provides Assurance That God Will Keep His Word

Omnipotence also provides us with assurance that God will keep His Word, whether it is made in predictions about the future or promises to us in the present. For example, an all-knowing God can predict the future, but only an all-powerful God can perform what He predicts. Likewise, an all loving God can promise salvation, but only an all powerful God can accomplish what He has promised (cf. 2 Tim. 1:12). In short, God's predictions and promises are no better than His power to perform them. Without all power, God cannot keep all predictions and promises He makes. God ***is*** all power, and He ***is*** all good.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S OMNIPOTENCE

That God is all-powerful was not seriously challenged in the name of Christianity for nearly the first nineteen hundred years of its existence. Only with the rise of the modern process theology of Alfred North White-head (1861–1947) has God's omnipotence been called into question (Volume 1, chapter 2).

The Early Church Fathers on God's Omnipotence

From earliest times there has been a virtually unanimous voice in favor of the limitless power of God. His incredible ability to create the world is evidence.

Mathetes

> For the Gentiles, by offering such things to those who are destitute of sense and hearing, furnishes an example of madness; they, on the other hand by thinking to offer these things to God as if He needed them, might justly reckon it rather an act of folly than of divine worship. For He that made heaven and earth, all that is therein, and gives to all the things of which we stand in need, certainly requires none of those things which He Himself bestows on such as think of furnishing them to Him. (*EMD*, 3 in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, I)

Justin Martyr (c. 100–c. 165)

"God directs the government of the universe on this day equally as all others" (***DJ***, 29 in ibid., 1.396).

Origen

> We do not back ourselves into a most absurd corner, saying that with God *all* things are possible. For we know how to understand this word *all*. It does not refer either to things that are non-existent or that are inconceivable. For example, we maintain that God cannot do what is disgraceful, for then He would be capable of ceasing to be God. For if He does anything that is disgraceful, he is not God. (in Bercot, ed., *DECB*, 311)

Tertullian

> Ought we not also to consider well the power, and might, and competency of God Himself, whether He be so great as to be able to rebuild and restore the edifice

of the flesh, which had become dilapidated and blocked up, and in every possible way dislocated?—whether He has promulgated in the public domains of nature any analogies to convince us of His power in this respect, lest any should happen to be still thirsting for the knowledge of God, when faith in Him must rest on no other basis than the belief that He is able to do all things? (*RF*, 11 in op. cit. III)

The Medieval Church Fathers on God's Omnipotence

During the Middle Ages, the great theologians of the church gave emphatic and articulate defense of God's omnipotence. We begin with the "medieval monolith," Augustine.

Augustine

We do not put the life of God and the foreknowledge of God under any necessity when we say that God must live an eternal life and must know all things. Neither do we lessen His power when we say He cannot die or be deceived. This is the kind of inability which, if removed, would make God less powerful than He is. God is rightly called omnipotent, even though He is unable to die or be deceived. We call Him omnipotent because He does whatever He wills to do and suffers nothing that He does not will to suffer. He would not, of course, be omnipotent, if He had to suffer anything against His will. It is precisely because He is omnipotent that for Him some things are impossible. (*CG*, 5.10)

Anselm

Again, how are You omnipotent if You cannot do all things? But, how can You do all things if You cannot be corrupted, or tell lies, or make the true into the false (such as to undo what has been done), and many similar things? Or is the ability to do these things not power but impotence? For he who can do these things can do what is not good for himself and what he ought not to do. And the more he can do these things, the more power adversity and perversity have over him and the less he has against them. He, therefore, who can do these things can do them not by power but by impotence. It is said, then, that he "can," not because he himself can do them but because his impotence gives another power against him.…
When someone is said to have the "power" of doing or suffering something which

> is not to his advantage or which he ought not to do, then by "power" here we mean "impotence," for the more he has this "power," the more adversity and perversity have power over him and the more is he powerless against them. Therefore, Lord God, You are the more truly omnipotent since You can do nothing through impotence and nothing can have power against You. (*ACMW*, 90)

Thomas Aquinas

"It is philosophically impossible for divine faith to profess what the reason must regard as false: not even divine omnipotence can make this otherwise" (*De Unitate Intellectus* in Gilby, ***STATTA***, 38).
Further,

> Some godly folk have held that God's omnipotence can unmake the past, in this sense, that what has happened has no longer really happened. The opinion is not heretical; nevertheless, if it involves a contradiction, it is false. (*De Aeternitate Mundi* in ibid., 585)
>
> The being of God, since it is not received into anything, but is pure being, is not limited to any particular mode of a perfection of being, but contains all being within itself: and thus as being taken in its widest sense can extend to an infinity of things, so the divine being is infinite: and hence it is clear that his might or active power is infinite. (*OPG*, 1.2)

The Reformation and Post-Reformation Teachers on God's Omnipotence

Although the Reformers challenged certain prevailing soteriological teachings of their time, nonetheless, they gave full support to the theology proper of the church. This is particularly true regarding God's omnipotence.

John Calvin

> God is deemed omnipotent, not because he can act though he may choose to be idle, or because by a general instinct, he continues the order of nature previously appointed; but because, governing heaven and earth by his providence, he so overrules all things that nothing happens without his

counsel. For when it is said in the Psalms, “He hath done whatsoever he hath pleased” (Ps. 115:3), the thing meant is his sure and deliberate purpose. (*ICR*, 1.16.3)

Jacob Arminius

The Power or Capability of God is infinite because it can do not only all things possible (which are innumerable, so that they cannot be reckoned to be such a number, without a possibility of their being still more) but likewise because nothing can resist it. For all created things depend upon the Divine Power, as upon their efficient Principle, as the phrase is [*turn in esse*, *turn in conservari*], both in their being and in their preservation; whence OMNIPOTENCE is deservedly attributed to Him.

Those things are impossible to God which involve a contradiction, as to make another God, to be mutable, to sin, to lie, to cause something at once to be and not to be, to have been and not to have been, etc., that this thing should be and not be, that it and its contrary should be, that an accident should be without its subject, that a substance should be changed into a pre-existing substance … that a body should possess ubiquity, etc. (*WJA*, 353)

Francis Turretin

“The power of God (the executing principle of the divine operations) is nothing other than the divine essence itself productive outwardly (through which he is conceived as able to do whatsoever he wills or can will)” (***IET***, 244).

Now,

Impossible and possible are used in three ways: (1) supernaturally; (2) naturally; (3) morally. The impossible supernaturally is what cannot be made even by the divine power (as a sensitive stone, an irrational man). The possible supernaturally is what can take place at least divinely (as the resurrection of the dead). The naturally impossible is what cannot be done by the powers of nature and second causes, but yet can be done by supernatural power (as the creation of a world, the conception of a virgin, etc.). But the naturally possible is that which does not exceed the powers of finite nature. The morally impossible is what cannot be done according to the laws of holiness; but the morally possible is what is agreeable to the laws of virtue. God can indeed do the naturally impossible, but not what is said to be such either morally or supernaturally. (ibid., 245–46)

Jonathan Edwards

God is, *in fact*, the supreme judge of the world. He hath power sufficient to vindicate his own right. As he hath a right which cannot be disputed, so he hath power which cannot be controlled. He is possessed of omnipotence, wherewith to maintain his dominion over the world; and he has dominion in the moral as well as the natural world. (*WJE*, II, 191)

R. L. Dabney

When we enquire after God's power, we mean here, not his *potestas*, or authority, but His *potentia*. When we say: He can do all things, we do not mean that He can suffer, or be changed, or be hurt; for the passive capacity of these things is not power, but weakness or defect. We ascribe to God no passive power. When we say that God's power is omnipotence, we mean that its object is only the possible, not the absolutely impossible. Here, however, we must again define, that by the absolutely impossible, we do not mean the physically impossible. For we see God do many things above nature, that is, above what material, or human, or angelic nature can effect. But we mean the doing of that which implies an inevitable contradiction.

Popularly, God's omnipotence may be defined as His ability to do all things. Now of two incompatibles, both cannot become entities together; for, by the terms of the case, the entity of the one destroys that of the other. But if they are not, and cannot be both things, the power of doing all things does not embrace the doing of incompatibles. But 2nd., more conclusively; if even omnipotence could effect both of two contradictories, then the self-contradictory would become the true; which is impossible for man to believe. Hence, 3rd., the assertion would infringe the foundation principle of all truth; that a thing cannot be thus, and not thus, in the same sense, and at the same time. (*LST*, 46)

John Miley

As God is a spiritual being his power must be purely spiritual. This, however, does not deny to him power over physical nature. As he is both a spiritual and personal being, power must be that of a personal will. This is at once the logic of the relative facts and the sense of Scripture. This sense will clearly appear in treating the omnipotence of the divine will.

The omnipotence of God is manifest in his works of creation. The concentration of all finite forces into a single point of energy would be infinitely insufficient for the creation of a single atom. In the sublime words "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" there is the agency of an omnipotent personal will. Only such a will is equal to the creation of the universe, and to

the divine providence which rules in the universal physical and moral realms. (*ST*, 213)

William G. T. Shedd

The Divine power is Omnipotence.… Omnipotence is manifested in the works of the actual creation, but it is not exhausted by them. God could create more than he has, if he pleased. He can do more than he has done, should it be his will. He could have raised up children to Abraham from the stones in the bed of Jordan; he could have sent in aid of the suffering Redeemer twelve legions of angels.

The Divine power is limited only by the absurd and self-contradictory. God can do anything that does not imply a logical impossibility. A logical impossibility means that the predicate is contradictory to the subject; for example, a material spirit, a corporeal deity, a sensitive stone, an irrational man, a body without parts or extension, a square triangle. These are not objects of power, and therefore it is really no limitation of the Divine omnipotence to say that it cannot create them. They involve the absurdity that a thing can be and not be at the same time. A logical impossibility is, in truth, a nonentity; and to say that God cannot create a nonentity, is not a limitation or denial of power. For power is the ability to create entity. (*DT*, 359)

Charles Hodge

It is by removing all the limitations of power, as it exists in us, that we rise to the idea of the omnipotence of God. We do not thus, however, lose the idea itself. Almighty power does not cease to be power. We can do very little. God can do whatever He wills. We, beyond very narrow limits, must use means to accomplish our ends. With God means are unnecessary. He wills, and it is done. He said, Let there be light; and there was light. He, by a volition, created the heavens and the earth. At the volition of Christ, the winds ceased, and there was a great calm. By an act of the will He healed the sick, opened the eyes of the blind, and raised the dead. This simple idea of the omnipotence of God, that He can do without effort, and by a volition, whatever He wills, is the highest conceivable idea of power, and is that which is clearly presented in the Scriptures. (*ST*, 407)

J. I. Packer

“His own name for himself is ***El Shaddai***, ‘God Almighty,’ and all his actions illustrate the omnipotence which his name proclaims” (***KG***, 67).

OBJECTIONS TO GOD'S OMNIPOTENCE

Objection One—Based on the Notion That Omnipotence Is Contradictory

The skeptic argues:

(1) An all-powerful God can do anything.
(2) An all-powerful God can make a stone too heavy for Him to lift.
(3) But if God can't lift it, then He can't do everything.
(4) Therefore, God is not omnipotent.

Response to Objection One

In response to this objection, it has been pointed out that both premises are false. First, an all-powerful God cannot do what is impossible. Omnipotence only means that God can do whatever is supernaturally, naturally, and morally possible to do. God cannot do what is logically or actually impossible to do. Further, it is impossible for God to make a stone too heavy for Him to lift, for whatever God can make, He can move. What God can create, He can destroy and recreate in another place. God cannot make another infinite, and what is finite He can move. God cannot make anything infinite (He alone is infinite), and whatever is finite He can lift. So it is impossible for Him to make a stone He can't lift.

Objection Two—Based Upon God's Freedom

It is argued that if God is free to choose not to use His power, then why isn't He free not to know His knowledge? That is, if God can have more power than He

uses, then why can't He have more knowledge than He knows?

Response to Objection Two

To begin with, this is contradictory. Affirming these kinds of attributes of God necessarily leads to contradictions.

The answer to this objection lies in a very important distinction. God can have more power than He ***uses***, but He cannot have more power than He already ***has***. Likewise He can have more knowledge than He uses, but He cannot have more knowledge than He already has.

Simply because God is all-powerful does not mean He has to do everything He ***could*** do. God is free, and He can freely choose, in accordance with His nature, to use only the power He chooses to exercise.

Objection Three—Based Upon God's Love

The Bible teaches that God is omnibenevolent (all-loving, all good—see chapter 15). As such, God desires to save all people (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9); however, all people will not be saved (Matt. 25:40–41; 2 Thess. 1:7–9; Rev. 20). Hence, God cannot be all-powerful: If He were, then He could accomplish all that He desires, including the salvation of all people.

Response to Objection Three

In reply, again, God cannot do ***any*** thing; for instance, He cannot do what is logically or morally impossible. It is impossible to save people against their will; forced freedom is a contradiction in terms. As mentioned previously, God's love works persuasively, not coercively. Thus, if God is love but man is free, then God cannot save all He desires to save—He can only save those willing to be saved. Jesus said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone

those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but ***you were not willing***" (Matt. 23:37, emphasis added).

Objection Four—Based Upon Scripture

Critics also offer an objection against omnipotence from the Bible. Jesus said, "With God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26). If this is so, then the charge still stands that He could make a stone too heavy for Him to lift.

Response to Objection Four

In reply, the context of this passage indicates that this means only that God can do what is ***humanly*** impossible, not what is ***actually*** impossible (cf. Luke 18:27). Other verses say that God cannot do what is actually impossible; for example, Hebrews declares: "It is impossible for God to lie" (6:18). All sophisticated theists agree that God cannot do what is logically or actually impossible. Omnipotence only claims that God can do whatever is possible, not what is impossible.

GOD'S OMNIPRESENCE

Technically speaking, omnipresence is not an attribute of God, but rather it flows from His attributes. Omnipresence results from His relation to His creation, like transcendence and immanence (see chapter 22). If there is no creation, then there is nothing else to which God can be present. However, since God is infinite in Himself, His omnipresence does express a certain characteristic of God that becomes manifest when there is a creation to which He can be everywhere present.

Omnipresence is part of a classical cluster of God's characteristics that distinguishes the God of orthodox theology from contemporary unorthodox

views such as panentheism and process theology (see Volume 1, chapters 2, 4, 5, and 8).

THE DEFINITION OF OMNIPRESENCE

Literally, omnipresence means that God is everywhere present at once (omni=everywhere + present). Negatively stated, there is nowhere that God is absent. The term "ubiquitous" is sometimes used interchangeably with omnipresence; the root meaning of "ubiquity" is from the Latin *ubique*, meaning "everywhere."

It is helpful to see what omnipresence does not mean. It does not mean that God ***is*** creation; this is pantheism (see Volume 1, chapter 2). In theism God ***made*** the world; in pantheism God ***is*** the world. Nor does omnipresence mean that God is ***in*** creation, which is panentheism. As we have seen in previous chapters, God is not in space (He is nonspatial); nor is He in time (He is nontemporal). Neither is God in matter, since He is immaterial—pure Spirit.

What, then, does omnipresence mean? It means that ***all of God is everywhere at once***. As the indivisible Being, God does not have ***one part here*** and ***another part there***, for He has no parts. God is ***present to*** but not ***part of*** creation. God is ***everywhere***, but He is not ***any thing***. He is ***at every point in space***, but He is not ***spatial***. He is ***at every*** point in space, but He is not ***of*** any point in space.

There is, of course, a sense in which God is "in" the universe but not "of" it: He is "in" it (better yet, it is in God) as its ***Cause*** (Col. 1:16). However, He is not part of the ***effect***. All of ***God is everywhere***, yet ***no part of God is anywhere***, since He has no parts.

Some illustrations of omnipresence are good, and some are not. For instance, God is not present to the whole universe the way air fills the room, since some molecules are in one place in the room while others are in another. All of God is everywhere.

A better illustration is that God is "in" or present to the whole universe the way a mind is in its brain, or the manner in which beauty is present in a work of art, or that thought is in a sentence. In each case, the one is present to and penetrates the whole without a part of it being in a part of the other.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S

OMNIPRESENCE

Many verses describe God as being present to or causally in His whole creation. Consider the following: “But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you” (1 Kings 8:27). “The LORD is the great God, the great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land” (Ps. 95:3–5). “Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast” (Ps. 139:7–10). “ ‘Am I only a God nearby,’ declares the LORD, ‘and not a God far away? Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?’ declares the LORD. ‘Do not I fill heaven and earth?’ ” (Jer. 23:23–24). “When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you” (Matt. 6:6). “God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring’ ” (Acts 17:27–28).

Many other verses speak of God as within the universe as its current Sustaining Cause: “In him all things hold together” (Col. 1:17). “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word” (Heb. 1:3). “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being” (Rev. 4:11).

So God is present to all creation as its Creator, not as being part of it. He is the Creator and Sustainer of all that has been made. In His infinity, God is not locked out of any corner of creation. Indeed, were it not for His causal presence, creation would not exist.

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR GOD’S OMNIPRESENCE

There are several basic arguments for God's omnipresence. They flow from His causality, infinity, and simplicity.

Omnipresence Follows From Current Causality

As just noted, God is the Cause and Sustainer of all being, and the Cause of all being is present in all created beings as the current and sustaining Cause. What is present in all created beings is omnipresent, for there is no finite being anywhere of which God is not its current sustaining Cause. Therefore, God is everywhere present.

Omnipresence Follows From Infinity

God is infinite or without limits in His Being, and what is without limits in its Being is not limited to a given place. What is not limited to a given place is everywhere; hence, it follows that God is everywhere. If there were some place God was not, then He would be limited as to where He is. But God is not limited in any way.

Omnipresence Follows From Simplicity

God is the simple Being who is without any parts. What has no parts cannot be partly anywhere. Furthermore, what has no parts cannot be finite, and what has parts cannot be infinite, since one more part could always be added. As we have seen, it is impossible to have one more than an infinite. Thus, a Being who has no parts must be an infinite Being, and an infinite Being must be everywhere. It follows that all of God is everywhere.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S

OMNIPRESENCE

Like the other great attributes of God, omnipresence is firmly rooted in the history of the church. Beginning with the early Fathers and into modern times, the omnipresence of God was universally recognized.

The Early Church Fathers on God's Omnipresence

Early Fathers, both Eastern and Western, declared that God is everywhere present in the universe as a natural consequence of God's infinity.

Theophilus (d. 180)

> This is the attribute of God, the Highest and Almighty, and the living God: not only to be everywhere present, but also to see all things and to hear all things. He is by no means to be confined in a place, for if he were, then the place containing Him would be greater than He.... For God is not contained, but is Himself the place of all. (*TA*, 2.3 in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, II)

Irenaeus

> They are ignorant as to what the expression means, that heaven is His throne and earth His footstool. For they do not know what God is. Rather, they imagine that He sits after the fashion of a man. They think He is contained within bounds, but does not contain. (*AH*, 4.3.1 in ibid., I)

Clement of Alexandria

> God is not in darkness or in place, but He is above both space and time, and qualities of objects. For that reason, neither is He at any time in a particular part—either as containing it or as being contained, either by limitation or section.... Though heaven is called His throne, not even there is He contained. (*S*, 2.2 in ibid., II)

Mark Minucius Felix (d. c. A.D. ***250)***

> Where is God afar off, when all things heavenly and earthly ... are known to God, are full of God? Everywhere He is not only very near to us, but He is infused into us. Accordingly, look upon the sun once more. It is fixed steadfast in the heavens, yet it is diffused over all lands equally.... How much more is God? (*OMF*, 32 in ibid., IV)

Tertullian

"If in created beings there is any portion of space anywhere void of God, the void clearly will be of a false deity" (***FBAM***, 1.11 in ibid., III).

Origen

> The God of the universe may, through His own power, descend with Jesus into the life of men. The Word that was in the beginning with God (who is also very God) may come to us. However, He does not give up His place or vacate His own seat, in doing so. It is not that one place becomes empty of Him. Or that another place that did not formerly contain Him is now filled. (*AC*, 4.5 in ibid., IV)

Hence,

> We do not ask the question, "How will we go to God?" as though we thought that God existed in some place. God is of too excellent a nature for any place. He holds all things in His power, and He Himself is not confined by anything whatever. (*AC*, 4.34 in ibid.)

The Medieval Church Fathers on God's Omnipresence

As was typical of other attributes of God, the great theologians of the Middle Ages treated omnipresence with a great deal more theological sophistication than their early predecessors.

Augustine

> The truth is that all these actions and energies belong to the one true God, who is really a God, who is wholly present everywhere, is confined by no frontiers and bound by no hindrances, is indivisible and immutable, and, though His nature has no need of either heaven or of earth, He fills them both with His presence and His power. (*CG*, 7.30)

Augustine illustrated omnipresence in this manner:

> What is more wonderful than what happens in connection with the sound of our voices and our words, a thing, forsooth, which passes away in a moment? For when we speak, there is no place for even the next syllable till after the preceding one has ceased to sound; nevertheless, if one hearer be present, he hears the whole of what we say, and if two hearers be present, both hear the same, and to each of them it is the whole; and if a multitude listen in silence, they do not break up the sounds like loaves of bread, to be distributed among them individually, but all that is uttered is imparted to all and to each in its entirety. Consider this, and say if it is not more incredible that the abiding Word of God should not accomplish in the universe what the passing word of man accomplishes in the ears of listeners, namely, that as the word of man is present in its entirety to each and all of the hearers, so the Word of God should be present in the entirety of his being at the same moment everywhere. (*L*, 137.2)

Anselm

> It belongs to the divine substance, of course, that it always and everywhere exist, so that nothing ever or anywhere is apart from its presence. Otherwise, it is in no way everywhere and always powerful, and what is not everywhere and always powerful is in no way God. (*SABW*, 247)

Thomas Aquinas

> It belongs therefore to a thing to be everywhere absolutely when, on any supposition, it must be everywhere; and this properly belongs to God alone. For whatever number of places be supposed, even if an infinite number be supposed to exist besides what already exist, it would be necessary that God should be in all of them; for nothing can exist except by Him. Therefore, to be everywhere primarily and absolutely, belongs to God, and is proper to Him: because whatever number of places be supposed to exist, God must be in all of them, not as a part of Him, but as to His very self. (*ST*, 1a.8.4)
>
> God fills every place; not, indeed, like a body, for a body is said to fill place inasmuch as it excludes the co-presence of another body; whereas by God being in a place, others are not thereby excluded from it; indeed, by the very fact that He gives being to the things that fill every place, He Himself fills every place, (ibid., 1a.8.2)

The Reformation and Post-Reformation Fathers on God's Omnipresence

The Reformers had no reason to dissent on God's omnipresence. Their view of God was identical to that of their medieval forefathers on all His basic metaphysical attributes.

Martin Luther

Again,

> This proud and conceited spirit … reveals his crude and stupid ideas when he conceives of God's omnipresence as if God were an immense, expansive Being which fills all the world and extends even beyond it, like a bag so full of straw that the straw sticks out at the top and at the bottom; just as though God were present everywhere according to the first, the corporeal, comprehensible manner. In that event Christ's body would, of course, be a mere figment or phantom, an immense bag of straw containing God together with heaven and earth. Would such ideas of God not be very crude?
>
> But this is not our language. On the contrary, we deny that God is such an extended, long, broad, thick, high, low Being. We rather contend that God is a supernatural, unfathomable Being, who at one and the same time is in every little kernel of grain and also in and above and outside all creatures. (*WL*, 542–43)

John Calvin

God is everywhere present, for

> after learning that there is a Creator, it must forthwith infer that he is also a Governor and Preserver, and that, not by producing a kind of general motion in the machine of the globe as well as in each of its parts, but by a special Providence sustaining, cherishing, superintending, all the things which he has made, to the very minutest, even to a sparrow. (*ICR*, 1.16.1)
>
> While, then, we are accustomed to regard every object as confined to the place where our senses discern it, *no place can be assigned to God*; and hence, if we would seek him, we must rise higher than all corporeal or mental discernment" (ibid., 3.20.40, emphasis added).

Jacob Arminius

> After creatures, and places in which creatures are contained, have been granted to have an existence, from this Immensity follows the OMNIPRESENCE or Ubiquity of the Essence of God, according to which it is entirely wheresoever any creature or any place is, and this in exact similarity to a [mathematical] point, which is totally present to the entire circumference, and to each of its parts, and yet without circumscription. If there be any difference, it arises from the Will, the Ability and the Act of God. (*WJA*, 117)

Francis Turretin

> God may be said to be present with all things in three modes: (1) by power and operation; (2) by knowledge; (3) by essence. This is usually expressed by the Scholastics in the line:
>
> *Inter, praesenter Deus est, et ubique potenter*
>
> . Meanwhile, GOD is present, and everywhere powerfully. He is said to be everywhere by his power because he produces and governs all things and works all things in all (in which sense Paul says, "In him we live and move and have our being,"
>
> Acts 17:28
>
>). He is present with all by his knowledge because he sees and beholds all things which are and become in every place as intimately present to and placed before him. Hence "all things" are said "to be naked and open unto the eyes of him" and "there is no creature that is not manifest in his sight" (
>
> Heb. 4:13
>
>). Finally, he is everywhere by his essence because his essence penetrates all things and is wholly by itself intimately present with each and every thing. Now it is of this last presence we properly treat here, for our adversaries themselves do not deny that GOD is everywhere present by his power and knowledge (as has been said already). (*IET*, 197)

John Miley

> In these terms we find the reality and the absoluteness of this omnipresence in the omniscience of God and the omnipotence of his will. While God dwells in heaven, he also dwells with the contrite and humble in spirit to revive and comfort them. These are purely personal ministries, and, therefore, signify a presence of God with the contrite and humble in his personal agency.… Here is first the expression of the greatness and majesty of God; then the expression of his kingly government. He is enthroned in heaven and rules over all the realms of existence. In the representation God is personally local, but his personal agency is everywhere operative. Thus he is present in all the universe in the comprehension of his knowledge and the infinite potency of his will. (*ST*, 220)

Charles Hodge

> The infinitude of God, so far as space is concerned, includes his immensity and his omnipresence. These are not different attributes, but one and the same attribute, viewed under different aspects. His immensity is the infinitude of his being, viewed as belonging to his nature from eternity. He fills immensity with his presence. His omnipresence is the infinitude of his being, viewed in relation to his creatures. He is equally present with all his creatures, at all times, and in all places. (*ST*, 383–84)

Further,

> Theologians are accustomed to distinguish three modes of presence in space. Bodies are in space circumscriptively. They are bounded by it. Spirits are in space definitively. They have an *ubi*. They are not everywhere, but only somewhere. God is in space repletively. He fills all space. In other words, the limitations of space have no reference to Him. He is not absent from any portion of space, nor more present in one portion than in another. This of course is not to be understood of extension or diffusion. Extension is a property of matter, and cannot be predicated of God. If extended, He would be capable of division and separation; and part of God would be here, and part elsewhere. Nor is this omnipresence to be understood as a mere presence in knowledge and power. It is an omnipresence of the divine essence. Otherwise the essence of God would be limited. (*ST*, 383–84)

William G. T. Shedd

By virtue of God's immensity, He is Omnipresent. Immensity and omnipresence are thus inseparably connected, and are best considered in reference to each other. Omnipresence has respect to the universe of created beings and things; to space as filled. Immensity has reference to this, and to what is beyond; to space as void: the "
extra flammantia moenia mundi
," of Lucretius. (
De Natura
in *I*, 74)

God is said to be beyond the universe (*extra mundum*), not in the sense that there are spaces beyond the universe which he fills by extension of substance, but in the sense that the universe does not exhaust his immensity, or is equal to it.

The presence of mind is wholly different from that of matter. Spiritual substance is present, wherever it is present, as a complete *whole* at every point. The human soul, for example, is present as a unity and totality at every point of the body. It is not present as the body is, partitively, or by division of substance. God, also, as the infinite Spirit, is present at every point of space as a totality. He is not present in the universe by division of substance, but as a unity, simple and undivided. This is taught in the dicta: "The soul is all in every part; God is a circle whose centre is everywhere, and circumference nowhere" (*DT*, 1.340).

J. I. Packer

"God is spirit." When our Lord said this, he was seeking to disabuse the Samaritan woman of the idea that there could be only one right place for worship, as if God were locally confined in some way. *Spirit* contrasts with *flesh*: Christ's point is that while we, being flesh, can be present in only one place at a time, God, being spirit, is not so limited. God is nonmaterial, noncorporeal, and therefore nonlocalized.

God is not a body—therefore, he is free from all limitations of space and distance; and is omnipresent. God has no parts—this means that his personality and powers and qualities are perfectly integrated, so that nothing in him ever alters. (*KG*, 120–21)

OBJECTIONS TO GOD'S OMNIPRESENCE

Critics of the orthodox Christian view have offered several objections to the doctrine of God's omniscience. Two in particular are noteworthy.

Objection One—Based Upon the Incarnation

According to orthodox theology, Christ-incarnate is God (see chapter 12 and appendix 1), and yet He was not omnipresent—He was located in one place at a time. Therefore, God-incarnate is not omnipresent.

Response to Objection One

In reply, it is important to point out that Christ ***as God*** was everywhere at once, while Christ ***as man*** was in one place at a time. Christ has two natures, and they must not be confused—what is true of one is not necessarily true of the other. For example, Christ was infinite and uncreated in His divine nature, but He was finite and created in His human nature. Likewise, as God, Christ was omnipresent, but as man He was not.

Objection Two—Based Upon the Invocation of His Presence

It is also objected that if God is everywhere, then why ask Him to be with us? This is what Jesus bid us to do, promising that "where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them" (Matt. 18:20).

Response to Objection Two

The answer to this objection is to distinguish the different ways that Christ is with us. In a general way, He is always with us as our Sustainer. However, in a special way, the Bible often speaks of Christ being with us to judge, to answer prayer, or to bless. Since Christ can be with us in more than one way, there is no contradiction here.

CONCLUSION

The bases for God's omnipotence and omniscience are firm—biblically, theologically, and historically—and the arguments against these attributes are misdirected. God is all-powerful and everywhere present; as a result, He knows all there is to know about everything there is to know, and He has all the power He needs to perform everything He wishes to perform; that is, everything that is not a contradiction.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

GOD'S OMNISCIENCE

DEFINITION OF OMNISCIENCE

Historically, the omniscience of God was a straightforward doctrine: God knows everything—past, present, and future; He knows the actual and the possible; only the impossible (the contradictory) is outside the knowledge of God. The contemporary debate, however, has changed the theological landscape on this doctrine. God's unlimited knowledge is now allegedly limited; His all-knowing is no longer the knowing of all. If we adhere to this, we are left with the oxymoronic view of limited omniscience. The attack on traditional omniscience has come from both outside and inside evangelicalism.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S OMNISCIENCE

"The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time" (Gen. 6:5). "Can anyone teach God knowledge?" (Job 21:22). "Be assured that my words are not false; one perfect in knowledge is with you" (Job 36:4). "Do you know how the clouds hang poised, those wonders of him who is perfect in

knowledge?" (Job 37:16). "You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD" (Ps. 139:2–4). "How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. When I awake, I am still with you" (Ps. 139:17–18). "He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name. Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit" (Ps. 147:4–5). "I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please" (Isa. 46:10). "His understanding no one can fathom" (Isa. 40:28). "See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you" (Isa. 42:9).

"Your Father knows what you need before you ask him" (Matt. 6:8). "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered" (Matt. 10:29–30). "The Lord … does these things that have been known for ages" (Acts 15:17–18). "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!" (Rom. 11:33). "Those God fore-knew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son" (Rom. 8:29). "In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will" (Eph. 1:11). "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account" (Heb. 4:13).

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S OMNISCIENCE

Granted that God has knowledge, His omniscience can be derived from a number of His other attributes. These include His infinity, His causality, His necessity, His knowledge of reality, His eternality, and His absolute perfection.

The Argument From God's Infinity

All theists agree that God is infinite (without limits), and God's knowledge is identical to His nature, since He is simple (see chapter 2). God must know according to His Being; therefore, God must know infinitely. To be limited in knowledge of the future is not to know infinitely; hence, God's infinite knowledge must include everything, including all future events. If it did not, He would be limited in His knowledge.

The Argument From God's Causality

All effects preexist in their efficient cause (see Volume 1, chapter 10), since a cause cannot produce what it does not possess—it cannot give what it hasn't got to give.[1] God is the First Cause of all that exists or will ever exist; thus, the future (including all of its free actions) preexists in God. Therefore, by knowing Himself, God knows all future free actions. God knows Himself infallibly and eternally; consequently, God has infallible and eternal knowledge of all free actions that will ever occur.

The Argument From God's Necessity

In addition, all theists agree that God is a necessary Being. A necessary Being has no possibility of not existing, and what has no possibility of not existing is pure existence. Pure Existence (or Pure Actuality) has no potentiality, and since potentiality is a limitation in being, a Being of pure actuality has no limitations. God's knowledge is identical to His Being; therefore, God's knowledge must be without any limitation—that is, it is infinite.

The Argument From the Nature of Reality

Reality includes both the actual and the possible. Only the impossible is not real, and God's knowledge extends to all that is real; if it did not, then He would not be all-knowing, since there would be something that He did not know. But if God knows the possible as well as the actual, then God must know the future, since the future is possible, not impossible. If it were impossible, then it would never happen. Thus, God must know all that will be actualized in the future, including all future free acts.

The Argument From God's Eternality

God is the eternal Being: His knowledge of the world is from eternity. An eternal Being knows eternally, and eternal knowing is not limited by time. Thus, God's knowledge is not limited by time: He knows the future with the same eternal glance by which He knows the past and present. As a result, there is no problem with foreseeing future events before they occur. God simply sees them in His eternal present.

The Argument From God's Perfection

God is an absolutely perfect Being; hence, His knowledge, being identical with His Being, must be absolutely perfect too. As the absolutely perfect Being, God must know Himself perfectly, and to know Himself perfectly means to know not only His own nature but to know all possible ways others can participate in the perfections of that nature. This means that God's perfect knowledge includes all the ways creatures can and will participate in God's perfections. Nothing, then, in the future free acts of humanity can be unknown to God from eternity. If it were, then God's knowledge of Himself would not be perfect.

The Argument From the Test for a False Prophet

Another argument in favor of God's infallible foreknowledge is the test for a false prophet laid down in Deuteronomy 18:22, in which God declared, "If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD ***does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken***. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him" (emphasis added). This implies that a true prophecy is infallible, and only false ones are fallible. That is, all prophecies that come from God come to pass, and any prophecy that does not come to pass did not come from God. The reason is obvious: Only an omniscient Being ***cannot*** be wrong about anything, including the future. Anyone who does not with certainty know the future, can, and eventually will be, wrong, especially if he makes specific predictions about the future (particularly the distant future). Without infallible foreknowledge, he is at best only making good guesses, and no one can be right all the time when he is guessing most of the time. Only predictions coming from an omniscient Mind will always come to pass.

The neotheist's response is to claim that biblical predictions about future free acts are not infallible; rather, they are merely probabilistic forecasts. A non-infallible probabilistic forecast is never really wrong, since it was just that—only a probable forecast. Since nothing for certain was claimed, when the forecast does not come to pass the prognosticator cannot be charged with a false prediction.

This reasoning is clearly mistaken on several grounds. ***First***, if true, then no false prophet should ever have been stoned, as Deuteronomy 18:22 says they should have been. Indeed, on this definition of a prophecy as merely a "probabilistic forecast," there could never truly be any such thing as a false prophecy. This is absurd, since either a prediction comes to pass or it does not. If it does, then it is true (since it corresponds to what was predicted), and if it does not, then it is false (since it does not correspond to what was predicted). The Bible declares that there can be and have been false prophecies, and it condemns those who make them. Hence, while the neotheist's response is ingenious, it is fallacious.

Second, according to this clever definition of a prophecy, even God's test for a false prophecy was a false one. Clark Pinnock, for example, lists a half dozen such unfulfilled predictions (***MMM***, 51). But, as we have seen, this would mean that God has violated the test for a false prophet, for He said that any unfulfilled prediction was false and, thus, grounds for being stoned. Since Jesus, as a Jew living under Jewish law, gave a prediction that was not fulfilled (according to

Pinnock), He should have been stoned. Since this is obviously absurd, God must have infallible knowledge of all future acts, including free ones.

Third, and finally, this probablistic view of a prophecy is contrary to what God says about His unerring ability to predict the future as proof of His infallible foreknowledge. Isaiah said that God and God alone can "declare the end from the beginning." Only God can say, "I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it" (Isa. 46:11). Later God lists His ability to make infallible predictions as irrefutable evidence that He is the true God and other gods are not, saying,

> I foretold the former things long ago, my mouth announced them and I made them known; then suddenly I acted, and they came to pass.... Therefore I told you these things long ago; before they happened I announced them to you so that you could not say, "My idols did them; my wooden image and metal god ordained them" (Isa. 48:3–5).

Again, the neotheist's maneuver is a classic case of special pleading, for it is a claim that God has the selective ability to do this on certain occasions, and not on other occasions, which is the traditional theistic view they reject. Furthermore, it undermines the neotheist's argument that this kind of infallible assurance of future free acts is incompatible with libertarian free will. They cannot have it both ways.

The Argument From the Infallibility and Inerrancy of the Bible

There are strong arguments for the infallibility and inerrancy of the Bible (see Volume 1, chapters 13–14, 27). Indeed, even many neotheists who deny God's infallible foreknowledge of future free acts claim, nonetheless, to believe in inerrancy: Clark Pinnock, John Sanders, and Gregory Boyd are cases in point. However, if the Bible is infallible, then all of its predictions must be infallible, and its predictions cannot be infallible unless God's knowledge of the future is infallible—which is what they deny. Hence, either God is infallible or the Bible is not; but, conversely, if the Bible is infallible, then so is God's foreknowledge of the future free events He predicts. In short, this manifests an inconsistency between neotheists' belief in the infallibility of the Bible and their denial of the infallibility of God's knowledge about the future.

The Bible declares that God cannot err (Rom. 3:4; Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18). And if

God cannot err, and if God is the ultimate source of Scripture (Matt. 4:7; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20–21, etc.), with "every word coming out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4; cf. 2 Sam. 23:2), then He must have infallible knowledge of future free acts, for the Bible is filled with predictions God has made about the past, present, and future. Any being with only fallible knowledge about all these matters would surely have made mistakes. Nevertheless, the Bible, even according to the claims of neotheists, has no errors. If so, then God must have infallible (unerring) knowledge about all these events. In brief, to deny that God's omniscience includes infallible foreknowledge of future free events is a denial of the infallibility and inerrancy of the Bible.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S OMNISCIENCE

Not only is the classical view of God's omniscience firmly grounded in Scripture, but the Fathers of the church also virtually unanimously support it. This has been true from the very beginning.

The Early Church Fathers on God's Omniscience

The early Fathers, apologists, and theologians of the church are one in affirming the omniscience of God. This is particularly clear in their teaching on God's infallible foreknowledge.

Justin Martyr (c. 100–165)[2]

Justin affirmed that God predetermined that Christ would remain in heaven until "the number of those who are foreknown by Him as good and virtuous is complete, on whose account He has still delayed the consummation" (***FA***, 45, in Roberts and Donaldson, ***ANF***, 1.178). God knows beforehand persons to be saved by repentance, some not even born yet (28, in ibid., 1.172). Justin also

asserted that this is not fatalism, but rather "God foreknowing all that shall be done by all men, and it being His decree that the future actions of men shall all be recompensed according to their several values" (44, in ibid., 1.177).
In addition, Justin spoke of the persecution of Christians, saying, "It was foreknown that these infamous things should be uttered against those who confessed Christ, and those who slandered Him" (49, in ibid., 1.179).

Tatian (120–173)

Tatian, a disciple of Justin, attributes the foreknowledge of God, through prophecy, as one of the reasons for his conversion to Christianity: "I was led to put faith in these by … the ***foreknowledge*** displayed of future events" (***AG***, 29, in ibid., 2.77, emphasis added).

Cyprian (200–258)

Cyprian said that the foreknowledge of God by the Holy Spirit through the apostles serves the church in teaching it how to live for Christ (***ECPT***, 55.6, in ibid., 5.349).

Irenaeus (c. 120–c. 202)

Irenaeus said that God foreknew the doctrines of evil teachers (***AH***, 3.21.9, in ibid., 1.454). Also,

> God, knowing the number of those who will not believe, since He foreknows all things, has given them over to unbelief, and turned away His face from men of this stamp, leaving them in the darkness which they have themselves chosen for themselves. (4.29.2, in ibid., 1.502)

Further, "in order that our faith might be firmly established; and contained a prophecy of things to come, in order that man might learn that God has ***foreknowledge*** of all things" (4.32.2, in ibid., 1.506, emphasis added).

Clement of Alexandria (150–215)

Clement said, “He shows both things: both His divinity in His ***foreknowledge*** of what would take place …” (***I***, 1.9, in ibid., 2.228, emphasis added). Other Fathers are in concert that God dwells in eternity and knows all future things from that eternal fulcrum.

Tertullian (c. 155–c. 225)

Tertullian asserted that “it was by this very attribute that He foreknew all things when He appointed them their places, and appointed them their places when He foreknew them” (***AM***, 2.5, in ibid., 3.301). Yet this foreknowledge did not interfere with God’s gift of freedom of choice to Judas (2.7, in ibid., 3.303), even to perish by his choice of sin. God’s foreknowledge included Judas’s betrayal of Jesus (4.41, in ibid., 3.419).

Origen (185–254)

Origen, in his work against Celsus, contended that God observed, in His foreknowledge, those who would walk worthy of Him and would have faithful service even until death (***AC***, 7.44, in ibid., 4.629). God knows the future of all things, including the sins of humankind (Ambrosiaster, ***CPE***, 81.24, in Oden, ***ACCSNT***, 235).[3]

Hippolytus (c. 170–c. 235)

Hippolytus said that God is “fully acquainted with whatever is about to take place, for foreknowledge also is present to Him” (***RAH***, 10.28, in Roberts and Donaldson, ***ANF***).

Gregory Thaumaturgus (c. 213–c. 270)

Similarly, Gregory Thaumaturgus indicates that for God, it is as though what is about to occur has already happened (in regard to His foreknowledge), because

all events have been made certain by Him (***MBE***, 3, in Roberts and Donaldson, ***ANF***, 6.11).

Medieval Church Fathers on God's Omniscience

The medieval Fathers were virtually unanimous in their view on omniscience. From Augustine to Aquinas, they understood omniscience in the strong sense of complete, infallible knowledge of all things actual and possible, present and future.[4]

Augustine

> His [God's] vision is utterly unchangeable. Thus, He comprehends all that takes place in time—the not-yet existing future, the existing present, and the no-longer-existing past—in an immutable and eternal present. (*CG*, 11.21)

Further,

> Neither does His attention pass from thought to thought, for His knowledge embraces everything in a single spiritual contuition. [Thus,] His knowledge of what happens in time, like His movement of what changes in time, is completely independent of time. (ibid., 11.1)

As to the relation between God's absolute and unchangeable foreknowledge and man's free will, Augustine held that God's "foreknowledge cannot be deceived" (ibid., 5.10), for God infallibly foreknows exactly how we are going to use our free choice. Thus,

> The conclusion is that we are by no means under compulsion to abandon free choice in favor of divine foreknowledge, nor need we deny—God forbid!—that God knows the future, as a condition for holding free choice, (ibid., 5.10)

Hence,

> A man does not sin because God foreknew that he would sin. Nay, it cannot be doubted but that it is the man himself who sins when he does sin, because He whose foreknowledge is infallible foreknew … that the man himself would sin, who, if he wills not, sins not. But if he shall not will to sin, even this did God foreknow. (ibid.)

Anselm

"He foreknows every future event. But what God foreknows will necessarily occur in the same manner as He foreknows it to occur" (***TIR***, 153). This infallible foreknowledge includes free acts: "God, who foresees what you are willingly going to do, foreknows that your will is not compelled or prevented by anything else; hence this activity of the will is free" (ibid., 154). So "to foreknow something implies that thing is going to happen.… And so, if God foreknows something, then it is necessary that the thing occur" (ibid., 157–58).

However, "although He foreknows all future events, nevertheless He does not foreknow every future event as occurring by necessity." For "He foreknows that some things are going to occur through the free will of rational creatures" (ibid., 158). And "He sees only what is true—whether this results from necessity or from freedom" (ibid., 161). Thus, God's knowledge of everything, including future free acts, is "necessary," "unchangeable," "eternal," and "immutable" (ibid., 162–63).

Nonetheless, "All things are always present to Him, and so He does not have ***foreknowledge*** of future things, but ***knowledge*** of present things" (***TFE***, 185). All truth exists eternally in the "Supreme Truth [who] has no beginning and no end" (ibid., 92), for "he himself is truth" (***CDH***, 274). Thus, all of God's prediction of free events were made infallibly and with necessity:

> If, then, it be said that it was necessary for him [Christ] to die of his single choice, because the antecedent faith and prophecy were true, this is no more than saying that it must be because it was to be. There is an antecedent necessity, which is the cause of a thing, and there is also a subsequent necessity arising from the thing itself. [Now,] wherever there is an antecedent necessity, there is also a subsequent one; but not *vice versa*…. By this subsequent and imperative necessity, was it necessary (since the belief and prophecy concerning Christ were true, that he would die of his own free will) that it should be so? (ibid., 276–77)

Thomas Aquinas

Aquinas argued that all knowing involves a Knower and a known. However, in self-knowledge the Knower and known are identical. Hence, God can only know Himself through Himself (***ST***, 1a.14.2): God knows Himself by Himself and in Himself. And since God is eternal, immutable, and simple, it follows that He knows Himself eternally, immutably, and simply.

Furthermore, God knows Himself perfectly. Something is known perfectly when its potential to be known is completely realized, and there is no unactualized potentiality in God, since He is complete actuality—Pure Existence. Therefore, God knows Himself perfectly: His self-knowledge is completely actual (ibid., 1a.14.3).

What is more, for Aquinas, God's knowledge is identical with His essence, for if God's acts of knowledge were really distinct from His essence, then they would be related as actuality to potentiality. But there can be no potentiality in God; He is Pure Actuality. Thus, God's knowledge and essence are really identical (ibid., 1a.14.4). This does not mean that God cannot know things other than Himself, for God is the efficient Cause (see Volume 2, chapters 18–19) of all things. All effects preexist in their efficient cause; hence, whatever exists must preexist in God, its efficient Cause.

So God knows Himself perfectly; yet to know Himself perfectly entails knowing all of the various kinds of perfection in Himself as well as those that can participate in His likeness. Therefore, it follows that God knows whatever exists perfectly insofar as it all preexists in Him (ibid., 1a.14.5).

Also, simply that God is unchanging does not mean He cannot know changing things. God knows everything in one eternal now, including the past, present, and future. God knows the future before it happens in time; therefore, when time changes, God's knowledge does not change, since He knew in advance it would change. In other words, God knows ***what*** we do, but not in the same ***way*** that we do; that is, in successive time frames. God knows the whole of time from (in) eternity, but He knows what is before and what is after the temporal now of human history (ibid., 1a.14.15).

God's knowledge is not simply of the actual; He also knows the potential—He knows both what is and what could be. God can know whatever is real in any way it can be known. Now, both the actual and the potential are real: Only the impossible has no reality (ibid., 1a.14.9). Hence, God cannot know what is impossible to know, since contradictions do not fall under the omniscience of God. However, God can know future contingents; that is, things that are dependent on free choice. This is true because the future is a potential that

preexists in God, and God knows whatever exists in Himself as the Cause of those things (ibid., 1a.14.13).

Of course, whatever God knows is known infallibly, since God cannot err in His knowledge. And since God knows future contingents, it follows that they too are known infallibly by God. They are contingent with regard to their immediate cause (human free choice), but necessary with regard to God's knowledge. God can do this without eliminating free choice, for the omniscient Being can know whatever is not impossible to know, and it is not impossible for the timeless Being to know a necessary end that is caused by a contingent means.

Therefore, the statement "Everything known by God must necessarily be" is true if it refers to the statement of the truth of God's knowledge, but it is false if it refers to the necessity of the contingent events (ibid., 1a.14.4). In Aquinas's own words,

> Although contingent things become actual successively, nevertheless God knows contingent things not successively—as they are in their own being, as we do—but simultaneously. The reason is because His knowledge is measured by eternity, as is also His being; and eternity being simultaneously whole comprises all time, as said above [Q. 10, A.2]. Hence, all that are in time are present to God from eternity, not only because He has the types of things present within Him, as some say, but because His glance is carried from eternity over all things as they are in their presentiality. Hence it is manifest that contingent things are infallibly known by God, inasmuch as they are subject to the divine sight in their presentiality; yet they are future contingents in relation to their own causes, (ibid., 1a.14.13)

The Reformation Fathers on God's Omniscience

The Reformers followed the thinking of Augustine in their formulation of God's omniscience (see above). For them, the knowledge of God is of all things—past, present, and future.

Martin Luther

Luther asserted that God "foreknows nothing contingently, but that He foresees, purposes, and does all things according to His own immutable, eternal and infallible will" (***BW***, 80). Luther's use of "contingently" does not mean that God's knowledge is always *scientia neccesitia* (necessary knowledge) and not

scientia libera (contingent knowledge); Luther, rather, uses "contingently" to speak of human actions that are independent of God's determinations, such as the Greek concept of fate (ibid., 80–81). His meaning is clear from his discussion of the Latin:

> Lest we be deceived over our terms, let me explain that *being done contingently* does not, in Latin, signify that the thing done is itself contingent, but that it is done by a contingent and mutable will—such as is *not* to be found in God! (ibid., 81)

Luther also believed that God knows all reality regarding Himself and all things outside of Himself, because God, in fact, wills everything,[5] ***rather than*** that the created order possesses complete independence and God only knows by observance, instead of by involvement. Moreover, God, in deciding the future that He knows, does not do so by "necessity," in the sense of compulsion, that is, against His will, which is free (ibid.). In brief, God has complete and infallible foreknowledge of all future events, including those flowing from free choice.

John Calvin

Calvin said, "We hence infer that God does not indolently contemplate the fortuitous issue of things, as most philosophers vainly talk; but that he determines, at his own will, what shall happen." He continued,

> Wherefore, in predicting events, he does not give a response from the tables of fate, as the poets feign concerning their Apollo, whom they regard as a prophet of events which are not in his own power, but declares that whatever shall happen will be his own work. [
>
> Isa. 45:7
>
>] (*CG*, 658)

Moreover, "God foreknew what the end was to be before he made him, and so foreknew what was ordained by His decree.[6] Should anyone inveigh against the prescience of God, he does it rashly and unadvisedly" (***ICR***, 3.23.7).
Lastly, for Calvin, foreknowledge does not mean conditioning by the creature:

> When we attribute prescience to God, we mean all things always were, and continue under his eye; that to his knowledge there is no past or future, but all

> things are present, and indeed so present, that it is not merely the idea of them that is before him (as those objects are which we retain in our memory), but that he truly sees and contemplates them as actually under his immediate inspection. This prescience extends to the whole circuit of the world, and to all creatures. (ibid., 3.21.5)

The Post-Reformation Theologians on God's Omniscience

The great teachers of the church after the Reformation were no less committed to God's omniscience than were their forefathers. This is evident from the following quotations.

Jacob Arminius

Arminius believed that God understands all things, whether this is God's knowledge of Himself,[7] His knowledge of His creatures' actions in the past, present, or future, necessary and contingent, good and bad. Arminius expressed God's omniscience in eloquent and precise terms:

> He knows things substantial and accidental of every kind; the actions and passions, the modes and circumstances of all things; external words and deeds, internal thought, deliberations, counsels, and determinations, and the entities of reason, whether complex or simple. All these things, being jointly attributed to the understanding of God, seem to conduce to the conclusion that God may deservedly be said to know things infinite. (*WJA*, I.444)

> This knowledge is not learned, but infinitely intuitive, in eternity not time, immeasurable and immutable, by a single and undivided act (ibid., I.445).

Francis Turretin

Turretin set forth four aspects to God's knowledge; namely, that it is perfect, undivided, distinct, and immutable (***IET***, 207). God's knowledge is ***perfect*** in that He knows all things by Himself, by His essence, and His knowledge is in

eternity, not in time (ibid.). His knowledge is ***undivided***, since He knows all things intuitively and noetically (immediate knowledge) rather than by learning or reasoning (discursively and dianoetically—indirect knowledge). His knowledge is ***distinct*** in that He knows all at one glance so that nothing, even the smallest thing, escapes His knowledge. Lastly, His knowledge is ***immutable*** because there is no change: He knows everything in all facets by immutable cognition (ibid.).

Turretin said that to deny that God knows every minute particular in the universe is very injurious toward Him (ibid). God knows the hairs on our heads and the sparrows that fall (Matt. 10:29–30); all things are naked and open to Him and manifest in His sight (Heb. 4:13); and He knows the number of stars and calls them by name (Ps. 147:4). Turretin concluded,

> Yea, since all things (even the greatest) are the smallest before him in comparison with his infinity (as Isaiah 40:15 magnificently says) and, as it were, nothing, the knowledge of all things should denied of him if the smallest are removed from his notice (ibid., 208)

Turretin then provided a lengthy discussion of contingent knowledge (ibid., 208–12), finding that

> when God conceives future contingent things as certainly future, he does not conceive of them otherwise than they are; but he knows them relatively to the decree as necessarily about to take place and determinate which, relative to their cause, he knows as indeterminate and contingently future. (ibid., 212)

Like Aquinas, Turretin explained the contingency by primary and secondary causes:

> God foreknows them both in himself and in his decree (as the first cause), and so they are necessary on account of the immutability of the decree and the infallibility of foreknowledge; and God foreknows them in the second causes on which they proximately and immediately depend, which are per se indefinite, and so they are contingent things, (ibid.)

Jonathan Edwards

Edwards shared the historic orthodox view of God's exhaustive knowledge, particularly that of foreknowledge, seeing it as one of the "evidences of … [God's] peculiar glory, greatly distinguishing him from all other beings" (***FW***,

11.1.4.109). In reference to the nature of God's foreknowledge, Edwards contended that for God not to know beforehand is to deny God the ability to foretell the future. God, instead, would be limited to uncertain guesses, for if God does not foreknow "the future volitions of moral agents, then neither can he certainly foreknow those events which are consequent and dependent on these volitions" (ibid., 2.11.96–97).

Additionally, in reacting to the idea that God does not know the actions of His free creatures, Edwards said that God "must have little else to do but to mend broken links as well as he can, and be rectifying his disjointed frame and disordered movements in the best manner the case will allow" (ibid., 11.4.111). Edwards then mused as to the tremendous and miserable disadvantages of God's governing the world without being able to discover major things that may befall His world, for which knowing, He could plan (ibid.).

Stephen Charnock

Charnock affirmed that God is immutable in regard to knowledge:

> God hath known from all eternity all that which he can know, so that nothing is hid from him. He knows not at present any more than he hath known from eternity: and that which he knows now he always knows: "All things are open and naked before him" [
>
> Heb. 4:13
>
>] (*EAG*, 1:321–22).
>
> Though the foreknowledge of God be infallible, yet it doth not necessitate the creature in acting. It was certain from eternity that Adam would fall, that men would do such and such actions, that Judas would betray our Saviour; God foreknew all those things from eternity; but, it is as certain that this foreknowledge did not necessitate the will of Adam, or any other branch of his posterity, in the doing those actions that were foreseen by God; they voluntarily run into such courses, not by any impulsion. God's knowledge was not suspended between certainty and uncertainty; he certainly foreknew that his law would be broken by Adam; he foreknew it in his own decree of not hindering him, by giving Adam the efficacious grace, which would infallibly have prevented it. (ibid., 2.145)
>
> Since God knows time, he knows all things as they are in time; he doth not know all things to be at once, though he knows at once what is, has been, and will be. All things are past, present, and to come, in regard of their existence; but there is not past, present, and to come, in regard of God's knowledge of them, because he sees and knows not by any other, but by himself; he is his own light by which he sees, his own glass wherein he sees; beholding himself, he beholds all things. (ibid., 1.285)

OBJECTIONS TO GOD'S OMNISCIENCE

Serious protests from contemporary theologians have been leveled against the traditional view of God's omniscience, both from inside and outside of the evangelical perspective. The most important are considered here.

Objection One—Based Upon the Unsettled Nature of the Future

Some critics of omniscience argue that traditional theologians are to be faulted for taking literally passages of Scripture where God is portrayed as knowing and/or controlling the future. (These thinkers, in turn, deny the literal meaning of other passages that speak of God knowing the future only in terms of possibilities, or in changing His mind—see Boyd, ***GP***, 14.) They insist that "if we don't assume that the future is entirely settled, there is an easy way to integrate the motif of future determinism with the motif of future openness" (ibid., 14–15). So the future allegedly "consists partly of settled realities and partly of unsettled realities" (ibid., 16).

Response to Objection One

First, their unwillingness to recognize legitimate use of anthropomorphisms regarding God's knowledge leads neotheists to conclusions they may not have envisioned. Neglecting the use of metaphoric language in the Bible would not only leave God without exhaustive knowledge of the future but also without exhaustive knowledge of the ***present***. An example of this is the interaction between Yahweh and Abraham in Genesis 18:20–33. The text portrays God not having adequate information of the present as to whether there were a sufficient number of righteous men to spare Sodom. Thus, Abraham negotiates God down from fifty to ten as the number of righteous men necessary to spare the city. Surely God, like every good negotiator, knows His bottom line before He begins

negotiating. Another instance of apparent imperfect knowledge of the present is Isaiah 6:8: “Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’ ” Surely we are not to suppose from such examples that God is so limited in His knowledge that He does not even know the present.

There are several reasons why some scholars have fallen into this untenable position. Primarily, they fail to understand that God may sound indefinite to us because He desires to speak in terms that solicit response from us, not to receive an answer to something He did not already know. The infinite God uses language (here and elsewhere) of sequential thought and indecision for the purpose of communication, not because of a lack in His knowledge, but because of a lack in our ability to know.

Second, if neotheists persist in taking these anthropomorphisms as literal descriptions of God, then they have reduced Him to a finite being rather than an infinite Being who seeks to condescend to human terms and thought patterns for the purpose of communication. If they wish to speak of God as infinite, or as omniscient, but infinite in His knowledge of only certain portions of the future, then they are fudging on the meaning of “omniscient.” For example, if a student said, “My math teacher is omniscient,” but, upon questioning him, we found out that he meant only that she had an unlimited knowledge of the subject she taught (namely, third-grade multiplication tables), would we not believe that he had altered the word’s meaning?

Third, the kind of interpretation that the critic of omniscience places on these biblical texts leads to other serious theological problems, such as God not being omnipresent, for God also interacts with human beings in the language of space. God asked Adam and Eve, “Where are you?” (Gen. 3:9). Does this mean that He did not know where they were when He inquired regarding their whereabouts in the Garden? However, if a non-spatial God knew where Adam and Eve were but found it necessary to enter into this spatial dialogue in order to have a proper conversation with spatial creatures, then why cannot the same be true of a nontemporal God having a dialogue with temporal creatures? Implicitly, the omnipresence of God is at stake if we do not understand this passage in a nonliteral sense regarding God’s attributes.

Fourth, following the literalistic interpretation of anthropomorphism, we would have to conclude that God moves from place to place. In Exodus 3:7–8, Yahweh encounters Moses on Mount Horeb, revealing that He has been observing His people in Egypt and has empathized with their suffering. Then He reveals that

He has now “come down” to deliver them. Certainly we should not understand that this literally means God moves from one place to another: An omnipresent Being does not have to move, since He is already there. God is not a spatial Being and does not move in time and space, but for the purpose of communication He uses expressions that are understandable to finite humans who do move in time and space. Such nonliteral descriptions of divine activity reveal personal interaction with humanity.

Finally, are we to suppose that God is struck by a divine amnesia when He forgives our sins because God said, “I will not remember your sins” (Isa. 43:25 NKJV)?

Objection Two—Based Upon God’s Alleged Limited Knowledge

According to the assailants of traditional omniscience, God knows all things that He has planned or determined, but not other matters that He has chosen not to determine or plan, namely, the free choices of human beings. In seeking to defend this viewpoint, neotheists turn to two important passages on God’s sovereignty and omniscience: Isaiah 46 and 48. Isaiah 46:9–10 reads, “Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come.” Isaiah 48:3 says, “I announced events beforehand, I issued the decrees and made the predictions; suddenly I acted and they came to pass” (NET).

Strangely, they declare that these texts do not reveal a God who knows the entirety of the future, but one who knows that part of the future which He has decided to control according to His purpose:

> He foreknows that certain things are going to take place because he knows *his own purpose and intention* to bring these events about. As sovereign Lord of history, he has decided to settle *this much* about the future. (Boyd, *GP*, 30, emphasis added)

As to the prediction that Judas would betray Christ, Greg Boyd claims that if he had not chosen to be the betrayer, then the odds are that Jesus could have found someone else. (However, this is not as likely with King Cyrus [Isa. 45:1f], since the number of kings available to conquer Israel were not as plentiful.) In order to demonstrate his position, Boyd sets forth five categories of future events that God does know in the future: (1) His knowledge of His chosen people, (2) His

knowledge of individuals, (3) His knowledge of Christ's ministry, (4) His knowledge of the elect, and (5) His knowledge of the end times.

Response to Objection Two

First of all, this objection appears to confuse God's determination with direct causation. A person may know something without causing it in such a way as to take away any human self-determination, and so may God. A person standing on the top of a building who sees two cars, not visible to each other, about to collide, does not cause the collision but only foresees it.

Further, they strangely believe that the sovereignty of God is expressed by God's ***not*** exercising control rather than by His exercising it. Boyd says,

> Indeed, God is so confident in his sovereignty, we hold, he does not need to micromanage everything. He could if he wanted to, but this would demean his sovereignty. So he chooses to leave some of the future open to possibilities, allowing them to be resolved by the decisions of free agents. It takes a greater God to steer a world populated with free agents than it does to steer a world of preprogrammed automatons. (ibid., 31)

For one thing, the classic orthodox view of God's sovereignty does not maintain that humans are "preprogrammed automatons." For another, Boyd seems to equivocate here by claiming that God is so much in control that He is not in control. Further, he says that God is somehow in control steering the world, at least in some sense. However, if controlling ***all*** of the future would be demeaning, then why would being in total control of ***some*** of the future not also be demeaning? This is a paradox, claiming God has limited omniscience and limited infinitude.

What is more, some critics claim that in a number of elements of the future God has definite intentions and truly knows them ahead of time, but in most other things He does not. Unless the Scriptures specifically mention things that He specifically knows, they are relegated to the side as things that He does not know with certainty. Using this type of logic and interpretative method, when the Bible says that the very hairs of our head are numbered, or that God knows the birds of the air who fall to the ground, one could conclude that the failure to mention the number of hairs on my arms or other animals on the ground would mean that God does not have perfect knowledge of these things. Surely they are provided as ***representations*** of the infinite knowledge of God. That the Bible is not

exhaustive regarding ***all*** the facts God foreknows does not in any way signify that He is not fully aware of them.

By contrast, the God of the Bible determines all things and thus knows all things that He has in fact determined, as well as all those other things that He did not determine to occur. In His determination of all things, God has chosen to be proactive in specific situations, but generally to refrain from acting, preserving the free acts of humans consistent with their natures, and thus completely accomplishing His will in reference to these actions.

Objection Three—Based Upon God's Knowledge of Peter's Character

Some of those who reject God's complete omniscience argue that God can predict with great accuracy ***without infallible foreknowledge***, based on His knowledge of the character of those performing the acts:

> Our omniscient Creator knows us perfectly, far better than we even know ourselves. Hence, we can assume that God is able to predict our behavior far more extensively and accurately than we could predict it ourselves. This does not mean that everything we will ever do is predictable, for our present character doesn't determine all of our future. But it does mean that our behavior is predictable to the extent that our character is solidified and future circumstances that will affect us are in place. (Boyd, *GP*, 35)

To illustrate this view, Peter and Judas are discussed. Boyd says that absolute knowledge of the future was not necessary for Jesus to predict that Peter would deny Him three times (Matt. 26:33–35):

> Contrary to the assumption of many, we do not need to believe that the future is exhaustively settled to explain this prediction. We only need to believe that God the Father knew and revealed to Jesus one very predictable aspect of Peter's character. Anyone who knew Peter's character perfectly could have predicted that under certain highly pressured circumstances (that God could easily orchestrate), he would act just the way he did. (ibid.)

Response to Objection Three

First, this view supposes that a person's character may inevitably lead to a particular action that may be certainly known by God: When presented with the right circumstances, we will supposedly choose to act in a certain way—without

fail. But how does this avoid a form of determinism that they disavow? If Peter genuinely had the right to self-determination (called free will), then no matter what the circumstances he could have made the choice he desired, contrary to the circumstances. If he could have done this, then God could not have known for sure whether he would or would not. Hence, from this perspective, God cannot infallibly predict based on the knowledge of character alone.

Second, it should be observed that even perfect knowledge of character could not predict what God did in Peter's case. How does knowledge of character not only reveal that he would deny Christ, but that he would deny Jesus three specific times? Not one, two, or four, but exactly three! Now, Boyd may respond that God sent three different people to Peter to ensure that it was three specific times to fulfill the prophecy, but must Peter fail at each with certainty? How could God ensure that someone else would not also tempt Peter and thus contradict the prophecy, or maybe be an encourager and move him from this course?

Third, not only was the prediction that Peter would deny Christ, and do it three times, but it would be before the rooster crowed. Boyd merely says, "before morning," but there is more than morning involved. The denials occurred immediately before a rooster crowed. How would God anticipate the acts of a nonmoral, non-free-will being in this prediction? It stretches one's credulity to see this position embraced.

Fourth, and finally, knowledge of character, no matter how good it is, ***cannot*** predict events with certainty. But the New Testament reveals that events like Jesus' betrayal and death were determined with certainty before they happened (cf. John 6:64; Acts 2:23). This is particularly so in a libertarian view of freedom, where the choice could always have been otherwise.

Objection Four—Based Upon the Possibility That Judas Would Not Betray Christ

Some rejecters of infallible foreknowledge believe that Judas' betrayal was not determined in eternity. In fact, any of the disciples allegedly could have been the betrayer (***GP***, 37). Boyd supports his argument in three ways.

First, he questions that John 6:64 teaches that Jesus knew in eternity (or even early in His ministry) that Judas would betray him. He claims that the word ***arche***, used here, does not imply that Jesus knew who would betray Him from a

time ***before*** the person decided in his heart to do so. As in Philippians 4:15, ***arche*** can mean "early on." John 6:64, thus, is said to suggest that Jesus knew who would betray Him from the moment this person resolved to betray him, or from the time Jesus chose him to be a disciple—but not from eternity (ibid.).
Second, neotheists disclaim that the term "son of perdition" relates specifically to Judas in John 17:12 KJV:

> Many assume that when Jesus referred to Judas as one who was "destined to be lost," he meant that Judas was damned from the beginning of time (John 17:12). However, they insist the verse doesn't say this. The Greek translated as "destined to be lost" [translated by whom, I don't know] literally says, "son of perdition," with no indication as to *when* Judas had become this. We can only know that by the time Jesus said this, Judas had, of his own free will, made himself into a person fit for destruction. (ibid.)

Third, it is also argued that Judas fulfilled Scripture, ***not*** that Judas was the one who ***had*** to fulfill Scripture. Boyd says that we have every reason to suppose that earlier on Judas could have (and should have) chosen a different path for his life, but as a free moral agent, Judas tragically chose a path of self-destruction. If he had made himself into a different kind of person, he would not have been a candidate for fulfilling the prophecy of the Lord's betrayal. In this case, the Lord would have found someone else God foreknew would freely fulfill this role (ibid., 38).
Some argue that Jesus did not really know that Judas would betray Him up until the time he actually did. John Sanders argues that when Jesus announced at the Passover meal that one of the disciples would betray Him—"hand" Him "over" (***paradidomi***) to the temple authorities—we would be wrong to believe that Judas in fact betrayed Jesus. Relying on the work of William Klassen, Sanders insists that none of the disciples considered Judas to be the betrayer at the Last Supper, and that Judas was on friendly terms with Jesus. Sanders says that "hand over" (***paradidomi***) does not mean "betray" (***GWR***, 98). Instead, Judas was attempting to get Jesus to confront the high priest and resolve their differences (ibid.). When Jesus sent Judas from the Supper (John 13:27–30), it was not to betray Him, for this would be wrong for Jesus to tell a fellow Jew to go and deliberately commit a sin. Rather, He is said to have reached out to Judas, trying to get him to decide what sort of Messiah he expected Jesus to be (ibid., 99).

Response to Objection Four

This reasoning implies that Jesus did not have a prior knowledge of Judas's intent to betray Him when He chose him as a disciple: Jesus only discovered this at the time of Judas's actual decision to do so later in the gospel accounts, or at the exact time He selected Judas as a disciple. One wonders why God's supposed unfailing anticipation of character, as argued earlier in reference to Peter, is not used here. In this case it would not require the absolute knowledge of the future, as Boyd seeks to dismiss here. Nonetheless, the text reveals that Jesus' knowledge of those who believed in Him and specifically who would betray Him does not speak of His later ministry or even necessarily to His choosing of Judas. Nothing in the sixth chapter of John would indicate this.

First, the word ***arche*** is used in John both to mean "eternity" (John 1:1, 2; 8:25) and to mean the beginning of Jesus' ministry with the Twelve (John 8:25; 15:27; 16:4). The text does not say which meaning should be understood here (in John 6:64), but there is other evidence in the context that suggests the former. Note that the verse following this pronouncement (in 6:64 NKJV) has the conclusionary "therefore": "Therefore, I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father." The reason why Jesus had knowledge of true believers and of the betrayer related to the fact of God's election, which is eternal.

Second, in response to replacing "son of perdition" with "destined to be lost," it should be observed that while it is grammatically possible, it is contextually unlikely. We do not dispute that humans are lost because they fit themselves for destruction, as taught by Paul in Romans 9:22. However, it is with the third point that we find most disagreement, where Boyd says that Judas's betrayal was not a specific fulfillment of Scripture and that someone else could have betrayed Jesus (as a fulfillment of Scripture). For one thing, it is not simple to find one to betray Jesus and thus fulfill Scripture. For another, Boyd's comment that Jesus does ***not*** say that Judas ***had*** to fulfill Scripture, ***only*** that he did fulfill it, misses the point. While it is true that Jesus did not say this, ***Peter did***. Note his words to the 120 in the Upper Room:

> Men *and* brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas.... For it is written in the book of Psalms: "Let his dwelling place be desolate, and let no one live in it"; and "Let another take his office" (

Acts 1:16–20
nkjv

).

Thus, the neotheist's view directly contradicts the literal meaning of the text.

Third, Sanders' view of the betrayal of Jesus by Judas stretches interpretation to the point of breaking. John 13:11, spoken on the night of Jesus' betrayal in the Upper Room, clearly says, "For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean." In his excellent review of Sanders' book, Ardel B. Caneday says of Sanders' discussion of "hand over" (***paradidomi***), "He commits two fallacies, both the root fallacy and the prescriptive fallacy.… He presumes that the etymology of the word establishes the meaning, and he prescribes that one meaning ('hand over') to every use of the word" (Caneday, "PGR," xx in ***TJ***). Sanders fails to learn from the arguments of James Barr in his important work ***The Semantics of Biblical Language:*** Words rely on context, not etymology (***SBL***, 217–18).[8]
Fourth, and finally, though Sanders insists that Jesus' dipping the bread into the bowl and giving it to Judas was an act of friendship rather than a sign that he was the betrayer, this is opposed to the words of Scripture, which indicate that He dipped into the bowl specifically to identify Judas as the betrayer, quelling the unease of at least two of the disciples regarding His announcement of a betrayer among them. After the dipping, the text narrates that Satan entered into Judas to do his dastardly deed (John 13:21–27). It is special pleading to argue that when Judas seeks to hand over Jesus to the authorities, it is not a breaking of trust and thus a betrayal.

Objection Five—Based Upon Alleged Bad Decisions by God

Not surprisingly, some critics of God's complete omniscience claim that not only does God have limited knowledge, but they imply that He also makes some bad or unwise decisions!

Response to Objection Five

Two considerations lead to a negative answer to this question.

First, it is better to allow Scripture to inform us regarding the nature of divine wisdom than to reinterpret an entire motif in order to square it with our preconceptions of divine wisdom. If God says He regretted a decision, and if Scripture elsewhere tells us that God is perfectly wise, then we should simply conclude that one can be perfectly wise and still regret a decision.

Second, even if this is a mystery to us, it is better to allow the mystery to stand than to assume that we know what God's wisdom is like and conclude on this basis that God can't mean what He clearly says (as does Boyd, ***GP***, 57). Furthermore, God's regret need not refer to the original condition, but to a later state that would involve no contradiction.

Finally, there are three reasons that this kind of interpretation is hard to reconcile with the omniscient (all-wise) God of Scripture.

For one, it is at odds with the clear teaching of the Bible that God's knowledge is "infinite" (Ps. 147:5 NKJV), that He knows the end from the beginning (Isa. 46:10), and that His wisdom is the basis of all human wisdom aimed at avoiding bad decisions (cf. Proverbs). How can God be the source, foundation, and repository of all wisdom (Prov. 1:7; Col. 2:3) and be so foolish?

For another, this view undermines the biblical teaching that God is absolutely perfect. The psalmist wrote, "The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple" (Ps. 19:7). Or, "Do you know how the clouds hang poised, those wonders of him who is perfect in knowledge?" (Job 37:16). How can God be ***perfect*** in knowledge and wisdom and yet make mistakes?

Lastly, it is unnecessary to take these anthropomorphic expressions as literal. As all admit, the Bible is filled with anthropomorphisms. Why, then, should these expressions not be understood anthropomorphically?

Objection Six—Based Upon the Alleged Impossibility of Knowing Future Free Acts

The “limited omniscience” objection goes like this:

(1) God knows infallibly whatever is possible to know.
(2) It is not possible to infallibly know future free acts.
(3) Therefore, God does not know future free acts infallibly.

States Sanders:

> Though God’s knowledge is coextensive with reality in that God knows all that can be known, the future free actions of free creatures are not yet reality, and so there is nothing to be known. (*GWR*, 198–99)

This is often called qualified or limited omniscience, in contrast to classical omniscience, which is unlimited. In this view, God’s knowledge of future free acts is fallible: “Nonetheless, this [God’s not knowing the future] does leave open the possibility that God might be mistaken about some points, as the biblical record acknowledges” (ibid., 132).

With regard to free choices, God can only prognosticate based on His vast knowledge of human character, events, and tendencies of what free creatures are likely to do. He cannot be absolutely sure what they will do, says Sanders:

> Given the depth and breadth of God’s knowledge of the present situation, God forecasts what he thinks will happen. In this regard, God is the consummate social scientist predicting what will happen, (ibid., 131)

However, these opponents of complete omniscience make one important exception: Anything God wishes to know absolutely and control completely about the future, so as to accomplish His ultimate plan, He can do by divine intervention. That is, God can tamper with human freedom (if necessary and on occasion) so as to be able to determine the final outcome of things. Ordinarily, it is argued, God does not do this and, hence, creatures are free to do what even God Himself does not infallibly know they will do. Boyd states,

> Many prophecies pertaining to individuals can also be understood as examples of the
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> lord
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> establishing particular parameters ahead of time. The two most impressive examples of this are Josiah and Cyrus. As a supernatural sign to his people, God named Josiah ("the
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> lord
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> strengthens") and Cyrus and declared their accomplishments before they were born. This decree obviously set strict parameters around the freedom of the parents in naming these individuals (see also
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> Luke 1:11–23
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>). It also restricted the scope of freedom these individuals could exercise *as it pertained to particular foreordained activities*. In other respects, however, these two individuals and their parents remained self-determining agents. (*GP*, 34, emphasis added)

Response to Objection Six

Classical theists have no difficulty with the ***logical*** form of this basic argument about God's omniscience. Of course, God cannot know the impossible. The disagreement is with the ***content*** of the second premise: It is not possible to infallibly know future free acts. Traditional theists contend that the defense given for this premise is lacking. The following examination of each of process theology's arguments will reveal why.

Objection Seven—Based Upon the Nature of Free Choice

This objection is as follows:

(1) Free acts are those that could have been otherwise.
(2) God's infallible knowledge of events means they cannot be otherwise (for if they could, then God would have been mistaken and not infallible in His knowledge).
(3) Hence, infallible knowledge of free acts is impossible.

Response to Objection Seven

This conclusion can be challenged in at least two ways.
First, it assumes a particular view of free choice, called libertarianism, that not all theists accept. Many, particularly in the strong Calvinist tradition (such as Jonathan Edwards),[9] argue that free acts are doing what one desires, and God is capable of giving free agents the desires He decrees. Hence, future free acts (in Edwards' sense) can be free and yet determined and, therefore, infallibly known in advance.
Second, other classical theists like Thomas Aquinas point out that there is no contradiction involved in claiming both that (1) a future free act is determined from the relation of God's infallible foreknowledge and (2) yet also free when viewed from the relationship of our free choice (in the sense of the power to do otherwise). Thus, infallible foreknowledge and free choice are not contradictory, for the law of non contradiction demands that to be contradictory, two propositions must affirm and deny the same thing in the same sense and ***in the same relationship*** (see Volume 1, chapter 5). However, in this case, one and the same event is determined in one relationship, but not determined ***in a different relationship***—one in relation to God's knowledge, and the other in relation to our free choice.

Objection Eight—Based Upon the Nature of Truth

According to this line of reasoning, future events have not yet occurred. A true statement is what corresponds to what has occurred; therefore, no statements about the future can be true (since the future has not yet occurred). That is to say, it makes no sense to talk about knowing something is true in advance of it happening, since it cannot be actually true until it actually happens.

Response to Objection Eight

In response, several things are important to observe.
First, the argument proves too much. For, if so, then God could not know anything in advance—including necessary events—since they have not yet happened. Yet even critics of traditional omniscience admit that God has infallible foreknowledge of necessary events. Therefore, they cannot object to the possibility of God knowing future free events on the basis of the nature of truth.
Second, one can avoid this problem by simply pointing out that it is true that God knows in advance that the event will occur. There is a difference in claiming (1) it is true in advance, and (2) God knows in advance that it will be true later. In either case, however, God can know it is going to occur—which is all that is necessary to defend the classical view of omnipotence.
Third, the problem is resolved for a classical theist, since God is eternal (see chapter 4), and there are no time indicators on His knowledge. An eternal God does not ***fore***see; He simply ***sees*** from all eternity all that from a temporal standpoint was, is, and will be. All future events are present to Him in His eternal Now. So God knows ***what*** we know, but He does not know it the same ***way*** that we know it. We know things as past, present, or future, but God knows our past, present, and future in His eternal Present. Therefore, in order to demonstrate that it is impossible for the omniscient God to know the future, the neotheist would have to prove that God is not eternal (nontemporal). As we have seen, no such proof has been given.

Objection Nine—Based Upon the Unreality of the Future

In his book ***The God Who Risks***, John Sanders argues that God cannot know the future, since:

(1) The future is not real (because it has not yet happened).
(2) God can only know what is real.
(3) Hence, God cannot know the future.

As we have already read, Sanders wrote, “Though God’s knowledge is coextensive with reality in that God knows all that can be known, the future actions of free creatures are not yet reality, and so there is nothing to be known” (***GWR***, 198).
Sanders anticipates two objections.
First, “It cannot be an imperfection not to know what is not in itself knowable, i.e., the future, the not yet real, at least in its free or not yet determined aspects.”
Second, this view is supposedly no more an “attenuated” or “limited” understanding of omniscience than is that of Thomas Aquinas, since he defined omnipotence as the ability to do all that is logically possible, and knowing what is not real is not logically possible (ibid., 199).

Response to Objection Nine

Thomas Aquinas responded to this objection nearly eight hundred years earlier by noting that the future is real, since reality is made up of the actual and the potential—only the impossible is not real. The future is a potentiality; it has not yet happened, but it can occur and it will yet occur. So in knowing the future, God knows what is real, namely, what is really possible.
Further, for the classical theist the future preexists in God, who is its ultimate Cause. Since the future preexists in God, God can and does know it in Himself as one of the things He will cause to occur, and there is no contradiction in affirming that the omniscient Being can know everything that exists in Himself.
Also, while ***formally*** the logic is the same for the classical theist on the definition of omniscience, ***actually*** there is a vast difference in what omniscience knows. The critic believes that God has no infallible knowledge of future free choices, and the classical theist holds that He does.
Finally, as Aquinas noted, it would be an imperfection for an omniscient Being not to know everything, since everything He knows is known in and through His own nature. Since His nature is absolutely perfect, it follows that everything God knows, including both His own nature and all ways any creature can participate in His perfections, must be known perfectly. Thus, not to know some ways that some creatures can (and will) participate in it would be an imperfection in God’s knowledge.

Objection Ten—Based Upon the Alleged Impossibility of Divine Actions

Sanders argues that an omniscient God cannot intervene in what He infallibly foresees:

(1) What is infallibly foreseen is determined.
(2) God foresees what will actually occur.
(3) But if it will actually occur, then He cannot intervene to change it.
(4) Therefore, God cannot intervene in a world He foreknows will occur.

Sanders claims,

> The problem arises because of the fact that what God previsions is what will *actually* occur. Divine foreknowledge, by definition, is always correct. If what will actually happen is—for example, the Holocaust—then God knows it is going to happen and cannot prevent it from happening, since his foreknowledge is never mistaken. (*GWR*, 201)

"Furthermore," Sanders writes,

> If what God has foreseen is the *entire* human history *at once*, then the difficulty is to somehow allow for God's intervention into that history. This raises a serious problem. Does simple foreknowledge imply that God previsions his own decisions and actions? That is to say, if God has infallible "foreknowledge" of his own actions, then the problem is to explain how the foreknowledge can be the *basis* for the actions when it already *includes* the actions, (ibid.)

He explains,

> It is impossible that God should use a foreknowledge derived from the actual occurrence of future events to determine his own prior actions in the providential governance of the world. Such a deity would then know what he is going to do before deciding what to do. [Such a God would] … be unable to plan, anticipate, or decide; he would simply know. This seems to call the divine freedom into question, making God a prisoner of his own omniprescience, lacking perfect freedom, (ibid.)

Response to Objection Ten

This objection poses a problem for molinists (see Craig, ***OWG***, 127–52), but not for thomists (see Volume 1, chapter 8). Luis de Molina (1535–1600) insisted that God's decisions are based on what He foreknows will actually occur, should He choose to create that kind of world—this is ***dependent*** knowledge. However, classical theists hold:

(1) God does not really have ***fore***knowledge; He simply ***knows*** in one eternal Now.

(2) God's knowledge is not based on anything outside Himself. God's knowledge of all things is based on knowing Himself and all other things as they preexist in Himself as their Primary Cause.

The basic argument in favor of the classical theist's view goes like this:

(1) God is an independent Being.
(2) God's knowledge is identical to His Being (since He is simple).
(3) Hence, God's knowledge is independent.

If this is so, then the belief that God has dependent knowledge (as in molinism) is false. All His knowledge must be part of His independent Being; that is, He must know everything in and through Himself and not through anything that is contingent.

Objection Eleven—Based Upon a Free Future

For the same reasons just given, some argue that it is impossible for the future to be truly free if God infallibly knows it. If God knows the future infallibly, then it must occur the way He knows it, or else He would be wrong in what He knows about it. But if it must occur that way, then God is not free to change it. Hence, a God who knows the future infallibly is not really free (in the sense that He could have done otherwise). The argument can be stated this way:

> If God knows already what will happen in the future, then God's knowing this is part of the past and is now fixed, impossible to change.... [And] since God is infallible, it is completely impossible that things will turn out differently than God expects them to. ... [But] if God knows that a person is going to perform it, then it is impossible that the person fail to perform it—so one does not have a free choice whether or not to perform it. (Pinnock, *OG*, 147)

Response to Objection Eleven

Of course, God could be free in another (nonlibertarian) sense of doing what He desires; this view is open to strong Calvinists in the tradition of Jonathan Edwards. Also, a moderate Calvinist can argue that God is free in a self-determined sense, without having the power of contrary choice, the way God determines a good without having the ability to choose evil. However, another alternative is possible for those who accept a libertarian concept of freedom, as Anselm noted (above); namely, that there is a difference between antecedent and consequent necessity. If God wills the future to be a certain way, then by consequent necessity it must be that way. But God could have been free not to will it that way. Therefore, He had antecedent freedom with regard to which way the future would be. God could have chosen to create a different world, yet when God decides to make a certain world, His omniscience knows it would be that way by consequent necessity.

As a simple Being, God's will and knowledge are coordinates: He knows what He wills and wills what He knows. In fact, He knows eternally what He wills eternally, and He wills eternally what He knows eternally. One is not subsequent to the other, either chronologically (since He is nontemporal, not bound by time) or logically (since He knows intuitively, not sequentially).

Further, this argument wrongly assumes that God not only knows ***what*** we know but also the ***way*** we know and will, namely, by foreknowledge and reaction. But the eternal Being does not ***fore***know anything as future; He knows it in His eternal Present. Further, a completely independent Being does not react to what He knows, since He is not dependent on anything outside His Being in order to decide or act. He does not react; He simply acts from eternity, prior to any event happening. In short, once again, God is proactive, not reactive, in His infallible foreknowledge and concomitant choices.

Objection Twelve—Based on God Voluntarily Limiting His Knowledge

A more recent objection springs from philosopher Dallas Willard, who claims that if God is omnipotent and can do anything that is possible, then He can will to limit His own omniscience. In this way, supposedly, God can still know everything, including future free acts, since He may choose to block out of His awareness some things that He knows. As such, God can engage in genuine interaction with His free creatures without, as it were, having His mind made up in advance. Therefore, unlike the suggestions of neotheism, which denies that God has or can have infallible knowledge of everything, God can "have His cake and eat it too." That is, God can be truly and completely omniscient and yet still be unaware of some things—the things He decides He does not want to know.

Response to Objection Twelve

As creative and ingenious as this view may seem, it is fraught with insuperable difficulties, both biblically and philosophically.
First, as seen above, there is no true biblical basis for this view except when taking figures of speech literally.
Second, once one takes these anthropomorphisms literally, there is no end to the absurdities that follow, such as God actually having a body, hands, arms, legs, and even feathered wings.
Third, as demonstrated previously, there is strong biblical basis for God being

aware in advance of future free acts. In addition, without this, His predestination of the elect, His predetermination of the Cross, and His infallible predictions don't make any real sense.

Fourth, God is a simple Being, and, thus, He cannot be compartmentalized into a section that knows all and another section that is not aware of all He knows. As a simple, indivisible Being with no parts whatsoever, it follows that whatever God knows, that He is aware of, and whatever He is aware of, that He knows.

Fifth, if God is a complexity of parts, such as one part that knows all and another part that is not aware of all He knows, then who composed Him? As the intelligent-design movement has demonstrated, every being with irreducible complexity has a Designer. If this God that Professor Willard posits has a Designer, then either there is an infinite regress of designers, which is impossible, or else there is a First, undesigned Designer, who is not complex but is absolutely simple, which is the assertion of classical theism.

Sixth, if God has compartments or parts, then He cannot be infinite, which all true theists, and even neotheists, believe He is. Any God with parts must be finite, since there cannot be an infinite number of parts, for the simple reason that no matter how many parts there are, one more can always be added, and there cannot be more than an infinite. Thus, however noble and brilliant the attempts of neotheists and modified neotheists may be, their "cure" is worse than the disease. It is simpler to believe that God is simple. And, again, if He is simple, He must be aware of everything He knows and know everything of which He is aware.

Seventh, and finally, no one has ever demonstrated a real need to resort to these options. There is no inherent contradiction in believing that God is simple and absolutely omniscient about all things, including future free acts. Hence, there is no reason to deny His absolute, complete, and infallible foreknowledge of all future events, including all free acts.

CONCLUSION

The classical theistic view of God's infallible foreknowledge, which has dominated the orthodox Christian church from the very beginning, has no reason to step aside for any recent view of limited foreknowledge, either on biblical or theological grounds. Indeed, there are good reasons biblically, historically, theologically, and philosophically to retain it.

Liberal process theology seriously undermines historic Christianity. Evangelical critics of traditional omniscience have created a dangerous paradigm of God based on anthropomorphism and speculative inferences borrowed largely from contemporary process theology. Certainly one's overall view of God guides our interpretation; this is not something new. We understand statements about God's physicality—His eyes, ears, and hands—as metaphors of His actions and capabilities, and we similarly understand mental limitations of God—repenting, forgetting, changing His mind—also as metaphors. It is the difference between seeing God from below and seeing Him from above. To do otherwise is inevitably, despite the protests from neotheism, to create a finite God.

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CHAPTER NINE

GOD'S WISDOM AND LIGHT

Wisdom and light are kindred nonmoral attributes of God. Since God is infinitely wise, wisdom is really the attribute of omni-sapience (God being all-wise). God's attribute of light is related, in that it is in His Light that we see the light.

THE DEFINITION OF GOD'S WISDOM

The basic Hebrew word for wisdom is ***chokam*** (***chakani***); the Greek word is ***sophia***. Both mean "wisdom" or "skill." Wisdom has to do with the ability to choose the right means for the desired ends. Knowledge is the apprehension of truth in the mind, while wisdom is the application of truth to one's life, as the book of Proverbs amply illustrates (see also James 1:5).

Since God is infinite and wise, He must be infinitely wise: This is called omnisapience. So as applied to God, wisdom refers to His unerring ability to choose the best means to accomplish the best ends. As such, God's wisdom is rooted in several other attributes: His omniscience provides the knowledge for His wise choices; His omnibenevolence assures that they will be good choices; and His omnipotence enables Him to achieve His ends by the means He chooses.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S WISDOM

The biblical foundation for God's wisdom is found in that He is called wise, He has wise words, He makes wise actions, and He is the source of all true wisdom.

God Is Wise

"You, Ezra, in accordance with the wisdom of your God, which you possess, appoint magistrates and judges to administer justice to all the people" (Ezra 7:25). "To God belong wisdom and power; counsel and understanding are his" (Job 12:13). "Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his" (Dan. 2:20). "God in his wisdom said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles' " (Luke 11:49). "To the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen" (Rom. 16:27). "To those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:24). "We speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began" (1 Cor. 2:7). "His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms" (Eph. 3:10). "Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!" (Rev. 7:12).

God's Words Are Wise

"The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple" (Ps. 19:7). "The wise will be put to shame; they will be dismayed and trapped. Since they have rejected the word of the LORD, what kind of wisdom do they have?" (Jer. 8:9).

God's Acts Are Wise

“How many are your works, O LORD! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures” (Ps. 104:24). “By wisdom the LORD laid the earth’s foundations, by understanding he set the heavens in place” (Prov. 3:19). “God made the earth by his power; he founded the world by his wisdom and stretched out the heavens by his understanding” (Jer. 10:12). “Who is wise? He will realize these things. Who is discerning? He will understand them. The ways of the LORD are right; the righteous walk in them, but the rebellious stumble in them” (Hos. 14:9).

God Is the Source of All Wisdom

“For the LORD gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding” (Prov. 2:6). “Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you’ ” (Gen. 41:39). “When all Israel heard the verdict the king had given, they held the king in awe, because they saw that he had wisdom from God to administer justice” (1 Kings 3:28). “God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore” (1 Kings 4:29). “Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, who made heaven and earth! He has given King David a wise son, endowed with intelligence and discernment” (2 Chron. 2:12). “I thank and praise you, O God of my fathers: You have given me wisdom and power, you have made known to me what we asked of you, you have made known to us the dream of the king” (Dan. 2:23). “To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness” (Eccl. 2:26). “The child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him” (Luke 2:40). “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better” (Eph. 1:17). “We have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding” (Col. 1:9). “In [Him] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3). “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5). “Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means

salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote to you with the wisdom that God gave him" (2 Peter 3:15).
In summation, since God is wisdom, His words and acts are wise. Further, He is the source of all true wisdom, for everyone else that has wisdom has received it from Him who is wisdom. The wisest man who ever lived prayed, "Give Thy servant an understanding heart to judge Thy people to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Thine?" (1 Kings 3:9 NASB).

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S WISDOM

In addition to the biblical data, there are sound theological arguments in favor of God's wisdom. Indeed, they support omnisapience; namely, that He has all wisdom—He is infinitely wise.

Wisdom Is Based in Omniscience

God is omniscient or all-knowing (see chapter 8). The omniscient God knows all ends and all means; further, He knows which of these means are the most effective to achieve these ends. It follows that God's omniscience enables Him to be wise; that is, it is the necessary condition for omnibenevolence (God's being all-good or all-loving). What is more, His omni-benevolence assures that He will choose the best means to the best ends. Finally, His omnipotence enables Him to achieve His ends by the means He chooses.

Wisdom Is Based in Omnibenevolence

God is not only all-knowing, He is also all-good (see chapter 15). Omniscience is only the necessary condition for wisdom, not the sufficient condition—omnibenevolence is also integral. A wise person not only knows which means are the most ***effective*** to achieving which ends, but he also knows which are the

best means to the best end. Hence, a God who is both all-knowing and all-good is truly all-wise (omnisapient).

Wisdom Is Based in Omnipotence

Even an all-knowing and all-good Being does not guarantee all-wise actions, merely wise understanding. In order for God's omnibenevolence to be operative, He must also be all-powerful, for even if He knows the most effective means to an end (in His omniscience) and the best means to the best ends (in His omnibenvolence), He must also be all-powerful in order to achieve His desired ends.

Some Implications of God's Wisdom

Two implications of God's wisdom are worth noting: One relates to His providence and the other to His relation to good (or best).

God's Wisdom Is the Basis for His Providence

The providence of God is based in His wisdom: His providence is His superintendence of all creation (see chapter 24). An all-wise Being knows the best means to the best end, and such a Being is capable of superintending and providing the best care for all His creation. Thus, it is the wisdom of God that makes it possible for Him to provide the ultimate providential superintendence of and care for His creation.

God's Will Is Based in His Wisdom

An all-wise God knows the best means to the best end for everything. The best means for the best end for each creature is God's will for that creature. Therefore, God knows the best way for every creature to achieve the best end.

This is what is called “God’s will”; therefore, God’s will for each creature is what is best for that one (cf. Rom. 12:1–2; James 1:5).

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR GOD’S WISDOM

That God is all-wise is a well-confirmed attribute in the history of the church. The testimony to God’s wisdom begins in the very earliest period.

The Early Church Fathers on God’s Wisdom

The immediate inheritors of the apostolic teaching were cognizant of God’s omnisapience, speaking often of His infinite wisdom.

Ignatius

> I glorify God, even Jesus Christ, who has given you such wisdom. For I have observed that ye are perfected in an immoveable faith, as if ye were nailed to the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, both in the flesh and in the spirit, and are established in love through the blood of Christ, being fully persuaded with respect to our Lord, that He was truly of the seed of David according to the flesh, and the Son of God according to the will and power of God. (*ES* in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, 1.86)

Ignatius added, “Fare ye well in the grace of God, and of our Lord Jesus Christ, being filled with the Holy Spirit, and divine and sacred wisdom” (ibid., 1.92).

Justin Martyr

> Pray that, above all things, the gates of light may be opened to you; for these things cannot be perceived or understood by all, but only by the man to whom God and His Christ have imparted wisdom. (*DT*, 7 in ibid., 1.371, I)

Theophilus

> Men of God carrying in them a Holy Spirit and becoming prophets, being inspired and made wise by God, became God-taught, and holy, and righteous. Wherefore they were also deemed worthy of receiving this reward, that they should become instruments of God, and contain the wisdom that is from Him, through which wisdom they uttered both what regarded the creation of the world and all other things. (*TA*, 2.9 in ibid., II)

Tertullian

> In proof that the Greek word [*arche*] means nothing else than beginning, and that beginning admits of no other sense than the initial one, we have that (Being) even acknowledging such a beginning, who says: “The Lord possessed me, the beginning of His ways for the creation of His works.” For since all things were made by the Wisdom of God, it follows that, when God made both the heaven and the earth *in principio* —that is to say, in the beginning—He made them in His Wisdom.... When Wisdom, however, was referred to, it was quite right to say, in the beginning. For it was in Wisdom that He made all things at first, because by meditating and arranging His plans therein, He had in fact already done (the work of creation) ... this meditation and arrangement being the primal operation of Wisdom, opening as it does the way to the works by the act of meditation and thought. (*AH*, 20 in ibid., III)

The Medieval Church Fathers on God’s Wisdom

Like their patristic predecessors, the great teachers of the church of the Middle Ages were unanimous on the omnisapience of God. Augustine led the way.

Augustine

> Those who say these things do not as yet understand Thee, O Thou Wisdom of God, Thou light of souls; not as yet do they understand how these things be made which are made by and in Thee. They even endeavor to comprehend

things eternal; but as yet their heart flieth about in the past and future motions of things, and is still wavering. (*C*, 11.11)

Although it will be forever wise when redeemed in eternity, yet it will be wise only by participating in the unchangeable Wisdom, which is not the soul itself. So with the air. If it were never to be deprived of its infused light, it would still not be identical with that light by which it is illuminated. (*CG*, XI, 10)

Anselm

But would it not understand itself? Is it possible even to conceive of supreme wisdom not understanding itself? The rational mind is able, after all, to be conscious both of itself and also of supreme wisdom, and it can think intelligibly of both. Like the rational mind, therefore, the supreme spirit is conscious of and understands itself. And, as it exists eternally, it does so eternally. (*ACMW*, 48)

Thomas Aquinas

It is impossible for God to will anything but what His wisdom approves. This is, as it were, His law of justice, in accordance with which His will is right and just. Hence, what He does according to His will He does justly: as we do justly what we do according to law. But whereas law comes to us from some higher power, God is a law unto Himself. (*ST*, Ia. 21, 1)

The Reformation Fathers on God's Wisdom

Following the great Fathers of the earlier church, those concerned with reforming the Roman Catholic Church on the doctrine of salvation maintained, nonetheless, the strict view of the church on the nature of God. This included His omnisapience.

Martin Luther

Hereby John [the apostle] shows not only that Christ is God and was forever and forever, from eternity, before the beginning of the world and all things, but that God not only created the world and all creatures by the Word, His only-

> begotten Son and divine Wisdom, but also constantly, to the end of the world, governs and sustains them by Him; that, therefore, the Son of God is co-Creator of heaven and earth with the Father. God, however, is not a Master who acts as a carpenter or builder does, who, when he has prepared, finished, and completed a house, ship, or any structure whatever, lets the house stand for its master to live in or turns the ship over to the boatmen and the crew to sail across the sea in it, while he, the builder, leaves and goes wherever he pleases. This is what all other craftsmen do. When they have finished their work or discharged their business, they leave and pay no further attention to their work and product, letting it stand as long as it can. (*WL*, 1150)

John Calvin

> Should we once begin to raise our thoughts to God, and reflect on what kind of Being he is, and how absolute the perfection of that righteousness, and wisdom, and virtue, to which, as a standard, we are bound to be conformed, what formerly delighted us by its false show of righteousness, will become polluted with the greatest iniquity; what strangely imposed upon us under the name of wisdom, will disgust by its extreme folly; and what presented the appearance of virtuous energy, will be condemned as the most miserable impotence. (*ICR*, 1.2.2)

The Post-Reformation Theologians on God's Wisdom

The followers of the Reformation were no exception to the rule. There is virtually an unbroken tradition from the beginning till modern times on God's omnisapience. Only with the rise and influence of process theology are there any significant exceptions to this.

Stephen Charnock

> He cannot, because of his nature, but love that which bears some agreement with his nature, that which is the curious draught of his own wisdom and purity: he cannot but be delighted with a copy of himself: he would not have a holy nature, if he did not love holiness in every nature: his own nature would be denied by him, if he did not affect everything that had a stamp of his own nature upon it. (*EAG*, 2.122)

R. L. Dabney

None who believe in God have ever denied to Him knowledge and wisdom. Wisdom is the employment of things known, with judicious reference to proper ends. Now, God is Spirit: but to think, to know, to choose are the very powers of spirits. The universe is full of beautiful contrivances. These exhibit knowledge, wisdom, antichoice, coextensive with the aggregate of the whole. All God's works reveal marks of His knowledge, thought and wisdom. But these works are so vast, so varied, so full of contrivance, they disclose to us a knowledge practically boundless. (*LST*, 47–48)

William G. T. Shedd

Wisdom is a particular aspect of the Divine knowledge.
First Timothy 1:17
, "God only wise." It is the intelligence of God as manifested in the adaptation of
means to ends. It is seen: (1) In creation.
Ps. 19:1–7
, "The heavens declare the glory of God";
Ps. 104:1–34
, "O Lord, how manifold are thy works; in wisdom hast thou made them all";
Job 38:5
, "Who hath laid the measures thereof?" (2) In providence.
Ps. 33:10–11
, "The Lord brought the counsel of the heathen to nought";
Rom. 8:28
, "All things work together for good." (3) In redemption.
1 Cor. 2:7
, "We speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that G
destined for our glory before time began";
Rom. 11:33
, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God!";
Eph. 3:10
, "The manifold wisdom of God." The wisdom of God is called "the foolishness of
God" (
1 Cor. 1:25
), in order to exhibit its infinite superiority to human wisdom. The lowest degree
Divine wisdom, so low as to be called folly in comparison with the highest
degree, is wiser than men. (*DT*, 356)

OBJECTIONS TO GOD'S WISDOM

Objection One—Based Upon the Problem of Evil

The foremost objection to God's infinite wisdom is the problem of evil. It can be stated this way:

(1) An all-wise (and all-powerful) God would have made the best world possible.
(2) This evil world is not the best world possible (even one less crime would make it a better world).
(3) Hence, this is not the best world possible.
(4) Therefore, no all-wise God made this world.

Response to Objection One

In response to this objection, theists may take one of two basic options. These may be called, respectively, the best-***world*** explanation and the best-***way*** explanation.

The Best-World Explanation

Some theists, such as Augustine (in ***On the Nature of the Good***) and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716, in ***Theodicy***), have said that it should be observed that it may be granted that this world is not the best world ***conceivable***, but it is the best way to the best world ***achievable***. Consider the following reasoning:

(1) The best world ***conceivable*** is not always the best world ***achievable***.
(2) An all-wise and all-powerful God will make the best world achievable.
(3) This world was made by God.

(4) Consequently, this is the best world achievable.

The crucial premise to defend is the first one: It is based on the fact that this is a free world (one with free moral agents), and while it is possible that one or more of them on any given day would choose to do one less evil act, nonetheless, given that they have not chosen to do so, then, even though a better world is logically possible, it is not actually achievable, given what free creatures have chosen to do.

It seems evident that not all conditions that are conceivable are achievable with free creatures without forcing their freedom (see Plantinga, ***GE***). As mentioned previously, forced freedom is a contradiction in terms, and even an omnipotent God cannot do what is contradictory (see chapter 7). Hence, it just may be that this is the best of all possible worlds achievable, even though it is not the best world conceivable.

The Best-Way Explanation

Another option for the theist is to admit that this is not the best world possible. There ***could*** be less evil, and if we worked hard at it without forcing anyone's freedom we could actually make it better tomorrow. But even if this is granted, the objector's result is not assured, for this may not be the best of all possible worlds, but it may be the best of all possible ***ways*** to the best of all possible worlds achievable. That is, it is logically possible that the best world is yet to come—indeed, this is precisely what the Bible tells us is the case (see Rev. 21–22). Truly, the fact that God is all-wise and all-powerful assures that this better world ***will*** come. The logic of the argument may be stated this way:

(1) If God is all-wise, He wants the best world achievable.
(2) If God is all-powerful, He can achieve what He wants.
(3) This is not the best world achievable.
(4) Therefore, the best world achievable is yet to come.

Granting that God is also all-knowing and all-good, it follows that He knows the best means to the best end. Hence, this present world, which is not the best world

achievable, must be the best means to the best world achievable. Indeed, there are many things in Scripture and in life that support God permitting evil in order to achieve a greater good (Gen. 50:20; Rom. 5:3–5; 2 Cor. 4:17; James 1:2–4). If this were not so, then God would not have permitted it.

In other words, an all-wise God knows the best way to the best world. So God must have permitted this world (which is not the best world) in order to produce the best world possible. Therefore, this present world is the best way to the best possible world.

Objection Two—Based Upon the Existence of Hell

A more intense form of this objection calls for attention as well. Given that an all-knowing, all-good, and all-wise God would make the best world achievable, why, then, will anyone be in hell? A world with no one in hell, or even with less people in hell, would be a better one, and the best world possible would have no one in hell. However, according to the Bible, some will be in hell (Matt. 25:40–41; Rev. 20:11–15); thus, it would seem to follow that God is not all-wise.

Response to Objection Two

The response here points to a crucial difference between what is ***logically*** possible and what is ***actually*** possible. That is, not everything ***logically possible*** is ***actually achievable***. Even an all-wise, all-powerful God cannot do what is actually impossible, and it is actually impossible to make a world where all free creatures go to heaven, ***if any free creature freely chooses not to do so***. It is contradictory to force free acts, and God cannot do what is contradictory. We live in a truly free world (cf. Matt. 23:37; 2 Peter 3:9). Therefore, hell is not contrary to an all-wise God.

It is noteworthy that this “free will” solution is not open to strong Calvinists, who deny that fallen creatures are truly free (see Volume 3). To “solve” the problem, they must deny God’s omnibenevolence, because an all-good God has the ***desire*** to save all. A God who uses “irresistible grace” on the unwilling has

the ***ability*** to save all; therefore, all would be saved. In brief, since strong Calvinists deny that God will save all (universalism), they must deny that God is all-good in a saving (salvific) way (see Volume 3, chapter 12).

Objection Three—Based Upon Dysteleology[1] in the World

Nontheists often point to aspects of the world that—while not evil (at least in a moral sense)—show a lack of perfect design. How could there be a Perfect Designer if something is imperfectly designed? Often reference is made to apparent randomness, waste in nature, natural disasters, vestigial organs,[2] and the lack of maximal design as evidence of the lack of a Perfect Designer. The argument may be stated as follows:

(1) Nature does not manifest perfect design.
(2) A Perfect Designer would have produced a perfect design.
(3) Hence, there is not a Perfect Designer in nature.

Response to Objection Three

Both premises can be challenged by theists.

Response to Premise One—That Nature Does Not Have a Perfect Design

The best the anti-perfect-design objection can prove is that there is an ***apparent*** lack of perfect design, not an ***actual*** lack. Many things for which there was once no known design have subsequently been found to have design: The many alleged vestigial organs (which are an alleged hangover from earlier stages of evolution) are a case in point. The list of vestigial organs has shrunk from around one hundred, when the idea was first proposed, to about a half a dozen today.

Even these have some known functions.[3]
Many other things that seem purposeless are designed for good ends. For instance, the so-called random mixture of air molecules is not without design, for if it were not so, the carbon dioxide we breathe out of our mouth would be breathed right back in and would soon suffocate us. Who is to say that there is not a hidden purpose for many of the other things in nature that have an ***apparent*** lack of design?

Response to Premise Two—That a Perfect Designer Would Have Produced a Perfect Design

It is not necessary that everything made by a Perfect Designer have a maximal design: A Perfect Designer does not have to make a maximal design any more than Michelangelo needed to paint a perfect portrait for his grandchild when only a sketch would suffice. A Perfect Designer may have had a perfectly good purpose in not making a maximally designed world. For one thing, He could have done so in anticipation of humanity's fall. For one example, the second law of thermodynamics (the fact that the world is running down) may have been in operation from before the Fall, in anticipation of it.
Finally, there is the unjustified assumption in the dysteleological objection that this world is presently the way God made it. ***It is not***. The Fall itself has brought the creation into bondage (Gen. 3; Rom. 8); some (if not all) of the apparent lack of design is a result of the Fall. At any rate, there is no reason to conclude that God is not all-wise simply because we cannot explain every example of apparent lack of design. Given the evidence for the incredible intelligence it took to make this world, life itself, and the human brain, containing as it does a "Library of Congress" full of genetic information (Sagan, ***C***, 278), ***the odds are that it is not God's intelligence that is lacking in making the design, but rather ours in understanding it***.

SUMMARY OF GOD'S WISDOM

The omnisapience of God is His unerring ability to choose the best means to the best ends. This attribute is rooted in several others: omniscience,

omnibenevolence, and omnipotence. As omniscient, God knows all ends and all means. Further, He knows which of these means are the most effective to achieve these ends. What is more, His omnibenevolence assures that He will choose the best means to the best ends. Finally, His omnipotence enables Him to achieve His ends by the means He chooses. Such omnisapience is firmly rooted in Scripture, sound theological reasoning, and the teachings of the great Fathers of the church.

GOD IS LIGHT

Light is one of the more curious attributes of God. At first blush it would seem that it is a straightforward figure of speech, like as to say that God is a "rock." However, upon examination there is more to it: Light is actually an attribute of God.

THE DEFINITION OF GOD AS LIGHT

The Bible declares that God ***is*** light; however, by this it does not mean that God is physical light, since God is pure spirit light (John 4:24). God ***made*** physical light (Gen. 1:3; Isa. 45:7), so He must be ***beyond*** it in the same way in which He made matter (Gen. 1:1) but is Himself not material (see chapter 6).

What, then, does the Bible mean by calling God light? The Hebrew words for light are ***or*** (Gesenius, ***HELOT***, 21c): "light, give light, light up" and ***maor*** (ibid., 22c): "light-bearer, luminary, lamp." The Greek words for light are ***phos*** (Arndt, ***GELNT***, 880): "light, light-bearer; the element and sphere of the divine; light, pure and simple"; ***phosphoros*** ("bright and morning star—light-bringer"): "bearing or giving light" (ibid.; cf. 2 Peter 1:19); ***photeinos:*** "shining, bright, radiant" (Matt. 17:5); ***photizo*** ("give light"): "give light to, light, illuminate" (cf. Rev. 21:23; 22:5).

In summary, as applied to God, these words mean that He is pure light, the Great Illuminator—the Radiant One.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR GOD AS LIGHT

There are many dimensions to what it means for God to be light. He is spiritual light; He is the Great Illuminator; He is radiant glory, and He is the Giver of light.

God Is Spiritual Light

As an attribute of God, light is used in its purest sense; He is spiritual light. “You are my lamp, O LORD; the LORD turns my darkness into light” (2 Sam. 22:29). “Let the light of your face shine upon us, O LORD” (Ps. 4:6). “The LORD is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear?” (Ps. 27:1). “Come, O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the LORD” (Isa. 2:5). “The Light of Israel will become a fire, their Holy One a flame; in a single day it will burn and consume his thorns and his briers” (Isa. 10:17). “The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun will never set again, and your moon will wane no more; the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your days of sorrow will end” (Isa. 60:19–20). “Though I have fallen, I will rise. Though I sit in darkness, the LORD will be my light” (Mic. 7:8).

God Is the Great Illuminator

“While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!’ ” (Matt. 17:5). “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12; cf. 9:5; 12:46). “[He] alone is immortal and … lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen” (1 Tim. 6:16). “We have the word of the prophets made more certain … until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” (2 Peter 1:19). “This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). “If we walk in the light, as he is in the light,

we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). "The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp" (Rev. 21:23). "There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 22:5).

God's Light Is Radiant Glory

God's glory is the outward radiance of His nature, and in this light is displayed the outward expression of the inward character of God. "By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night" (Ex. 13:21). "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you" (Isa. 60:1).

God Is the Giver of Spiritual Light

Not only is God light in His very essence, but He is the source of all spiritual light: All who are truly enlightened are illuminated by God. "Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death" (Ps. 13:3). "The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes" (Ps. 19:8). "The LORD is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear?" (Ps. 27:1). "Open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins" (Acts 26:18). "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor. 4:4).

In summary, God is spiritual light by His very nature. The effulgence of this nature, called the glory of God, is also described as light. Being the Source of all light, God also gives light (illumination) to His creatures: We see the light in His light.

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR GOD AS LIGHT

There are two main attributes from which God's attribute of light can be derived. The first is pure actuality, and the second is omniscience.

Light Can Be Derived From Pure Actuality

Since the Bible declares that "God is light," this attribute is of His very essence. But the essence of God is pure actuality; in fact, from pure actuality the other essential metaphysical attributes of God can be derived. Hence, God as light can be derived from His pure actuality.

Light Can Be Derived From Omniscience

One of the characteristics of God's light is the ability to enlighten. This enlightenment is an act of the intellect both on the part of the enlightenment and of the enlightened. Thus, God's attribute of light is based in His omniscience, which enables Him to enlighten other minds.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR GOD AS LIGHT

The great teachers and confessions of the Christian church, down through the ages, refer to God as light. This began from earliest times and continues into the present.

The Early Church Fathers on God As Light

That God is light is a name early, and long, given to God. Rooted in Scripture, it was continued by the earliest Fathers and confirmed by those who followed them.

Justin Martyr

> Indeed, the things which you do openly and with applause, as if the divine light were overturned and extinguished, these you lay to our charge; which, in truth, does no harm to us who shrink from doing any such things, but only to those who do them and bear false witness against us. (*FA*, 27 in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, I)

Irenaeus

> But since God is all mind, all reason, all active spirit, all light, and always exists one and the same, as it is both beneficial for us to think of God, and as we learn regarding Him from the Scriptures, such feelings and divisions [of operation] cannot fittingly be ascribed to Him. (*AH*, 2.28.4 in ibid., I)

Athenagoras (fl. 2nd century)

> That we are not atheists, therefore, seeing that we acknowledge one God, uncreated, eternal, invisible, impassible, incomprehensible, illimitable, who is apprehended by the understanding only and the reason, who is encompassed by light, and beauty, and spirit, and power ineffable, by whom the universe has been created through His Logos, and set in order, and is kept in being—I have sufficiently demonstrated. (*WA*, 10 in ibid., II)

Mark Minucius Felix (d. c. A.D. 250)

> He orders everything, whatever it is, by a word; arranges it by His wisdom; perfects it by His power. He can neither be seen—He is brighter than light; nor can be grasped—He is purer than touch; nor estimated; He is greater than all perceptions; infinite, immense, and how great is known to Himself alone. (*O*, 18

in ibid., IV)

Origen

> Nor, seeing He is called the Son of (His) love, will it appear absurd if in this way He be called the Son of (His) will. Nay, John also indicates that “God is Light,” and Paul also declares that the Son is the splendor of everlasting light. As light, accordingly, could never exist without splendor, so neither can the Son be understood to exist without the Father; for He is called the “express image of His person,” and the Word and Wisdom. (*DP*, 4.1.28 in ibid.)
>
> Now, I should like to ask these persons what they have to say respecting that passage where it is declared that God is light; as John writes in his Epistle, “God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.” Truly He is that light which illuminates the whole understanding of those who are capable of receiving truth, as is said in the thirty-sixth Psalm, “In Thy light we shall see light.” For what other light of God can be named, “in which any one sees light,” save an influence of God, by which a man, being enlightened, either thoroughly sees the truth of all things, or comes to know God Himself, who is called the truth? (*DP*, 1.1.1 in ibid.)

The Medieval Church Fathers on God As Light

God as light became a significant theme in the writings of the Fathers of the Middle Ages. This is evident in the writings of virtually all of the major teachers of this period.

Augustine

> Those who say these things do not as yet understand Thee, O Thou Wisdom of God, Thou light of souls; not as yet do they understand how these things be made which are made by and in Thee. They even endeavor to comprehend things eternal; but as yet their heart flieth about in the past and future motions of things, and is still wavering. (C, 11.11)

Anselm

> Truly, Lord, this is the inaccessible light in which You dwell. For truly there is nothing else which can penetrate through it so that it might discover You there. Truly I do not see this light since it is too much for me; and yet whatever I see, I see through it, just as an eye that is weak sees what it sees by the light of the sun, which it cannot look at in the sun itself. My understanding is not able [to attain] to that [light]. It shines too much and [my understanding] does not grasp it nor does the eye of my soul allow itself to be turned towards it for too long. It is dazzled by its splendour, overcome by its fullness, overwhelmed by its immensity, confused by its extent. O supreme and inaccessible light; O whole and blessed truth, how far You are from me who am so close to You! How distant You are from my sight while I am so present to Your sight! (*ACMW*, 96–97)

Thomas Aquinas

"Since God is absolute form, or rather absolute being, He can be in no way composite. Hilary implies this argument, when he says (*De Trin*., vii): God, Who is strength, is not made up of things that are weak; nor is He Who is light, composed of things that are dim" (***ST***, la.3, 7). "In this way Dionysius (***Cael. Hier***., i) expounds the matter, that every procession of the divine manifestation comes to us from the movement of the Father of light" (***ST***, la.9, 1, ad.2).
Here we should note, first, that according to Augustine, and many others, light is more properly said of spiritual things than of sensible things. Ambrose (339–397), however, thought that brightness is said metaphorically of God. "This is not a great issue, for in whatever way the name 'light' is used, it implies a manifestation, whether that manifesting concerns intelligible or sensible things" (Aquinas, ***CGJ***, I, lecture 3).

The Reformation Fathers on God As Light

God's attribute of light shines forth in the Reformers as well as their followers in the modern world. Luther and Calvin both recognized this attribute of God.

Martin Luther

“The great unthankfulness, contempt of God’s Word, and willfulness of the world, make me fear that the divine light will soon cease to shine on man, for God’s word has ever had its certain course” (TT, 11). “God’s Word is a light that shines in a dark place; as all examples of faith show” (ibid., 39).

Further,

> What is it we poor wretched people aim at? We who cannot, as yet, comprehend with our faith the merest sparks of God’s promises, the bare glimmering of his commandments and works … presumptuously seek to understand the incomprehensible majesty of the incomprehensible light of God’s wonders, (ibid., 56)

What is more,

> We must know that he dwells in a light to which human creatures cannot come, and yet we go on, and try to reach it.… We look, with blind eyes like a mole, on the majesty of God, and after that *light* which is shown neither in words nor miracles, but only signified; out of curiosity and willfulness we would behold the highest and greatest light of the celestial sun ere we see the morning star. Let the morning star, as St. Peter says, go first up in our hearts, and we shall then see the sun in his noontide splendor. (ibid., 56–57)

John Calvin

“It hence follows, that we are blind as to the light of God, until in Christ it beams on us” (***EH***, 34).

The Post-Reformation Theologians on God As Light

After the Reformation, the concept of God as light was continued. Many noted modern theologians carried on this theme; a few select citations make the point.

Stephen Charnock

> We cannot have an adequate or suitable conception of God: He dwells in inaccessible light; inaccessible to the acuteness of our fancy, as well as the weakness of our sense. If we could have thoughts of him, as high and excellent as his nature, our conceptions must be as infinite as his nature. (*EAG*, 1.196)
> Since God knows time, he knows all things as they are in time; he doth not know all things to be at once, though he knows at once what is, has been, and will be.… He is his own light by which he sees, his own glass wherein he sees; beholding himself, he beholds all things. (ibid., 1.285)

Jonathan Edwards

God is the giver of light, for

> men in a natural condition may have convictions of the guilt that lies upon them, and of the anger of God, and their danger of divine vengeance. Such convictions are from the light of truth. That some sinners have a greater conviction of their guilt and misery than others, is because some have more light, or more apprehension of truth, than others. And this light and conviction may be from the Spirit of God. (*WJE*, 2.13)

God Himself is light:

> Positively what this spiritual and divine light is. And it may be thus described: A true sense of the divine excellency of the things revealed in the word of God, and a conviction of the truth and reality of them thence arising. This spiritual light primarily consists in the former of these, viz., a real sense and apprehension of the divine excellency of things revealed in the word of God. A spiritual and saving conviction of the truth and reality of these things, arises from such a sight of their divine excellency and glory; so that this conviction of their truth is an effect and natural consequence of this sight of their divine glory. (ibid., 2.14)

AN OBJECTION TO GOD AS LIGHT

The major objection to using light as an attribute of God comes from a confusion of the term “light” as used of God and what is meant by light as used of the physical universe. ***Physical light*** is created and finite (Gen. 1:3; 2 Cor. 4:6),

whereas ***spiritual light***, as an attribute of God, is not. This objection carries no more weight than to claim the word ***being*** should not be used of God because "being" as we know it is created and finite. As discussed earlier (in chapter 1), all characteristics found in the finite world that apply to God are finite as we find them in creation. Hence, they must be stripped of their limitations (by way of negation) and applied to the infinite God in a pure and unlimited way. The same is true of the term "light."

SUMMARY

Wisdom and light are two of God's nonmoral attributes. Wisdom flows from His omniscience and omnibenevolence. As applied to God, "wisdom" denotes His unerring ability to choose the best means to accomplish the best end. Light refers to God as the Great Illuminator, the Radiant One, the Source of all illumination and enlightenment. By His wisdom we know where to walk (James 1:5), and by His light we can see the path on which to walk (Ps. 119:105).

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CHAPTER TEN

GOD'S MAJESTY, BEAUTY, AND INEFFABILITY

Beauty and majesty are nonmoral attributes of God that go together: His beauty is part of His majesty, and His majesty is constituted in part by His inexpressible beauty. Both, along with His infinity and transcendence, are the reason for His ineffability (see below), meaning that He goes far beyond our finite ability to comprehend or express.

DEFINITION OF GOD'S MAJESTY

The concept of "majesty" or "majestic" is represented by several Hebrew words.[1] The range of meaning of the sentences in which they are used includes "majesty," "excellence," "exaltation," "splendor," "eminence," and "glory." Two Greek words, ***megaleiotes*** and ***megalosune***, are translated "splendor," "magnificence," "greatness," and "majesty." The dominant usage of these words is of God, though sometimes they are used of creatures. From the way the words for majesty are used of God, a definition can be formulated: God's majesty consists of unsurpassed greatness, highest eminence, unparalleled exaltation, and unmatched glory.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S MAJESTY

In the Bible, majesty is associated with God's honor and strength (1 Chron. 16:27); greatness, power, glory, and victory (1 Chron. 29:11); thunderous voice (Job 37:4); golden splendor and awesomeness (Job 37:22); powerful voice (Ps. 29:4); might and glory (Ps. 45:3 NKJV); truth, humility, and righteousness (Ps. 45:4); strength, stability, and sovereignty (Ps. 93:1); honor, strength, and beauty (Ps. 96:6 NKJV); splendor and majesty (Ps. 104:1); glorious splendor and wonderful works (Ps. 145:5); mighty acts and glory (Ps. 145:12); terror and glory (Isa. 2:19–21 NKJV); judgment and glory (Isa. 24:14–15); justice and righteousness (Isa. 26:10); beauty, stability, and grace (Isa. 33:20–21); strength and greatness (Mic. 5:4); marvelousness and amazingness (Luke 9:43); brightness of glory and express image (Heb. 1:3 NKJV); throne in heaven (Heb. 8:1); transfiguration of His Son (2 Peter 1:16); and wisdom, glory, dominion, and power (Jude 25 NKJV).

The appropriate response to God's majesty is informative of its meaning and significance. The Scriptures declare that God should be greatly praised for His greatness: "Great is the LORD, and most worthy of praise, in the city of our God, his holy mountain" (Ps. 48:1). He ought to be repeatedly blessed for His blessedness: "Praise the LORD, O my soul. O LORD my God, you are very great; you are clothed with splendor and majesty" (Ps. 104:1). God should be always held in awe for His awesomeness: "O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens" (Ps. 8:1). And He ought to be forever given the highest honor for His honorableness: "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being" (Rev. 4:11).

Isaiah provided an incredible picture of God's regal majesty and beauty and of an appropriate response to it:

> In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the

temple was filled with smoke. “Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty” (

Isa. 6:1–5

).

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR GOD’S MAJESTY

God’s majesty is rooted in or associated with several other attributes. These include infinity, transcendence, and beauty.

Majesty Follows From Infinity

God’s infinity is the backdrop of His majesty. Like the majesty of Mount McKinley, it is because God is so big that He is majestic. We stand in awe because He is so awesome. Majesty is rooted in infinity.

Majesty Follows From Transcendence

Likewise, the fact that God transcends (is above and beyond) all creation has majestic drawing power. If God were four feet tall, He would not command the kind of respect He does. In fact, if the stars were only a few yards away, we would not stand in awe of the universe.

Majesty Is Associated With Beauty

Not all beautiful things are majestic, but all majesty has beauty—and God’s majesty has incredible beauty. An ugly majestic being is an oxymoron; beauty is

an essential characteristic of majesty. Great and beautiful things have majesty, and the awesome God of the universe has both to an infinite degree.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S MAJESTY

God's attribute of majesty is confirmed by the great teachers of the church, beginning from the earliest times. A brief summary of their comments follows.

The Early Church Fathers on God's Majesty

The early Fathers of the church used different terms to describe majesty, but it was acknowledged, nonetheless.

Irenaeus

> It is proper, then, that I should begin with the first and most important head, that is, God the Creator, who made the heaven and the earth, and all things that are therein … since He is the only God, the only Lord, the only Creator, the only Father, alone containing all things, and Himself commanding all things into existence. (*AH*, 2.1.1 in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, I)
>
> If, however, any one does not discover the cause of all those things which become objects of investigation, let him reflect that man is infinitely inferior to God; that he has received grace only in part, and is not yet equal or similar to his Maker. (*AH*, 2.25.3 in ibid.)

Theophilus

> God by His own word and wisdom made all things; for "by His word were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth." Most excellent is His wisdom. By His wisdom God founded the earth; and by knowledge He prepared the heavens; and by understanding were the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the clouds poured out their dews. (TA, 67 in ibid., II)

Athenagoras

"God, the first and the last, and besides Me there is no God." In like manner: "Before Me there was no other God, and after Me there shall be none; I am God, and there is none beside Me." And as to His greatness: "Heaven is My throne, and the earth is the footstool of My feet: what house will ye build for Me, or what is the place of My rest?" (***WA***, 9 in ibid., II).

The Medieval Church Fathers on God's Majesty

Augustine

May the Lord therefore console thee, that thou mayest "see the good things of Jerusalem" (
Ps. 127:5
). For these good things are. Why are they? Because they are everlasting. Why a they? Because the King is there, I AM WHO I AM (
Ex. 3:14
). (EP, 109, 20 in Przywara, *AS*, 90)

All things which He has made are good because they were made by Him, but they are subject to change because they were made not out of Him, but out of nothing. Although they are not supremely good, since God is a greater good than they, these mutable things are, none the less, highly good by reason of their capacity for union with [God]. (*CG* 12.1)

Anselm

You therefore permeate and embrace all things; You are before and beyond all things. You are before all things of course since, before they came to be, You already are. But how are You beyond all things? For in what way are You beyond those things that will never have an end? …

Is it because these things can in no way exist without You, though You do not exist any the less even if they return to nothingness? For in this way, in a sense, You are beyond them. Or is it also that they can be thought to have an end, while You cannot in any way? For in this way, in a sense, they do indeed have an end,

> but You do not in any sense. And assuredly that which does not have an end in any way at all is beyond that which does come to an end in some way. (*ACMW*, 99)

Thomas Aquinas

"For this kind of sacrifice [burnt offering] was offered to God specially to show reverence to His majesty, and love of His goodness: and typified the state of perfection as regards the fulfillment of the counsels" (***ST***, la2ae.102–03 ad 8). "Wherefore the first distinction in matters of faith is that some concern the majesty of the Godhead, while others pertain to the mystery of Christ's human nature, which is the mystery of godliness (1 Tim. 3:16)" (ibid., 2a2ae.l.8). "Every Divine excellency is included in His majesty: to which it pertains we should be made happy in Him as in sovereign good" (ibid., 2a2ae.84.1ad 2).

The Reformation Fathers on God's Majesty

Martin Luther

> Our God is outside, below, and above every creature. But we cannot reconcile ourselves to this thought.... God, then, is outside of everything that exists, for He says: "The heaven is My throne." So He must extend far above the heaven. "And the earth is My footstool" (Isa. 66:1). So He must also be in the entire world. "He ascended up far above all heavens that He might fill all things" (Eph. 4:10).... Thus spake a certain philosopher: God is a Circle, the center of which is everywhere and the circumference nowhere. (*WLS*, 544)

John Calvin

> [God] is far beyond the reach of change or corruption ... he holds the whole universe in his grasp, and rules it by his power. The effect of the expressions therefore, is the same as if it had been said, that he is of infinite majesty,

incomprehensible essence, boundless power, and eternal duration. (*ICR*, 3.20.40)

"Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth" (Ex. 20:4). By these words he curbs any licentious attempt we might make to represent h by a visible shape, and briefly enumerates all the forms by which superstition had begun, even long before, to turn his truth into a lie.... But God makes no comparison between images, as if one were more, and another less befitting; he rejects, without exception, all shapes and pictures, and other symbols by which the superstitious imagine they can bring him near to them. (ibid., Ia. 11:1)

The Post Reformation Theologians on God's Majesty

Following the Reformation, there was an antiphonal choir of praise to God for His majesty. This begins with Arminius and reverberates to the present.

Jacob Arminius

This Perfection of God infinitely exceeds the perfection of all the creatures, on a three-fold account. For it possesses all things in a mode most perfect, and does not derive them from another. But the perfection which the creatures possess, they derive from God, and it is faintly shadowed forth after its archetype. (*WJA*, 1:136)

Jonathan Edwards

He is a being of infinite greatness, majesty, and glory; and therefore he is infinitely honourable. He is infinitely exalted above the greatest potentates of the earth, and highest angels in heaven; and therefore he is infinitely more honourable than they. His authority over us is infinite; and the ground of his right to our obedience himself, and we have an absolute, universal, and infinite dependence upon him. (*WJE*, 1, 669)

J. I. Packer

> The word *majesty*, when applied to God, is always a declaration of his greatness and an invitation to worship.... He is far above us in greatness, and therefore is to be adored.
>
> Our thoughts of God are not great enough; we fail to reckon with the reality of his limitless wisdom and power. Because we ourselves are limited and weak, we imagine that at some point God is too, and find it hard to believe that he is not. We think of God as too much like what we are. Put this mistake right, says God; learn to acknowledge the full majesty of your incomparable God and Savior. (*KG*, 83, 88)

GOD'S BEAUTY

As we have seen, God's beauty is closely associated with His majesty. In fact, beauty is an essential element of majesty, even though it is an attribute of God in its own right.

DEFINITION OF GOD'S BEAUTY

Several Hebrew [2] and Greek [3] words convey the idea of beauty. The range of meaning includes "beautiful," "good," "pleasant," "splendorous," "agreeable," "delightful," and "lovely." The essence of beauty is: ***that which is being perceived pleases***. As applied to God, beauty is the essential attribute of goodness that produces in the beholder a sense of overwhelming pleasure and delight.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S BEAUTY

Beauty is used several ways in relation to God. His holiness, His regality, His temple, and His city (Zion) are all said to be beautiful. "Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name. Bring an offering and come before him; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness" (1 Chron. 16:29; cf. Ps. 96:9). "Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to the LORD and to praise him for the splendor [beauty]

of his holiness" (2 Chron. 20:21). 'Ascribe to the LORD the glory due to his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness" (Ps. 29:2). "Your eyes will see the king in his beauty and view a land that stretches afar" (Isa. 33:17). God's beauty is manifest in His temple: "Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and glory are in his sanctuary" (Ps. 96:6). "One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple" (Ps. 27:4). "Adorn yourself with glory and splendor, and clothe yourself in honor and majesty" (Job 40:10). "Worship the LORD in the beauty of his holiness! Tremble before Him, all the earth" (Ps. 96:9 NKJV).
Not only is God beautiful, but He gives beauty to His creation: " 'Your fame spread among the nations on account of your beauty, because the splendor I had given you made your beauty perfect,' declares the Sovereign Lord" (Ezek. 16:14). "He has made everything beautiful in its time" (Eccl. 3:11). "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good" (Gen. 1:31).

THE THELOGICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S BEAUTY

Theologically, the attribute of beauty in God is based in the idea of being. It can also be derived from His causal connection with His creation.

Beauty and Being

Being (reality), insofar as it is knowable, is ***true***. Being, insofar as it is desirable, is ***good***. And Being, insofar as it is pleasurable, is ***beauty***. So, again, beauty in God is that aspect of His Being which, when perceived by His creatures, provides a sense of overwhelming pleasure and delight.

Beauty and Creation

God's beauty is known from His creation. Creation is beautiful; this is evident all

around us from a tiny flower (Matt. 6:28–29) to the magnificent night sky (Ps. 19:1). The effect derives its perfections from its Cause. As we have seen, God cannot give what He hasn't got—He cannot produce what He does not possess. Therefore, God is beautiful; His creation is merely a reflection of His beauty.

An Implication of God's Beauty

All beauty comes from God; hence, all beauty is like God. All who create beauty imitate God: We only think His thoughts after Him, and we only paint His paintings after Him. There is no work of art that did not appear first in the infinite mind of the Creator of all things. Human artists are at best only sub-creators imitating the Super Creator (see Sayers, ***MM***); they merely think His thoughts after Him, form His sculptures after Him, and sing His songs after Him, etc. There is nothing in the mind of the creature that was not first in the mind of the Creator. Once more, all effects preexist in their Cause.

The Beatific Vision: The Ultimate Aesthetic Experience

The Bible declares that, in this life, no mortal can see God. John wrote, "No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known" (John 1:18). Moses requested to see God's face, but God said, "You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live" (Ex. 33:20). However, after our resurrection, immortal man, in his glorified body, ***will*** see God face-to-face. John wrote of this experience, saying, "No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads" (Rev. 22:3–4). Paul added, "When perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.… Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known" (1 Cor. 13:10–12).

This experience is known as the Beatific (blessed) Vision. At this point the believer will be glorified. John said of it, "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). In

addition to seeing God as the ultimate and infinite good, we shall see Him as ultimate and infinite beauty. It will be the ultimate aesthetic experience: No mountain, however grand, no rainbow, however bright, and no sunset, however blazing, will compare with this infinite blast of ultimate Beauty! (see Volume 4, chapter 9).

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S BEAUTY

Although it did not receive major attention, the attribute of divine beauty is attested in the writings of the Fathers. Beginning with the patristic Fathers, through the Middle Ages, and into the Reformation and post-Reformation periods, there is a continual chain of citations that attest to this glorious characteristic of God.

The Early Church Fathers on God's Beauty

While occupied with more mundane matters on earth, the great teachers of the early church did not neglect the loftier matters of contemplating the beauty of God, the Creator of all things.

Clement of Alexandria

> What further need has God of the mysteries of love? And then thou shalt look into the bosom of the Father, whom God the only-begotten Son alone hath declared. And God Himself is love; and out of love to us became feminine. In His ineffable essence He is Father; in His compassion to us He became Mother. The Father by loving became feminine: and the great proof of this is He whom He begot of Himself; and the fruit brought forth by love is love. (*WRM*, 37 in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, II)

Origen

> As, therefore, our understanding is unable of itself to behold God Himself as He is,

> it knows the Father of the world from the beauty of His works and the comeliness of His creatures. God, therefore, is not to be thought of as being either a body or as existing in a body, but as an uncompounded intellectual nature, admitting within Himself no addition of any kind; so that He cannot be believed to have within him a greater and a less, but is such that He is in all parts.
>
> Our eyes frequently cannot look upon the nature of the light itself—that is, upon the substance of the sun; but when we behold his splendor or his rays pouring in, perhaps, through windows or some small openings to admit the light, we can reflect how great is the supply and source of the light of the body. (*DP*, 1:1:6 in ibid., IV)

Tertullian

> "Therefore in this sense too, beginning may be taken for princely authority and power. It was, indeed, in His transcendent authority and power, that God made the heaven and the earth" (*AH*, 2:3:19 in ibid., III).

The Medieval Church Fathers on God's Beauty

During the Middle Ages, as stated, the great teachers of the church elaborated on God's attribute of beauty. Their philosophical insights gave new depth to the significance of this wonderful characteristic of God.

Augustine

> Undoubtedly, anything susceptible of degrees is mutable, and for this reason, the most able, learned and experienced philosophers readily concluded that the first form of all could not be in any of these things in which the form was clearly mutable. Once they perceived various degrees of beauty in both body and mind, they realized that, if all form were lacking, their very existence would end. Thus, they argued that there must be some reality in which the form was ultimate, immutable and, therefore, not susceptible of degrees. They rightly concluded that only a reality unmade from which all other realities originate could be the ultimate principle of things. (*CG*, 8:6)

Anselm

> How great is that light from which shines every truth that gives light to the understanding! How complete is that truth in which is everything that is true and outside of which nothing exists save nothingness and falsity! How boundless is that which in one glance sees everything that has been made, and by whom and through whom and in what manner it was made *from* nothing! What *purity*, what simplicity, what certitude and *splendour* is there! Truly it is more than can be understood by any creature.
>
> Still You hide away, Lord, from my soul in Your light and blessedness, and so it still dwells in its darkness and misery. For it looks all about, and does not see Your beauty; it listens, and does not hear Your harmony. It smells, and does not sense Your fragrance. It tastes, and does not recognize Your savour. It feels, and does not sense Your softness. For You have in Yourself, Lord, in Your own ineffable manner, those [qualities] You have given to the things created by You according to their own sensible manner. But the senses of my soul, because of the ancient weakness of sin, have become hardened and dulled and obstructed. (*ACMW*, 96–97)

Thomas Aquinas

> For beauty includes three conditions: “integrity” or “perfection,” since those things which are impaired are by the very fact ugly; due “proportion” or “harmony”; and lastly, “brightness” or “clarity,” whence things are called beautiful which have a bright color. (*ST*, Ia.39:8)
>
> Beauty and goodness in a thing are identical fundamentally; for they are based upon the same thing, namely, the form; and consequently goodness is praised as beauty. But they differ logically, for goodness properly relates to the appetite (goodness being what all things desire); and therefore it has the aspect of an end (the appetite being a kind of movement towards a thing). On the other hand, beauty relates to the cognitive faculty; for beautiful things are those that please when seen. Hence beauty consists in due proportion; for the senses delight in things duly proportioned, as in what is after their own kind—because even sense is a sort of reason, just as is every cognitive faculty. Now since knowledge is by assimilation, and similarity relates to form, beauty properly belongs to the nature of a formal cause, (ibid., Ia.5:4)

The Reformation Fathers on God’s Beauty

The Reformers did not dissent from their forefathers on God’s beauty. They saw it as part of God’s great transcendence over His creation.

Martin Luther

> God indeed gives to some many good things and richly adorns them, as He did Lucifer in heaven. He scatters His gifts broadcast among the multitude; but He does not therefore regard them. His good things are merely gifts, that last but for a season; but His grace and regard are the inheritance, which lasts forever. (*WL*, 3:159)

John Calvin

As we have seen, Calvin wrote,

> WHICH ART IN HEAVEN. From this we are not to infer that he is enclosed and confined within the circumference of heaven, as by a kind of boundaries. Hence Solomon confesses, “The heaven of heavens cannot contain thee” (1 Kings 8:27); and he himself says by the Prophet, “The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool” (Isa. 66:1); thereby intimating, that his presence, not confined to any region, is diffused over all space. But as our gross minds are unable to conceive of his ineffable glory, it is designated to us by heaven, nothing which our eyes can behold being so full of splendour and majesty. While, then, we are accustomed to regard every object as confined to the place where our senses discern it, no place can be assigned to God; and hence, if we would seek him, we must rise higher than all corporeal or mental discernment. (*ICR*, 3.20.40)

The Post-Reformation Teachers on God’s Beauty

The emphasis on God’s beauty continues in the post-Reformation period. A few samples will suffice.

Jacob Arminius

> God knows himself entirely and adequately: For He is all Being, Light and Eye. He also knows other things entirely; but excellently, as they are in Himself and in his Understanding; adequately, as they are in their proper natures (

1 Cor. 2:11

;

Psalm 94:9–10

). (*WJA*, 1.445)

Jonathan Edwards

God is a being infinitely lovely, because he hath infinite excellency and beauty. To have infinite excellency and beauty, is the same thing as to have infinite loveliness. He is a being of infinite greatness, majesty, and glory; and therefore he is infinitely honourable. He is infinitely exalted above the greatest potentates of the earth, and highest angels in heaven; and therefore he is infinitely more honourable than they. (*WJE*, I, 669)

OBJECTIONS TO GOD'S BEAUTY

Two main objections are leveled at God's beauty. The first is the common belief that beauty is purely subjective, and the second is the presence of evil in the world.

Objection One—Based on the Idea That Beauty Is Subjective

Attributes are objective aspects of God's Being; nevertheless, it is widely held that beauty is subjective, as the common adage holds: "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." What is beautiful to one person is ugly to another. Beauty, allegedly, is culturally relative.

Response to Objection One

In reply, it should be pointed out that beauty has two sides:[4] The admirable (the objective side) and the enjoyable (the subjective side). Not everything enjoyable

is admirable, but everything admirable is enjoyable. That beauty has an objective element is evident from these facts:

(1) There is widespread agreement that some things are beautiful (e.g., rainbow, sunset, smile).
(2) Beauty has identifiable factors (e.g., unity, order, balance).
(3) Recent studies show a transcultural element to human beauty.
(4) That some things are more beautiful than others (e.g., roses than garbage) reveals an objective standard. God's objective nature as beautiful is the ultimate basis for knowing what is beautiful.

Objection Two—Based Upon the Presence of Evil

How can God be beautiful and yet make a world with such ugliness (evil) in it? If He is perfect, why is the world so imperfect?

Response to Objection Two

Two things should be observed.
First, God did not make this world the way it is: He made it perfect (Gen. 1:31; Eccl. 7:29). It was the fall of humanity that brought ugliness into the world (Gen. 3; Rom. 5, 8). So God is not responsible for the ugliness in the world, only the beauty.
Second, we would not even be able to recognize the evil unless we had an objective understanding of the good. We would not know the ugly unless we had a concept of the beautiful. Therefore, the fact that we know there are aspects of this world that are evil and ugly shows that ultimately there must be some objective standard for good and beautiful—that standard is God.

SUMMARY OF GOD'S BEAUTY

God is beautiful; He is, in fact, the ultimate standard of all beauty. Whatever is

beautiful is beautiful because it is like Him. All beauty has order and unity; God is the source of all order and unity. Hence, God is the source of all beauty. When we see Him as He is, we will behold beauty—ultimate, infinite, and unadulterated beauty—as it truly is.

GOD'S INEFFABILITY

God's majesty and beauty are so great that they are virtually indescribable—His attributes, being infinite, go so far beyond our finite ability to understand that they are ***ineffable***. Ineffability is not itself an attribute of God, since it does not describe an intrinsic characteristic of God. God's nature is not ineffable to ***Him***; it is only ineffable to ***us***, since we are limited in our ability to understand it.

DEFINITION OF GOD'S INEFFABILITY

Literally, "ineffable" means "incapable of being expressed" (Lat. *ineffabilis: in* = "not" + *effabilis* = "capable of being expressed"). Theologically, ineffability refers to the transcendent characteristics of God that cannot be adequately expressed in human language.

It is important to note, however, that "ineffable" does not mean that we cannot understand God's attributes at all; this is a self-defeating statement. Nor can we know that we cannot know God (how can we know that God cannot be expressed at all?)—this, too, is self-defeating. There is no way to express, of God, that He cannot be expressed in any way, for this very statement is an expression about God.

This is not to say that God can be expressed perfectly, completely, and comprehensively: He cannot. This is what is meant by "ineffable." Although God can be ***apprehended***, He cannot be ***comprehended***, for again, "We know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.… Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known" (1 Cor. 13:9–10, 1 Cor. 12).

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S

INEFFABILITY

There are many verses that describe God's ineffability, and among these the following stand out: "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law" (Deut. 29:29). "Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty?" (Job 11:7). "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain" (Ps. 139:6). " 'My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the LORD" (Isa. 55:8). "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!" (Rom. 11:33). "Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory" (1 Tim. 3:16).

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S INEFFABILITY

The theological basis for God's ineffability rests in His infinity and transcendence.

Ineffability Follows From Infinity

As was shown earlier (see chapter 5), God is infinite; that is, He is without limits or boundaries of any kind. By contrast, all creatures are finite: Even humans, the crown of God's creation (Gen. 1:27), are limited in understanding. Hence, as finite creatures we cannot comprehend the infinite. What cannot be comprehended is ineffable; therefore, the infinite God is ineffable to us, for there is an infinite distance between the infinite Being and a finite being.

Ineffability Follows From Transcendence

God is transcendent, or far above, His creation (see chapter 22). We can't completely comprehend what is far above us; thus, we can't comprehend God. This is why God is known only analogously (see Volume 1, chapter 9). Just as we can grasp hold of an extremely long rope without being able to see either end, even so we can know God without knowing Him completely.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S INEFFABILITY

The doctrine of God's ineffability was recognized from earliest times. A survey of the Fathers of the church reveals that this characteristic of God is firmly grounded in our history.

The Early Church Fathers on God's Ineffability

Irenaeus

> If, however, we cannot discover explanations of all those things in Scripture which are made the subject of investigation, yet let us not on that account seek after any other God besides Him who really exists. For this is the very greatest impiety. We should leave things of that nature to God who created us, being most properly assured that the Scriptures are indeed perfect, since they were spoken by the Word of God and His Spirit; but we, inasmuch as we are inferior to, and later in existence than, the Word of God and His Spirit, are on that very account destitute of the knowledge of His mysteries. (*AH*, 2:28:2 in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, I)

Athenagoras

> That we are not atheists, therefore, seeing that we acknowledge one God, uncreated, eternal, invisible, impassible, incomprehensible, illimitable, who is apprehended by the understanding only and the reason, who is encompassed

by light, and beauty, and spirit, and power ineffable, by whom the universe has been created through His Logos, and set in order, and is kept in being—I have sufficiently demonstrated. (*WA*, 10 in ibid., II)

Tatian

God is a Spirit, not pervading matter, but the Maker of material spirits, and of the forms that are in matter; He is invisible, impalpable, being Himself the Father of both sensible and invisible things. Him we know from His creation, and apprehend His invisible power by His works. I refuse to adore that workmanship which He has made for our sakes. The sun and moon were made for us: how, then, can I adore my own servants? How can I speak of sticks and stones as gods? … Nor even ought the ineffable God to be presented with gifts; for He who is in want of nothing is not to be misrepresented by us as though He were indigent. (*AG*, 4 in ibid.)

Clement of Alexandria

This discourse respecting God is most difficult to handle. For since the first principle of everything is difficult to find out, the absolutely first and oldest principle, which is the cause of all other things being and having been, is difficult to exhibit. For how can that be expressed which is neither genus, nor difference, nor species, nor individual, nor number; nay more, is neither an event, nor that to which an event happens? No one can rightly express Him wholly. For on account of His greatness He is ranked as the All, and is the Father of the universe…. We speak not as supplying His name; but for want, we use good names, in order that the mind may have these as points of support, so as not to err in other respects. For each one by itself does not express God; but all together are indicative of the power of the Omnipotent. For predicates are expressed either from what belongs to things themselves, or from their mutual relation. (*S*, 5:12 in ibid.)

Thus, “In His ineffable essence He is Father” (***WRM***, 37 in ibid.)

Origen

Again,

> Our eyes frequently cannot look upon the nature of the light itself—that is, upon the substance of the sun; but when we behold his splendor or his rays pouring in, perhaps, through windows or some small openings to admit the light, we can reflect how great is the supply and source of the light of the body. So in like manner, the works of Divine Providence and the plan of this whole world are a sort of rays, as it were, of the nature of God, in comparison with His real substance and being. As, therefore, our understanding is unable of itself to behold God Himself as He is, it knows the Father of the world from the beauty of His works and the comeliness of His creatures. (*DP*, 1:6 in ibid., II)

The Medieval Church Fathers on God's Ineffability

Augustine

> They even endeavor to comprehend things eternal; but as yet their heart flieth about in the past and future motions of things, and is still wavering. Who shall hold it and fix it, that it may rest a little, and by degrees catch the glory of the ever-standing eternity and compare it with the times which never stand, and see that it is incomparable. (*C*, 11:10–11)

Anselm

> Still You hide away, Lord, from my soul in Your light and blessedness, and so it still dwells in its darkness *and* misery. For it looks all about, and does not see Your beauty. It listens, and does not hear Your harmony. It smells, and does not sense Your fragrance. It tastes, and does not recognize Your savour. It feels, and does not sense Your softness. For You have in Yourself, Lord, in Your own ineffable manner, those [qualities] You have given to the things created by You according to their own sensible manner. But the senses of my soul, because of the ancient weakness of sin, have become hardened and dulled and obstructed. (*ACMW*, 97)

Thomas Aquinas

Aquinas went so far as to say that our knowledge of God is almost equivocal (***SCG***, 33–34). His doctrine of analogy (see Volume 1, chapter 9) was based in

part on God's ineffability. Were God's essence knowable in itself, there would be no need for speaking of likeness to Him. Indeed, it is because of God's ineffability that it is necessary to use the *via negativa* (way of negation) and speak of God's metaphysical attributes in negative terms.

The Reformation Fathers on God's Ineffability

It was natural that the great Reformers, with their stress on God's sovereignty, would see the transcendent God as ineffable. Indeed, some, such as Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855), even viewed God as "***wholly*** other."

Martin Luther

> Philosophers of the past have defined God thus: God is a circle whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere. By this definition they wanted to signify that God is everything and nothing. Our Lord God is everywhere and yet cannot be comprehended.
> Nothing is so small, God is still smaller; nothing so large, God is still larger; nothing so short, God is still shorter; nothing so long, God is still longer; nothing so wide, God is still wider; nothing so narrow, God is still narrower, etc. In a word, God is an inexpressible Being, above and beyond everything that may be said or thought. (*WLS*, 542–43)

John Calvin

> His essence, indeed, is incomprehensible, utterly transcending human thought; but on each of his works his glory is engraven in characters so bright, so distinct, and so illustrious, that none, however dull and illiterate, can plead ignorance as their excuse. (*ICR* 1.5.1)

God so transcends human thought that He must accommodate Himself to a human level so that we can understand Him. Thus, even though He is changeless, He appears to change His mind:

> What then is meant by the term repentance? The very same that is meant by the

> other forms of expression, by which God is described to us humanly. Because our weakness cannot reach his height, any description which we receive of him must be lowered to our capacity in order to be intelligible. And the mode of lowering is to represent him not as he really is, but as we conceive of him. (ibid., 1.17.13)

The Post-Reformation Theologians on God's Ineffability

As noted earlier, God's ineffability follows from several other attributes. The post-Reformation teachers saw this and stressed different characteristics of God to support His ineffability.

Jacob Arminius

> As we are not able to know the nature of God in itself, we can in a measure attain to some knowledge from the analogy of the nature which is in created things, and principally that which is in ourselves who are created after the image of God; while we always add a mode of eminence to this analogy, according to which mode God is understood to exceed infinitely the perfections of things created. (*WJA*, 2:33)

Stephen Charnock

> We cannot have an adequate or suitable conception of God: He dwells in inaccessible light; inaccessible to the acuteness of our fancy, as well as the weakness of our senses. If we could have thoughts of him, as high and excellent as his nature, our conception must be as infinite as his nature. (*EAG*, 1:196)

R. L. Dabney

> Infinitude means the absolutely limitless character of God's essence. Immensity, the absolutely limitless being of His substance. His being, as eternal, is in no sense circumscribed by time; as immense, in no wise circumscribed by space. ... The scholastic formula was, "The whole substance, in its whole essence, is

> simultaneously present in every point of infinite space, yet without multiplication of itself." This is unintelligible, but so is His immensity. (*LST*, 44)

William G. T. Shedd

> Man knows the nature of finite spirit through his own self-consciousness, but he knows that of the Infinite spirit only analogically. Hence some of the characteristics of the Divine nature cannot be known by a finite intelligence. For example, how God can be independent of the limitations of time, and have an eternal mode of consciousness that is without succession, including all events simultaneously in one omniscient intuition, is inscrutable to man, because he himself has no such consciousness. The same is true of the omnipresence of God. How he can be all at every point in universal space, baffles human comprehension, though it has some light thrown upon it by the fact that the human soul is all at every point in the body.

Thus, "The Divine being is of an essence whose spirituality transcends that of all other spirits, human, angelic, or arch-angelic; even as his immortality transcends that of man or angel" (***DT***, 152).

THE NATURE OF A MYSTERY VERSUS A PROBLEM

Gabriel Marcel (see ***MB***) has made a helpful distinction between a problem and a mystery that provides a significant insight into how to approach God's ineffability. Combined with a contrast between these and a paradox, some important conclusions emerge in our study of the attributes of God.

Paradox and Antinomy

On a popular level, the words ***paradox*** and ***mystery*** are often used interchangeably. However, historically and more precisely there is a very important distinction. In more technical usage from the Greek philosopher Zeno (c. 495 B.C.–C. 430 B.C.) through Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) and into

modern times, the word ***paradox*** (or ***antinomy***) meant a logical contradiction. For all rational thinkers, paradox was something that violated the law of noncontradiction and should be rejected. To avoid confusion, it seems best to avoid using the word in any other way, especially to describe the mysteries of the Christian faith, such as the Trinity and the Incarnation.

A kindred word, ***antithesis*** (from the Greek ***antitheses***), also used by Kant to describe a logical contradiction, should also be avoided by Christians as describing God or any item of their faith. Indeed, the New Testament says explicitly to "avoid contradictions" (1 Tim. 6:20 NKJV). There are no contradictions in Christianity, though there are mysteries.

Mystery Versus Paradox

The biblical and historical word that most appropriately describes ineffable aspects of God is "mystery." Theologically, a mystery (such as the Trinity, the Incarnation, or the transcendence of God) is something that does not go ***against*** reason, but ***beyond*** reason. In short, on the one hand, it does not violate the law of noncontradiction, and, on the other hand, it is something that, while we can apprehend it, we cannot completely comprehend it.

Mystery Versus Problem

One of the difficulties, especially in Western theology, [5] is that ***mysteries*** are often treated as if they were ***problems***. At this point, Gabriel Marcel's distinction is very helpful. He notes that problems call for a ***solution***, but mysteries call for ***meditation***. Problems demand ***extensive*** study (like knowing more words to solve a crossword puzzle), whereas mysteries require ***intensive*** study.

In view of this distinction, the Trinity should be treated as a mystery, not a problem. Once the basic elements are understood, we should not attempt to unscrew the inscrutable. We should not analyze it, but admire it; we should not dissect it, but devote ourselves to it. It is an object of worship, not scholarship. As has been well said, if one tries to understand it completely (as a problem), he may lose his mind, and if he does not believe it sincerely, he may lose his soul! Once we understand God's attributes and ineffable nature, we need more reverence, not more research.

It would appear that there is a place for both the intellectual and the mystical. Rationally, we need to sort out false from true beliefs about God. Also, we need to demonstrate that what we believe about God is not contradictory. However, once the borders of orthodoxy have been established, based on Scripture and good reason, we should be content to enjoy the mystery of God's ineffability.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

All rational creatures have a sense of the supreme and a sense of the sublime (Ps. 19:1; Rom. 1:19–20). God's majesty provides a sense of the supreme; God's beauty gives a sense of the sublime. We should enjoy all beauty as a gift of God (James 1:17), knowing that its ineffability is part of its fascination and mystery to ponder. In doing this, we are in anticipation of the incredible and ultimate beauty of heaven—the beatific vision—seeing God face-to-face (Rev. 22:4; 1 Cor. 13:10–12; cf. Ex. 33:22–23). Meanwhile, however, God remains ineffable to us; we know Him only in part, indirectly—not completely or face-to-face.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

GOD'S LIFE AND IMMORTALITY

God's attributes of life and immortality are tied together; the latter is an eternal version of the former. Since God is life intrinsically, it follows that He is immortal as well; however, like many other things, life is easier to recognize than to define, at least in a precise manner.

THE DEFINITION OF GOD'S LIFE

Generally speaking, the biblical words of life literally mean "to be alive," "active," "moving," "flowing." The Hebrew word for "life" (***chay***) means "living one," "fountain of life" (Gesenius, ***HELOT***, 311); "living," "alive," "flowing of fresh water" (cf. John 4:10—Archer, et al., ***TWOT***, 1:644). The Greek word for "life" (***zōe***) means "live," "living," "of beings that in reality … are not subject to death [e.g., God]" (Arndt and Gingrich, ***GELNT***, 336). Theologically, to speak of God as life is to say two basic things: God is alive, and He is the Source of all other life. He has life intrinsically; He ***is*** Life, while all other things ***have*** life as a gift from Him. The difficulty, again, is in defining more precisely what life is. Whatever else it may include, life involves immanent self-activity. The many biblical references will help at least to describe life more fully.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS OF GOD'S ATTRIBUTE OF LIFE

The Bible depicts God as living and as the Source of all other living things. This generally involves being alive, active, and moving. Life is the opposite of death, which entails the lack of life, activity, and movement.

God as Living

Numerous Old Testament texts refer to the "living God" or the like. "What mortal man has ever heard the voice of the living God speaking out of fire, as we have, and survived?" (Deut. 5:26). "So tell them, 'As surely as I live, declares the LORD, I will do to you the very things I heard you say' " (Num. 14:28). "This is how you will know that the living God is among you and that he will certainly drive out before you the Canaanites" (Josh. 3:10). "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?" (1 Sam. 17:26; cf. 17:36). "It may be that the LORD your God will hear all the words of the field commander, whom his master … has sent to ridicule the living God, and that he will rebuke him for the words the LORD your God has heard" (2 Kings 19:4; cf. Isa. 37:4, 17). "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God" (Ps. 42:2). "My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God" (Ps. 84:2). "The LORD is the true God; he is the living God, the eternal King" (Jer. 10:10). "Every man's own word becomes his oracle, and so you distort the words of the living God, the LORD Almighty, our God" (Jer. 23:36). "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?" (Dan. 6:20). "He is the living God and he endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end" (Dan. 6:26). "I heard him swear by him who lives forever" (Dan. 12:7). "They will be called 'sons of the living God' " (Hosea 1:10; cf. Rom. 9:26).

The New Testament also refers many times to the "living God" or the equivalent. "Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God' " (Matt. 16:16). "Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me" (John 6:57; cf. 14:12). "We are

bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them" (Acts 14:15). "You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts" (2 Cor. 3:3). "What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God" (2 Cor. 6:16). "They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (1 Thess. 1:9). "If I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). "We have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe" (1 Tim. 4:10). "See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God" (Heb. 3:12). "How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!" (Heb. 9:14). "It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:31). "You have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God" (Heb. 12:22). "Come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him" (1 Peter 2:4). "I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades" (Rev. 1:18). "Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea" (Rev. 7:2).

God As the Source of Life

Further, again, the living God is said to be the Source of all other life. "God created … every living and moving thing with which the water teems, according to their kinds" (Gen. 1:21). "I will wipe from the face of the earth every living creature I have made" (Gen. 7:4). "See now that I myself am He! There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of my hand" (Deut. 32:39). "The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised" (Job 1:21). "Those who turn away from you will be written in the dust because they have

forsaken the LORD, the spring of living water" (Jer. 17:13). "God said … 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' … He is not the God of the dead but of the living" (Matt. 22:31–32; cf. Mark 12:27). "For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living" (Rom. 14:9).

God As the Resurrector From the Dead

Another indication that God has Life intrinsically and uniquely is that He can raise the dead. In the Old Testament, Job declared, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God" (Job 19:25–26; cf. Ps. 16:10; Dan. 12:1–2). This is also repeated in the New Testament; Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25–26). He added elsewhere, "I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live" (John 5:25).

God As the Giver of Living Bread and Water

"If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water" (John4:10–11). "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever" (John 6:51).

God As the Source of Living Words

As the living God, He has living words: "He was in the assembly in the desert, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers; and he

received living words to pass on to us" (Acts 7:38). "The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Heb. 4:12). "They will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead" (1 Peter 4:5).

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S LIFE

God's attribute of life follows from two other attributes: His pure actuality and uncausality. While God is the Unmoved Mover, He is not the unmoving mover. He is immovable but not immobile. All motion and activity begin ultimately with Him as the Prime Mover.

Life Follows From Pure Actuality

God is Pure Actuality (see chapter 2), and life is a form of being or actuality. Whatever reality God gives, He has; hence, God has life (i.e., God ***is*** life). Only Life can create life, since He cannot share what He does not have to share. There cannot be an infinite regress where everything is receiving life, but nothing is giving it; therefore, ultimately there must be something that is life in and of itself and has not received it from anyone else. This life is God.

Life Follows From Uncausality

One of the essential characteristics of life is motion, for all life has some form of motion or growth. Everything that moves (like living things) is moved by another, and there can't be an infinite regress of movers. Thus, there is a First, Unmoved Mover (God). Yet God is not immobile, for He is the most moving Mover, giving life and existence to all else. This First Mover of all living things must itself be living.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S LIFE

The nature of God as life itself has never been seriously doubted in the history of the historic Christian church. This has been true from the earliest times.

The Early Church Fathers on God's Life

Justin Martyr

> Impelled by the desire of the eternal and pure life, we seek the abode that is with God, the Father and Creator of all, and hasten to confess our faith, persuaded and convinced as we are that they prove God by their works that follow Him. (*FA*, 1:8 in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, l)

Irenaeus

> It is one and the same Creator who both fashioned the womb and created the sun; and one and the same Lord who both reared the stalk of corn, increased and multiplied the wheat, and prepared the barn. (*AH*, 2:34:3 in ibid.)
>
> As the heaven which is above us, the firmament, the sun, the moon, the rest of the stars, and all their grandeur, although they had no previous existence, were called into being, and continue throughout a long course of time according to the will of God, so also any one who thinks thus respecting souls and spirits, and, in fact, respecting all created things, will not by any means go far astray.... For life does not arise from us, nor from our own nature; but it is bestowed according to the grace of God. And therefore he who shall preserve the life bestowed upon him, and give thanks to Him who imparted it, shall receive also length of days for ever and ever.
>
> When God therefore bestows life and perpetual duration, it comes to pass that even souls which did not previously exist should henceforth endure [for ever], since God has both willed that they should exist, and should continue in existence. (*AH*, 2:35:4 in ibid.)

Theophilus

When thou shalt have put off the mortal, and put on incorruption, then shalt thou see God worthily. For God will raise thy flesh immortal with thy soul; and then, having become immortal, thou shalt see the Immortal, if now you believe on Him; and then you shall know that you have spoken unjustly against Him. (*TA*, 1.7 in ibid., II)

The Medieval Church Fathers on God's Life

Augustine

Neither the whole universe, with its frame, figures, qualities and ordered movement, all the elements and bodies arranged in the heavens and on earth, nor any life … can have existence apart from Him whose existence is simple and indivisible. For, in God, being is not one thing and living another—as though He could be and not be living. Nor in God is it one thing to live and another to understand—as though He could live without understanding. Nor in Him is it one thing to know and another to be blessed—as though He could know and not be blessed. For, in God, to live, to know, to be blessed is one and the same as to be. (*CG*, 8:6)

For then "when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is." This is life eternal. For all that we said before is nothing to that life. That we live, what is it? That we are in health, what is it? That we shall see God, is a great thing. This is life eternal; this Himself hath said, "But this is life eternal, that they may know Thee the Only True God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent" (Augustine, *Sermons on NT Lessons*, 77:13).

Anselm

God is the very life by which He lives, and … the same holds for like attributes. But clearly, whatever You are, You are not that through another but through Your very self. You are therefore the very life by which You live, the wisdom by which You are wise, the very goodness by which You are good to both good men and wicked, and the same holds for like attributes. (*ACMW*, 94)

Thomas Aquinas

"Life is in the highest degree properly in God" (***ST***, la.18:3).

> But although our intellect moves itself to some things, yet others are supplied by nature, as are first principles, which it cannot doubt; and the last end, which it cannot but will. Hence, although with respect to some things it moves itself, yet with regard to other things it must be moved by another. Wherefore that being whose act of understanding is its very nature, and which, in what it naturally possesses, is not determined by another, must have life in the most perfect degree. Such is God; and hence in Him principally is life. From this the Philosopher concludes (*Metaph*. xii.51), after showing God to be intelligent, that God has life most perfect and eternal, since His intellect is most perfect and always in act. (ibid.)
>
> In God to live is to understand, as before stated (A. 3). In God intellect, the thing understood, and the act of understanding, are one and the same. Hence whatever is in God as understood is the very living or life of God. Now, wherefore, since all things that have been made by God are in Him as things understood, it follows that all things in Him are the divine life itself, (ibid., Ia.18, 4)

A Reformation Father on God's Life

Martin Luther

We must make due difference between this god and the upright and true God, who is a God of life, comfort, salvation, justification, and all goodness; for there are many words that bear no certain meanings, and equivocation is always the mother of error. (***TT***, 40)

God styles himself, in all the Holy Scriptures, a God of life, of peace, of comfort, and joy, for the sake of Christ. I hate myself that I cannot believe it so constantly and surely as I should; but no human creature can rightly know how mercifully God is inclined toward those that steadfastly believe in Christ, (ibid., 54)

The Post-Reformation Theologians on God's Life

God as "Life" is often treated under His immortality and/or eternity. Stephen Charnock illustrates the point:

> God, being a Spirit, is immortal. His being immortal, and being invisible, are joined

> together. Spirits are in their nature incorruptible; they can only perish by that hand that framed them. Every compounded thing is subject to mutation; but God, being a pure and simple Spirit, is without corruption, without any shadow of change. The world perishes; friends change and are dissolved; bodies moulder, because they are mutable. God is a Spirit in the highest excellency and glory of spirits; nothing is beyond him; nothing above him; no contrariety within him. This is our comfort, if we devote ourselves to him; this is our God; this Spirit is our Spirit; this is our all, our immutable, our incorruptible support; a Spirit that cannot die and leave us. (*EAG*, 1.202)

OBJECTIONS TO GOD'S LIFE

There are two main objections to attributing life to God. ***First***, all life is complex, and God is absolutely simple (see chapter 2). ***Second***, all life involves motion, and God is the Ultimate Mover of all things.

Objection One—Based Upon the Complexity of Life

It is well known by science that biological life involves specified complexity. Even the simplest form of life is incredibly complex, involving enough information in a one-celled animal to fill a thousand volumes of an encyclopedia. However, God is an absolutely simple Being (see chapter 2); hence, it is alleged that God cannot be said to be alive in any literal sense of the term.

Response to Objection One

In response, it is noted that all terms, even nonmetaphorical ones, are applied to God only analogously, not univocally (see chapter 1). So "living" applies to God in a ***similar*** way, that is, partly the same and partly different. God is similar to created life in that He is active and dynamic; however, He is different in that He is simple, while life is complex. If He were complex, then God too must have been created. This is impossible, since He is the uncreated Creator of all

creatures. Life applies to God not because He is complex, but because He is mobile. In fact, He bestows life and motion upon everything else that has it.

Objection Two—Based Upon Change in Living Things

Life is constantly changing, whereas God is unchanging (see chapter 4). Supposedly, if change is of the essence of life, then God cannot be living.

Response to Objection Two

Here too the objection fails to remember that all of our terms apply to God only analogously. God is ***like*** created life in that He exists, endures, and is dynamic. But He is ***unlike*** created life in that while it changes, He does not. He is the unchanging Changer of all else that changes. He is unmoved (by another), but He is not unmoving. He is dynamic Pure Actuality (see Volume 1, chapter 1).

SUMMARY

God is life, and He is the Source of all other life. As life, God is the most active, dynamic, and moving Being in the universe. He is not immobile, static, or dead: He is the Most Moving Mover, yet He remains the Unmoved Mover in that nothing else in the universe can move Him. As Pure Actuality, He has no potentiality to be actualized. He Himself is the ultimate Actualizer of all things.

GOD'S IMMORTALITY

God is not simply life; He is ***immortal*** life. In fact, He alone possesses immortality intrinsically. All else who have it, have it as a gift from Him.

THE DEFINITION OF GOD'S IMMORTALITY

The Greek word ***immortal*** (***athanasia***) literally means "without death," "imperishable," and "incorruptible" (cf. 1 Tim. 6:16 and 1 Cor. 15:5–54). In addition, ***aphthanarsia***, as in Romans 2:7 and 2 Timothy 1:10, means "more than deathlessness; but a quality of life enjoyed as death is swallowed up by life [2 Cor. 5:4]" (see Vine, ***EDNTW***, 579).
Theologically, immortality as applied to God means that He possesses life intrinsically and eternally. God ***is*** life; all else merely ***has*** life. As life itself, He is the Fountain of all other life.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S IMMORTALITY

The Bible uses the word ***immortal*** of God several times. It is also used of human beings a few times, since they receive their immortality from God. The Greek word for "immortality" (***aphthanarsia***) means "undecaying" or "incorruptible." As applied to God, it is intrinsic incorruptibility.

God Is Immortal

"Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen" (1 Tim. 1:17). "Who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever" (1 Tim. 6:16). Depraved humans "exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles" (Rom. 1:23).

God Gives Immortality to Some Creatures

Immortality is used of only saved persons in the New Testament, and then only in their resurrected (bodily) state. “To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life” (Rom. 2:7). “It has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Tim. 1:10). “The perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory’ ” (1 Cor. 15:53–54).
A parallel idea to “immortal,” namely, “incorruptible,” is found in a few other New Testament texts. God gives an “incorruptible” crown to the faithful (1 Cor. 9:25 KJV), an “incorruptible” inheritance to believers (1 Peter 1:4 KJV), and has an “incorruptible” word by which we are saved (1 Peter 1:23 KJV).

God Is the Giver of Eternal Life

Numerous Scriptures refer to God as the Giver of eternal life to all who believe. A pair of samples will suffice: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life” (John 5:24; cf. John 3:36). Again, one cannot pass on to another what He does not possess Himself. Hence, God must possess eternal life essentially and intrinsically.

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR GOD’S IMMORTALITY

God’s immortality can be derived from several other attributes. These include His life, pure actuality, necessity, and simplicity.

Immortality Follows From Life

As shown above, God has life essential. What has life essentially cannot die; thus, God is essentially immortal.
God ***is*** life, and what ***is*** life cannot die. He cannot lose it, since it was never given to Him.

Immortality Follows From Pure Actuality

God is Pure Actuality, with no potentiality in His Being whatsoever. What has no potentiality cannot be actualized by anything else: God is the Actualizer of all other things that are actual. Life involves that which is actual and has activity, which is a defining characteristic of life. Further, God's life must be eternal, since He cannot be actualized by anything else. Therefore, God is immortal life.

Immortality Follows From God's Necessity

God is a necessary Being (see chapter 3). A necessary Being cannot not exist, and God is also a living Being. Hence, God's life cannot not exist, since He ***is*** life essentially and eternally. God is immortal life.

Immortality Follows From Simplicity

God is a living Being, and God is a simple Being. A simple Being cannot be destroyed, for it has no composition and, therefore, cannot be decomposed. It follows that God's life cannot be destroyed: It is essentially immortal.

Some Implications of God's Immortality

Two main implications follow from God's immortality: Only God has immortality intrinsically, and all creatures have it only as a gift of God (it is extrinsic to them).

God Has Immortality Intrinsically

The Bible declares that God "alone is immortal and … lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever" (1 Tim. 6:16). He alone is the "King eternal" (1 Tim. 1:17), the "incorruptible God" (Rom. 1:23 NKJV).

Immortality Is a Gift From God to Creatures

All creatures ***came to be*** by God (Gen. 1:1, 21; John 1:3; 1 Cor. 8:6), and all creatures ***continue to be*** by God (1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3; Rev. 4:11): "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being" (Rev. 4:11). Further, creatures will have continued life forever only as a gift of God (2 Tim. 1:10; Rom. 2:7; 1 Cor. 15:53–54).[1]

It is noteworthy that "immortality," as used of humans in the New Testament, does not refer only to the soul but to the whole person, body and soul, in the resurrected state. This is in contrast to the platonic view, which refers immortality only to the soul. So the platonic view of immortality of the soul is not biblical for at least three reasons:

(1) The soul is not indestructible.
(2) Immortality refers to the body as well as the soul.
(3) There is no duality of soul and body, but a unity of the two (see Ladd, "GVHVM" in ***PTM***).

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S

IMMORTALITY

The great hymn declares: “Immortal, invisible, God only wise.” With this the Fathers of the church agree.

The Early Church Fathers on God’s Immortality

Ignatius

Be thou watchful as an athlete of God. That which is promised to us is life eternal, which cannot be corrupted, of which things thou art also persuaded. In everything I will be instead of thy soul, and my bonds which thou hast loved. (*EP*, 2 in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, 1)

Justin Martyr

Immediately we recognized the presence of God following on the prayer—a God unconquerable and indestructible. (*FA*, 1.68 in ibid., 1)

Irenaeus

And then the doctrine concerning the resurrection of bodies, which we believe, will emerge true and certain [from *their* system]; since, [as we hold,] God, when He resuscitates our mortal bodies which preserved righteousness, will render them incorruptible and immortal. For God is superior to nature, and has in Himself the disposition [to show kindness], because He is good; and the ability to do so, because He is mighty; and the faculty of fully carrying out His purpose, because He is rich and perfect. (*AH*, 2.29.2 in ibid., 1)

Origen

I KNOW that some will attempt to say that, even according to the declarations of

> our own Scriptures, God is a body, because in the writings of Moses they find it said, that “our God is a consuming fire”; and in the Gospel according to John, that “God is a Spirit, and they who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.” Fire and spirit, according to them, are to be regarded as nothing else than a body. Now, I should like to ask these persons what they have to say respecting that passage where it is declared that God is light; as John writes in his Epistle, “God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.” Truly He is that light which illuminates the whole understanding of those who are capable of receiving truth, as is said in the thirty-sixth Psalm, “In Thy light we shall see light” (*DP*, 1.1.1 in ibid., IV).

The Medieval Church Fathers on God’s Immortality

The major teachers of the church of the Middle Ages concur with the early Fathers on the attribute of God’s immortality. From Augustine to Aquinas there is one voice.

Augustine

> Let it not be supposed that in this Trinity there is any separation in respect of time or place, but that these Three are equal and co-eternal, and absolutely of one nature: and that the creatures have been made, not some by the Father, and some by the Son, and some by the Holy Spirit, but that each and all that have been or are now being created subsist in the Trinity as their Creator; and that no one is saved by the Father without the Son and the Holy Spirit, or by the Son without the Father and the Holy Spirit, or by the Holy Spirit without the Father and the Son, but by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the only one, true, and truly immortal (that is, absolutely unchangeable) God. (*L*, 169.2)

Anselm

Again,

You therefore permeate and embrace all things; You are before and beyond all things. You are before all things, of course, since, before they came to be, You already ***are***. But how are You beyond all things? For in what way are You beyond those things that will never have an end?

Is it because these things can in no way exist without You, though You do not

exist any the less even if they return to nothingness? For in this way, in a sense, You are beyond them. Or is it also that they can be thought to have an end while You cannot in any way? For in this way, in a sense, they do indeed have an end, but You do not in any sense. And assuredly that which does not have an end in any way at all is beyond that which does come to an end in some way. Is it also in this way that You surpass even all eternal things, since Your eternity and theirs is wholly present to You, though they do not have the part of their eternity which is yet to come just as they do not now have what is past? In this way, indeed, are You always beyond those things, because You are always present at that point (or because it is always present to You) which they have not yet reached. (***ACMW***, 99)

It belongs to the divine substance, of course, that it always and everywhere exists, so that nothing ever or anywhere is apart from its presence. Otherwise, it is in no way everywhere and always powerful, and what is not everywhere and always powerful is in no way God. (***SABW***, 247)

Thomas Aquinas

Aquinas affirmed,

Life is an abstract term, signifying the very living of what is alive. An animal is said to be alive because of its soul; its living is the kind of existing which comes from that, its proper form. ***God***, however, is his existence, and therefore is his living and his life. (***SCG***, 97)

> God's living is his knowing. His power of understanding, the object understood, and his act of understanding are all identical. Whatever is understood in God is, therefore, his living and his life. All things he makes he understands. Therefore as existing in him they are his life. (*ST*, Ia.18.4)

A Reformation Father on God's Immortality

John Calvin

> From the power *of* God we are naturally led to consider his eternity, since that from which all other things derive their origin must necessarily be self-existent and

> eternal. Moreover, if it be asked what cause induced him to create all things at first, and now inclines him to preserve them, we shall find that there could be no other cause than his own goodness. (*ICR*, 1.5.6)
>
> Here we may observe, *first*, that his eternity and self-existence are declared by his magnificent name twice repeated; and, *secondly*, that in the enumeration of his perfections, he is described not as he is in himself, but in relation to us, in order that our acknowledgment of him may be more a vivid actual impression than empty visionary speculation. (ibid., 1.10.2)

The Post-Reformers on God's Immortality

The great theologians after the Reformers were aware that God's immortality is associated with other attributes such as immutability and incorruptibility. The following select quotations illustrate the point.

Jacob Arminius

> The life of God is his essence itself, and his very being; because the Divine Essence is in every respect simple, as well as infinite, and therefore, eternal and immutable. On this account, to it, and indeed to it alone, is attributed immortality, which, therefore, cannot be communicated to any creature. (*WJA*, 1.391)

Stephen Charnock

" 'From everlasting to everlasting thou art God.' Thou hast always been God, and no time can be assigned as the beginning of thy being" (***EAG***, 1.277). Again,

> God is without beginning. "In the beginning" God created the world [Gen. 1:1]. God was then before the beginning of it; and what point can be set wherein G began, if he were before the beginning of created things? God was without beginning, though all other things had time and beginning from him.
>
> God is of himself, from no other. Natures, which are made by God, may increase, because they began to be; they may decrease, because they were made of nothing, and so tend to nothing; the condition of their original leads them to defect, and the power of their Creator brings them to increase. But God hath no original; he hath no defect, because he was not made of nothing: he hath no increase, because he had no beginning. He was before all things, and,

> therefore, depends upon no other thing which, by its own change, can bring change upon him. (ibid., 1.281, 1.321)

William G. T. Shedd

> The Self-Existence of God (*aseitas*) denotes that the ground of his being is in himself. In this reference, it is sometimes said that God is his own cause. But this is objectionable language. God is the uncaused Being, and in this respect differs from all other beings. The category of cause and effect is inapplicable to the existence of a necessary and eternal Being. (*DT*, 338)

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Although the term “life” is often conceived in biological terms, it also has an essential spiritual meaning. As applied to God, “life” and “immortal” mean that God is the ultimate, intrinsic Actor, Mover, and Actualizer in the universe. He ***is*** life; everything else merely ***has*** life. He possesses life intrinsically; every other living being has it only extrinsically. These attributes of God—life and life immortal—are solidly grounded in Scripture, theology, and church history.

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CHAPTER TWELVE

GOD'S UNITY AND TRIUNITY

That God is one, and only one, is the great cry of Judaism called the shema. It is based upon Deuteronomy 6:4—"The LORD our God, the LORD is one"—and was repeated by Jesus in the New Testament. When asked by the Jewish scribes what the greatest commandment was, Jesus replied, "The first of all the commandments ***is***: 'Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength' " (Mark 12:29 NKJV).

THE DEFINITION OF GOD'S UNITY

"Unity" literally means "oneness." God is one Being, in contrast to many beings. There is one and only one God (monotheism) as opposed to many gods (polytheism).
There are three related words that should be distinguished:

(1) Unity—There are not two or more gods.
(2) Simplicity—There are not two or more parts in God.
(3) Triunity—There are three persons in the one God.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S UNITY

The Scriptures affirm God's absolute unity from the beginning to the very end. "In the beginning God [not gods] created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one" (Deut. 6:4). "You shall have no other gods before me" (Ex. 20:3). "I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God" (Isa. 44:6). "I am the LORD, and there is no other" (Isa. 45:18). " 'The most important [command],' answered Jesus, 'is this: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one" ' " (Mark 12:29). "We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one" (1 Cor. 8:4). "[There is] one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4:6). "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5).

The text could scarcely be clearer: There is one and only one God, as opposed to more than one. The oneness of the Godhead is one of the most fundamental teachings of Scripture. A denial of this truth is a violation of the first commandment.

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S UNITY

In addition to the emphatic teaching of Scripture, there are many strong theological arguments for God's unity. That there is one and only one God can be derived from other attributes, such as pure actuality, infinity, absolute perfection, and also from the nature of the universe.

Pure Actuality Implies Unity

God is Pure Actuality with no potentiality whatsoever, and there cannot be two or more Pure Actualities, for potentiality is the principle of differentiation. One thing cannot differ from another (in being) unless it is a different kind of being, and two beings of pure actuality are not different kinds of beings (see Volume 1, chapter 2). Therefore, there can only be one Being who is Pure Actuality. Pure

Act as such does not differ from Pure Act as such; Being as such cannot differ from Being as such. Many things can ***have*** being, but only one thing can ***be*** Being.

Infinity Implies Unity

The Bible affirms that God is infinite in His Being (see chapter 5), and there cannot be two or more infinite beings. If there were, then there would be more than an infinite, which is impossible. There cannot be two Alls or Supremes; hence, there can only be one infinite God. More precisely, to be two there must be a difference, and two simple beings of the very same kind cannot differ in their being.[1]

Absolute Perfection Implies Unity

Sacred Scripture asserts that God is absolutely perfect (see chapter 14), and there cannot be two beings who are absolutely perfect, for to be two they must differ; otherwise they would be the same. To differ, one would have to possess some perfection that the other lacked. However, the one that lacked some perfection would not be absolutely perfect; therefore, there can be only one Being who is absolutely perfect.

THE *UNI*-VERSE IMPLIES THAT THERE IS ONLY ONE GOD

The cosmos is created by God (see part 2), and the cosmos is a universe, not a multi-verse: It has unity, order, and design throughout. The anthropic principle (see Barlow, ***ACP***) affirms that the entire universe was fine-tuned for the emergence of life from the very beginning (see Volume 1, chapter 2). Oneness of universe implies one Mind behind it (Heeren, ***SMG***); thus, there is but one God.

Some Implications of God's Unity

At least three implications emerge from the oneness of God: It opposes polytheism, tritheism, and idolatry.

Unity Versus Polytheism

If there were more than one God, then polytheism would be true. However, as was shown above, there is only one God. Polytheism is false; the unity of God, then, excludes all forms of polytheism.

Unity Versus Tritheism

The oneness of God is opposed to the heresy called tritheism, which alleges that there are three separate beings in the Godhead. Monotheism asserts that there is only one Being who is God, not three beings. Hence, God's unity stands against the error of tritheism.

Unity Versus Idolatry

If one and only one Being in the universe is God, then only this Being is worthy of worship: Nothing else than the Ultimate is worthy of an ultimate commitment (which is worship). There is only one God, as shown above; therefore, only this one God should be worshiped and not anything else.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S UNITY

The historical basis for God's unity goes to the very origins of Christianity in the New Testament and even back to Judaism, from which Christianity sprang.

The Early Church Fathers on God's Unity

The absolute unity of God has never been challenged by any orthodox Father of the church. Even among the early Fathers, theirs is a unanimous chorus of praise to the one God and His oneness.

Justin Martyr

> The most true God is the Father of righteousness.... We worship and adore Him, the Son (who came forth from Him and taught us these things, along with the host of the other good angels who follow and are made like Him), and the prophetic Spirit, (in Bercot, *DECB*, 652)

Irenaeus

> One God the Father is declared, above all, through all, and in all. The Father is indeed above all, and He is the Head of Christ. But the Word is through all things and is Himself the Head of the church. While the Spirit is in us all, and He is the living water. (*AH*, 5.18.2 in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, I)

Clement of Alexandria

"The universal Father is one. The universal Word is one. And the Holy Spirit is one" (***I***, 1.6 in ibid., II).

Tertullian

> I testify that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are inseparable from each other.... My assertion is that the Father is one, the Son is one, and the Spirit is one—and that they are all distinct from each other. (*AP*, 2.7.9 in ibid., III)

Hippolytus (c. 170–c. 235)

"However, if he desires to know how it is shown that there is still one God, let

him know that His power is one. As far as regards the power, therefore, God is one" (***AHON***, 8 in ibid., V).

Origen

> All things that exist were made by God and there was nothing that was not made —except for the nature [singular] of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.... For the Father alone knows the Son. And the Son alone knows the Father. And the Holy Spirit alone searches even the deep things of God. (*DP*, 4.1.35 in ibid., IV)

The Medieval Church Fathers on God's Unity

Although Christian theologians down through the centuries exercised themselves explaining the plurality within the unity of God; nonetheless, at the basis of it all was their firm belief that God was one in nature and attributes.

Augustine

> This Trinity is one God. And, although it is a Trinity, it is nonetheless simple. For, we do not say that the nature of this good is simple because the Father alone shares in it, or the Son alone, or the Holy Spirit alone.
> They [the angels] know this Word and the Father and their Holy Spirit, understanding that this Trinity is indivisible and that each of the Persons is substantial, although there are not three Gods but only one. (*CG*, 11.10, 11.29)

Again, "Let it not be supposed that in this Trinity there is any separation in respect of time or place, but that these Three are equal and co-eternal, and absolutely of one nature" (***L***, 169.2).

Anselm

"First, all three together are one supreme essence (even though each, perfectly, is

the supreme essence). And the one supreme essence cannot exist without itself, outside itself, or greater or less than itself" (***ACMW***, 66–67).

> One must, therefore, have faith in Father, in Son and in their Spirit, equally in each individual and in all three together. This is because each individual is the supreme essence, and all three together are one and the same supreme essence. The supreme essence is the only thing that everyone ought to believe. (ibid., 79)

Thomas Aquinas

> If there were any inequality in the divine persons, they would not have the same essence; and thus the three persons would not be one God; which is impossible. We must therefore admit equality among the divine persons. (*ST*, Ia.42.2)
>
> Since one is an undivided being, if anything is supremely one it must be supremely being, and supremely undivided. Now both of these belong to God. For He is supremely being, inasmuch as His being is not determined by any nature to which He is adjoined; since He is being itself, subsistent, absolutely undetermined. But He is supremely undivided inasmuch as He is divided neither actually, nor potentially, by any mode of division; since He is altogether simple, as was shown above [Q. 3, A. 7]. Hence, it is manifest that God is one in the supreme degree. (ibid., Ia.11.4)
>
> God is the same as His essence or nature. To understand this, it must be noted that in things composed of matter and form.… Since God then is not composed of matter and form, He must be His own Godhead, His own Life, and whatever else is predicated of Him. (ibid., Ia.3.3)
>
> In God, intellect, and the object understood, and the intelligible species, and His act of understanding are entirely one and the same. Hence, when God is said to be understanding, no kind of multiplicity is attached to His substance. (ibid., Ia.14.4)
>
> It was shown above [Q. 4, A. 2] that God comprehends in Himself the whole perfection of being. If then many gods existed, they would necessarily differ from each other. Something therefore would belong to one, which did not belong to another. And if this were a privation, one of them would not be absolutely perfect; but if a perfection, one of them would be without it. So it is impossible for many gods to exist. (ibid., Ia.11.3)

The Reformation Fathers on God's Unity

The Reformers were careful to stress the oneness of God, His triunity notwithstanding. They continued the strong creedal and confessional stand of the

orthodox church down through the centuries.

Martin Luther

> We have had to use the word *Person* just as the fathers also have used it, for we have no better term. It signifies nothing else than *hypostasis*, a Being or Substance which exists of itself, and is God. There are indeed three distinct Persons, but only one God or a single Godhead.
>
> Christ shows forcefully that the Holy Spirit is … a separate, distinct Person by Himself, one who is not the Father or the Son. For all these expressions obviously refer to a separate Person: the Comforter, who will come; again: "Whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak" (John 16:13). If He is to come or (as He said above) to be sent or to proceed; again, if He is to hear and speak, He must certainly be Someone. Now He is, of course, not the Father, because the Father neither comes nor is sent; nor is He the Son, who has already come and now returns to the Father, of whom the Holy Spirit is to preach and whom He is to glorify. (*WLS*, 1381–82, 1384)

John Calvin

"The essence of God being simple and undivided, and contained in himself entire, in full perfection, without partition or diminution, it is improper, nay, ridiculous, to call it his express image" (***ICR***, 1.13.2).

> Moreover, this distinction is so far from interfering with the most perfect unity of God, that the Son may thereby be proved to be one God with the Father, inasmuch as he constitutes one Spirit with him, and that the Spirit is not different from the Father and the Son, inasmuch as he is the Spirit of the Father and the Son. In each hypostasis the whole nature is understood, the only difference being that each has his own peculiar subsistence.
>
> When we profess to believe in one God, by the name God is understood the one simple essence, comprehending three persons or hypostases; and, accordingly, whenever the name of God is used indefinitely, the Son and Spirit, not less than the Father, is meant. But when the Son is joined with the Father, relation comes into view, and so we distinguish between the Persons. (ibid., 1.13.19–20)
>
> It seems to me that nothing can be more admirable than the words [of Gregory Nanzianzen]: "I cannot think of the unity without being irradiated by the Trinity: I cannot distinguish between the Trinity without being carried up to the unity." Therefore, let us beware of imagining such a Trinity of persons as will distract our thoughts, instead of bringing them instantly back to the unity. The words Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, certainly indicate a real distinction, not allowing us

> to suppose that they are merely epithets by which God is variously designated from his works. Still they indicate distinction only, not division. (ibid., 1.13.17)

Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531)

"Only one thing can be infinite, for once we allow that there are two infinite substances, the one is immediately limited by the other" (in Bromley, ed., ***ZB***, 247).

The Post-Reformation Theologians on God's Unity

The triunity of God was a continued preoccupation of the post-Reformers. Each one struggled to state the mystery in a way that was most apprehensible by their contemporaries.

Jacob Arminius

> The Divine Persons are not modes of being or of existing, or modes of the Divine Essence: For they are things with the mode of being or existing. The Divine Persons are distinguished by a real distinction, not by the degree and mode of the thing. A Person is an individual subsistence itself, not a characteristic property, nor is it an individual principle; though it be not an individual, nor a person without a characteristic property or without an individual principle.... Is it not useful that the Trinity be considered—both as it exists in nature itself, according to the co-essential relation of the Divine Persons—and as it has been manifested in the economy of salvation, to be accomplished by God the Father, in Christ, through the Holy Spirit? And does not the former of these considerations appertain to religion universally, and to that which was prescribed to Adam, according to the law?—But the latter consideration properly belongs to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Yet not excluding that which I have mentioned as belonging to all religion universally, and therefore to that which is Christian. (*WJA*, II. 481–82)

R. L. Dabney

The doctrine of the Trinity, as held by the Catholic Church, cannot be better defined than in the words of our Confession. It embraces the following propositions: The true unity, indivisibility, and simplicity of God. The subsistence of a threefold personal distinction, marked by a part of the properties of separate personalities, (in some inscrutable manner, entirely compatible with true unity) as intelligence, active principles, volition, action. Identity of substance, so that the whole godhead is truly in each person, without confusion or division, and all the essence belongs alike to all the persons. The distinction of the three persons, each by its property, incommunicable from one person to another, and the existence consequently of eternal relations between them. Now, that it is inscrutable how these things can be, we freely admit. Did they involve a necessary but not self-contradiction, we should also admit that the understanding would be incapable of receiving them all together. But we do not hold that the persons are three in the same sense in which they are one. (*LST*, 177–78)

John Miley

Trinitarianism is not tritheism; nor are trinitarians less pronounced on the unity of God than unitarians. The sense of this unity is embodied in the term designative of the personal distinctions in the Godhead. It follows that the unity of God is the basal truth in the doctrine of the Trinity. But as this question is not in issue as between trinitarianism and unitarianism, and especially as we have previously considered it in its distinctive application to God, it requires no further treatment here. (*ST*, 223)

William G. T. Shedd

God, as personal, is self-conscious. Consequently he must make himself his own object of contemplation. Here the doctrine of the Trinity, the deep and dark mystery of Christianity, pours a flood of light upon the mystery of the Divine self-consciousness. The pillar of cloud becomes the pillar of fire. The three distinctions in the one essence personalize it. God is personal because he is three persons: Father, Son, and Spirit.

Here is society within the essence, and wholly independent of the created universe; and self-knowledge, self-communion, and blessedness resulting therefrom. But this is impossible to an essence destitute of these internal personal distinctions. Not the singular unit of the deist, but the plural unity of the trinitarian explains this. (*DT*, 183–85)

Stephen Charnock

> All multitude begins in, and is reduced to unity. As above multiplicity there is absolute unity, so above mixed creatures there is an absolute simplicity. You cannot conceive number without conceiving the beginning of it in that which was not number, viz., a unit.
>
> All that we consider in God is unchangeable; for his essence and his properties are the same, and, therefore, what is necessarily belonging to the essence of God, belongs also to every perfection of the nature of God; none of them can receive any addition or diminution. (*EAG*, 1.183, 1.318)

OBJECTIONS TO GOD'S UNITY

The theological objections to God's oneness fall into two basic categories. ***First***, there are those who deny there is only one God (as opposed to many gods). ***Second***, others claim there are many beings or parts in God. The latter is a challenge to God's simplicity, which was treated earlier (see chapter 2).

Objection One—Based on Plural References to God

Most of these objections are based on biblical references to God in the plural. The term "God" itself is plural in form; God sometimes speaks in the plural ("we" or "us"—cf. Gen. 1:26), and even the word for "one" in Hebrew (***echad***) can mean "many."

Response to Objection One

First, it is true that the very word for God in the Old Testament (***elohim***) is plural in form; indeed, it can be translated "gods" (see Ps. 82:6). However, when used of God, it is plural grammatically, not ontologically. It is plural in literary form, but not in actual reality. The many verses (see above) that use this form for God but that declare He is absolutely one are proof that this form is not intended to

indicate a plurality of gods.

Second, the use of "we" or "us" of God is another literary form known as a royal or regal plural. It is used of royalty and of God in Semitic cultures. Even in a rigid monotheism such as Islam, where there is only one person in the Godhead, there are still references in the Qur'an to God as "we" or "us" (see Sura 6:55, 76; 7:117, 138, etc.).

Third, the Hebrew word for one (***echad***) used of God can and does mean "many in one." For example, in Genesis 2:24 it refers to male and female as one (***echad***) flesh. At best this is an implication of the Trinity, not an affirmation of polytheism, for the Bible clearly condemns polytheism. Nonetheless, while not allowing that there are many gods (polytheism) or many beings in the Godhead (tritheism), the Bible does allow for a plurality of persons within the unity of essence by such terms as ***echad***. So while not opposing monotheism, the term ***echad*** does favor trinitarianism.

Fourth, and finally, the Bible seems to imply there are many gods by the very command not to worship them (Ex. 20:3): "You shall have no other gods before me." However, the "other gods" can be taken as imaginary, namely, gods created by us but not the real God. Or, they can be understood as the demons behind these gods that are not to be worshiped (1 Cor. 10:20). Paul summed it up well:

> We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live. (1 Cor. 8:4–6)

Objection Two—Based on God's Trinity

Of course, the main objection to God's unity is the claim that there is a plurality within this unity—that there are three persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and yet only one God. This appears to be a flat contradiction, affirming that there is only one God and yet that there are three gods.

Response to Objection Two

The orthodox Christian response to this charge is that God is three and one in different senses. He is three ***persons***, but He has only one ***essence*** (nature). Therefore, it is not a contradiction, since it does not affirm that there are three persons and yet only one person in God or that there are three natures and yet only one nature in Him. How there can be three persons and yet only one nature ***is*** a mystery, but ***not*** a contradiction, as will be shown below.

GOD'S TRIUNITY—THE *TRINITY*

God is not only a unity, He is a triunity; that is, there is not only one God (monotheism), but there are three persons in that one God. This is the orthodox teaching of the Trinity.

THE MEANING OF THE WORD TRINITY

First of all, it is important to point out what is ***not*** meant by the Christian concept of a Trinity. It does not mean there are three gods (tritheism), and it does not mean God has three modes of one and the same being (modalism). Tritheism denies the absolute simplicity of God, and modalism denies the plurality of persons in God. The former claims there are three beings in the Godhead, and the latter affirms there are not three persons in God.

What, then, does the word ***Trinity*** mean? It means that God is a triunity: He is a plurality within unity. God has a plurality of persons and a unity of essence; God is three persons in one nature. There is only one "What" (essence) in God, but there are three "Whos" (persons) in that one What. God has three "I's" in His one "It"—there are three Subjects in one Object.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR THE TRINITY

The doctrine of the Trinity is based on two basic biblical teachings:

(1) There is one and only one God.
(2) There are three distinct persons who are God: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

There Is Only One God

The biblical, theological, and historical evidence for God's absolute oneness has already been given (see above). It need not be repeated here.

Three Different Persons Are God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

In addition to declaring God to be one in nature or essence, the Scriptures affirm that there are three distinct persons who are God. All are called God, and all have the essential characteristics of a person.
Personhood is traditionally understood as one who has intellect, feelings, and will. All three of these characteristics are attributed to all three members of the Trinity in Scripture (see below). Essentially, personhood refers to an "I," a "who," or a subject. Each "I" in the Trinity possesses (by virtue of its one common nature) the ***power*** to think, feel, and choose. Personhood itself is its I-ness or who-ness.

The Father Is God

Numerous verses speak of God as being a Father. Here is a sampling.
Jesus said, "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval" (John 6:27). Paul added, "To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 1:7). And, "Paul, an apostle—sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from

the dead" (Gal. 1:1).

The Son Is God

That Christ is God is affirmed in many passages and in many ways, both directly and indirectly. Several are summarized here.

Jesus Claimed to Be Yahweh (Jehovah)

Yahweh (YHWH) or Jehovah is the special name given by God for Himself in the Old Testament. It is the name revealed to Moses in Exodus 3:14, when God said, "I AM WHO I AM." While other titles for God may be used of men (***adonai*** [LORD] in Genesis 18:12) or false gods (***elohim*** [gods] in Deuteronomy 6:14), Yahweh is only used to refer to the one true God. No other person or thing was to be worshiped or served (Ex. 20:5), and His name and glory were not to be given to another.[2] Isaiah wrote, "Thus saith Jehovah … I am the first, and I am the last; and besides me there is no God" (Isa. 44:6 ASV), and, "I am Jehovah, that is my name; and my glory I will not give to another, neither my praise unto graven images" (42:8 ASV).

Jesus prayed, "And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began" (John 17:5—this is an obvious claim for Christ's deity, for Jehovah of the Old Testament said, "My glory will I not give to another" [Isa. 42:8 NKJV]). Jesus also declared, "I am the First and the Last" (Rev. 1:17)—precisely the words used by Jehovah in Isaiah 44:6. He said, "I am the good shepherd," (John 10:11), and the Old Testament said, "Jehovah is my shepherd" (Ps. 23:1 ASV). Further, Jesus claimed to be the judge of all men (John 5:27ff.; Matt. 25:31ff.), and Joel quotes Jehovah as saying, "There I will sit to judge all the nations on every side" (Joel 3:12). Likewise, Jesus spoke of Himself as the "bridegroom" (Matt. 25:1f.) while the Old Testament identifies Jehovah in this way (Isa. 62:5; Hosea 2:16). While the psalmist declares, "Jehovah is my light" (Ps. 27:1 ASV), Jesus said, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12).

Perhaps the strongest claim Jesus made to be Jehovah is in John 8:58, where He

says, “Before Abraham was born, I am!” This statement claims not only existence before Abraham, but equality with the “I AM” of Exodus 3:14. The Jews around Him clearly understood His meaning and picked up stones to kill Him for blaspheming (cf. John 10:31–33). The same claim is also made in Mark 14:62 and John 18:5–6.

Jesus Claimed to Be Equal With God

Jesus professed deity in other ways, one of which was by claiming for Himself the prerogatives of God. He said to a paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven” (Mark 2:5ff.). The scribes correctly responded, “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” So to prove that His claim was not an empty boast, He healed the man, offering direct proof that what He had said about forgiving sins was true also. Another prerogative that Jesus claimed, due only to God, was the power to raise and judge the dead: “I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live … and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned” (John 5:25, 29). He removed all doubt about His meaning when He added, “For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it” (John 5:21). The Old Testament clearly teaches that only God is the Giver of life (1 Sam. 2:6; Deut. 32:39) and the one to raise the dead (Ps. 2:7) and the only Judge (Joel 3:12; Deut. 32:36). Jesus boldly assumed for Himself powers that only God has.

Jesus also claimed that He should be honored as God: He said that all men should “honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him” (John 5:23). The Jews listening knew that no one should claim to be equal with God in this way, and again they wanted to kill Him (John 5:18).

Jesus Claimed to Be Messiah-God

Even the Qur'an recognizes that Jesus was the Messiah (Sura 5:17, 75). The Old Testament teaches that the coming Messiah would be God Himself, so when Jesus claimed to be that Messiah, He was also claiming to be God. For example, the prophet Isaiah (in 9:6) calls the Messiah "Mighty God." The psalmist wrote of the Messiah, "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever" (Ps. 45:6; cf. Heb. 1:8). Psalm 110:1 records a conversation between the Father and the Son: "The LORD says to my Lord [***adonai***]: 'Sit at my right hand.' " Jesus applied this passage to Himself in Matthew 22:43–44.

In the great messianic prophecy of Daniel 7, the Son of Man is called the "Ancient of Days" (7:22), a term used twice in the same passage of God the Father (Dan 7:9, Dan 13). Jesus also said He was the Messiah at His trial before the high priest. When asked, " 'Are you the Christ [***christos***, Greek for "Messiah"], the Son of the Blessed One?' " Jesus said, " 'I am … And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.' The high priest tore his clothes. 'Why do we need any more witnesses? … You have heard the blasphemy' " (Mark 14:61–64). There was no doubt that in claiming to be Messiah (see also Luke 24:27; Matt. 26:56), Jesus also claimed to be God.

Jesus Claimed to Be God by Accepting Worship

The Old Testament forbids worshiping anyone other than God (Ex. 20:1–5; Deut. 5:6–9). The New Testament agrees, showing that men refused worship (Acts 14:13–15), as did angels (Rev. 22:8–9). But Jesus accepted worship on numerous occasions, revealing that He claimed to be God. A leper worshiped Him before he was healed (Matt. 8:2), and a ruler knelt before Him with a request (Matt. 9:18). After He stilled the storm, "Those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God' " (Matt. 14:33). A Canaanite woman (Matt. 15:25), the mother of James and John (Matt. 20:20), and the Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5:6) all bowed before Jesus without one word of rebuke. A blind man said, " 'Lord, I believe,' and he worshiped Him" (John 9:38). Thomas saw the risen Christ and cried out, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28). This could only be elicited by a person who considered Himself to be God.

Jesus Claimed to Have Equal Authority With God

Jesus also put His words on a par with God's: "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago … But I tell you" (Matt. 5:21–22) is repeated over and over again. "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:18–19). God had given the Ten Commandments to Moses, but Jesus said, "A new commandment I give you: Love one another" (John 13:34). Jesus promised, "Until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law" (Matt. 5:18), while later Jesus said of His words, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away" (Matt. 24:35). Speaking of those who reject Him, Jesus confirmed, "That very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day" (John 12:48). There is no question that Jesus expected His words to have equal authority with God's declarations in the Old Testament.

Jesus Claimed to Be God by Requesting Prayer in His Name

Jesus not only asked people to believe in Him and obey His commandments, but He also asked them to pray in His name: "And I will do whatever you ask in my name.… You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it" (John 14:13–14). "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you" (John 15:7). Jesus even insisted, "No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). In response to this, the disciples not only prayed in Jesus' name (1 Cor. 5:4) but also prayed to Christ (Acts 7:59). Jesus certainly intended that His name be invoked both before God and as God in prayer.

Jesus Claimed to Be God by His Use of Parables

In his Cambridge doctoral dissertation on this topic, Philip B. Payne notes that

> out of Jesus' fifty-two recorded narrative parables, twenty depict him in imagery which in the [Old Testament] typically refers to God. The frequency with which this occurs indicates that Jesus regularly depicted himself in images which were particularly appropriate for depicting God. (Payne, "JICDP" in *TJ*, 17)

These images include Sower, Director of the Harvest, Rock, Shepherd, Bridegroom, Father, Giver of Forgiveness, Vineyard Owner, Lord, and many more. Thus, "Jesus depicts himself in these parables as the shepherd … and in so doing implicitly claims to be God" (ibid., 11).

In view of these many clear ways in which Jesus claimed to be God, an unbiased observer should recognize, whether he accepts it or not, that Jesus of Nazareth did indeed claim to be God in the Gospels.[3] That is, He claimed to be identical to the Jehovah (Yahweh) of the Old Testament.

Jesus' Disciples Acknowledged His Claim to Be God

In addition to Jesus' claims about Himself, His immediate disciples also acknowledged His claim to deity. This they manifested in many ways, several of which will be briefly outlined now.

(1) The disciples attributed the titles of deity to Christ.

In agreement with their Master, Jesus' apostles called Him "the first and the last" (Rev. 1:17; 2:8; 22:13); "the true light" (John 1:9); their "rock" or "stone" (1 Cor. 10:4; 1 Peter 2:6–8; cf. Ps. 18:2; 95:1); the "bridegroom" (Eph. 5:22–33; Rev. 21:2); "the Chief Shepherd" (1 Peter 5:4); and "the great Shepherd" (Heb. 13:20). The Old Testament role of "Redeemer" (Hosea 13:14; Ps. 130:7) is given to Jesus in the New Testament (Tit. 2:13–14; Rev. 5:9 NKJV). He is seen as the

forgiver of sins (Acts 5:31; Col. 3:13; cf. Jer. 31:34; Ps. 130:4) and “Savior of the world” (John 4:42; cf. Isa. 43:3). The apostles also said He is “Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead” (2 Tim. 4:1). All of these titles are unique to Jehovah (Yahweh) in the Old Testament but are given to Jesus in the New Testament.

(2) The disciples considered Jesus the Messiah-God.

The New Testament opens with a passage concluding that Jesus is Immanuel (“God with us”), which refers to the messianic prediction of Isaiah 7:14. The very title “Christ” carries the same meaning as the Hebrew appellation “Messiah” (“Anointed One”). In Zechariah 12:10, Jehovah says, “They will look on me, the one they have pierced.” The New Testament writers apply this passage to Jesus twice (John 19:37; Rev. 1:7) as referring to His crucifixion. Paul interprets Isaiah’s message, “For I am God, and there is no other.… Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear” (Isa. 45:22–23) as applying to his Lord, “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow … and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:10–11). The implications of this are strong, because Paul says that all created beings will call Jesus both Messiah (Christ) and Jehovah (Lord).

(3) The disciples attributed the powers of God to Jesus.

There are some things only God can do, but these very things are attributed to Jesus by His disciples. He is said to be able to raise the dead (John 5:21; 11:38–44) and forgive sins (Acts 5:31; 13:38). Moreover, He is said to have been the primary agent in the creating of the universe (John 1:2–3; Col. 1:16) and in sustaining its existence (Col. 1:17). Surely only God can be said to be the Creator of all things, and the disciples claim this power for Jesus.

(4) The disciples associated Jesus’ name with God’s.

The apostles’ use of Jesus’ name as the agent and recipient of prayer has been noted (1 Cor. 5:4; Acts 7:59). Often in prayers or benedictions, Jesus’ name is used alongside God’s, as in “Grace and peace to you from God our Father and

the Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2). The name of Jesus appears with equal status to God's in the so-called trinitarian formulas: For example, the command to go and baptize "in the name [singular] of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19). Again this association is made at the end of 2 Corinthians: "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (13:14). If there is only one God, then these three persons must by nature be equated.

(5) The disciples called Jesus God.

Thomas saw His wounds and cried, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28). Paul wrote, "Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised!" (Rom. 9:5). He calls Jesus the one in whom "all the fullness of Deity lives in bodily form" (Col. 2:9). In Titus, Jesus is "our great God and Savior" (2:13), and the writer to the Hebrews says of Him, "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever" (Heb. 1:8). Paul says that before Christ existed in the "form of a servant," which clearly refers to being really human, He existed in the "form of God" (Phil. 2:5–8 NKJV). ***The parallel phrases suggest that if Jesus was fully human, then He was also fully God***. A similar term, "the image of the invisible God," is used in Colossians 1:15 to mean the manifestation of God Himself. This description is strengthened in Hebrews, where it says, "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word" (Heb. 1:3). The prologue to John's gospel also minces no words, stating, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and ***the Word [Jesus] was God***" (John 1:1, emphasis added).

(6) The disciples considered Jesus superior to angels.

The disciples did not simply believe that Christ was more than a man; they believed Him to be greater than any created being, including angels. Paul said Jesus is "far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come" (Eph. 1:21). The demons submitted to his command (Matt. 8:32), and even angels that refused to be worshiped are seen worshiping Him (Rev. 22:8–9). The author of the letter to the Hebrews presents a complete argument for Christ's superiority

over angels, saying, “For to which of the angels did God ever say, ‘You are my Son; today I have become your Father’? … And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, ‘Let all God’s angels worship him’ ” (Heb. 1:5–6). There could be no clearer teaching that Christ was not an angel but rather the God whom the angels worshiped.

In summary, there is manifold testimony from Jesus Himself and from those who knew Him best that Jesus claimed to be God and that His followers believed this to be the case. They claim of the carpenter of Nazareth these unique titles, powers, prerogatives, and activities that apply only to God. There is no reasonable doubt that this is what they believed and what Jesus thought of Himself according to the New Testament. C. S. Lewis insightfully observed, when confronted with the boldness of Christ’s claims, that we are faced with three distinct alternatives:

> I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish things that people often say about Him: “I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.” That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. (*MC*, 55–56)

The third option is that Jesus was telling the truth: He is Lord.

Having established earlier that the New Testament is historically reliable (see Volume 1, chapter 26), that the Bible is the Word of God (see Volume 1, chapter 14), that miracles are possible and confirm the claim of those performing them in the name of God (Volume 1, chapter 3), it follows that Jesus not only ***claimed*** to be but also supernaturally proved Himself to be God in human flesh.

The Holy Spirit Is God

The deity of the Holy Spirit is indicated by:

(1) His possessing the names of God;
(2) His having the attributes of God;
(3) His performing the acts of God;
(4) His association with God in benedictions and baptismal formulas.

The Holy Spirit Is Given the Names of Deity

The Holy Spirit is referred to as God or Lord. “Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit.… You have not lied to men but to God” (Acts 5:3–4). “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you?” (1 Cor. 3:16). “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?” (1 Cor. 6:19). “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men” (1 Cor. 12:4–6). “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Cor. 3:17). “How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God …” (Heb. 9:14).

The Holy Spirit Possesses the Attributes of Deity

Attributes of God such as life (Rom. 8:2); truth (John 16:13); love (Rom. 15:30); holiness (Eph. 4:30); eternality (Heb. 9:14); omnipresence (Ps. 139:7); and omniscience (1 Cor. 2:11) are ascribed to the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit Performs Acts of Deity

Certain acts are associated only with God; both God the Father and the Son are said to perform these acts, and so is the Holy Spirit. These include the act of creation (Gen. 1:2; Job 33:4; Ps. 104:30); the acts of redemption (Isa. 63:10–11; Eph. 4:30; 1 Cor. 12:13); the performance of miracles by His own power (Gal. 3:2–5; Heb. 2:4); and the bestowal of supernatural gifts (Acts 2:4; 1 Cor. 12:4–11).

The Holy Spirit Is Associated With God in Prayers and Benedictions

Numerous times in the Bible the Holy Spirit is associated with one or both other members of the Trinity: “I will tell of the kindnesses of the LORD [the Father]. … In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence [the Son] saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old. Yet they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit” (Isa. 63:7–10). First Peter 1:2 speaks of “the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ.” Jude 1:20 exhorts readers to “build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit.” The benediction of 2 Corinthians 13:14 contains all three members of the Godhead: “May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God [the Father], and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” And the baptismal formula of Matthew 28:19 contains the Holy Spirit along with the other members of the Trinity all under one “name” [essence]: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

All Three Members of the Trinity Are Persons

Each individual member of the Trinity is a person, since each is referred to as a person (I, Who). Each has all the basic elements or powers of personhood: mind, will, and feeling.

The Father Is a Person

In addition to being referred to as a person (“He”), the three elements of personhood all are attributed to God the Father. He has the power of ***intellect*** to know (Matt. 6:32): “Your heavenly Father knows that you need them”; the ***emotional*** faculty to feel (Gen. 6:6): “The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain”; and the power of ***will*** to choose (Matt. 6:9–10): “Our Father in heaven … your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” In addition, personal traits, such as the ability to communicate (Matt. 11:25) and teach (John 7:16–17), are also attributed to the Father.

The Son Is a Person

In addition to being referred to as a person (“He”), the Son can communicate and teach (John 7:17) as only persons can do. Further, He too has intellect (John 2:25): “He did not need man’s testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man”; feeling (John 11:35): “Jesus wept”; and will (John 6:38): “For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.” The personal pronoun “He” is used consistently of the Son.

The Holy Spirit Is a Person

All the elements of personhood are attributed to the Holy Spirit in Scripture. He has a mind (John 14:26): “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you.” He has will (1 Cor. 12:11): “All these are the work of one and the same spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines”; and He has feeling (Eph. 4:30): “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”

Further, personal pronouns (“He” and “His”) are appropriately attributed to the Holy Spirit: “But when ***he***, the Spirit of truth, comes, ***he*** will guide you into all truth. ***He*** will not speak on ***his*** own; ***he*** will speak only what ***he*** hears, and ***he*** will tell you what is yet to come” (John 16:13, emphasis added).

Finally, the activities of a person are ascribed to the Holy Spirit: He searches, knows, speaks, testifies, reveals, convinces, commands, strives, moves, helps, guides, creates, recreates, sanctifies, inspires, intercedes, orders the affairs of the church, and performs miracles (see Strong, ***ST***, 325). There are numerous verses of Scripture to support these activities (see Gen. 6:3; Luke 12:12; John 3:8; 16:7–8; Acts 8:29; Rom. 8:26; 1 Cor. 2:11; Eph. 4:30; 2 Peter 1:21, etc.).

Other Biblical Evidence of the Triunity in God

Many times in Scripture one member of the Trinity is speaking to another. This indicates that they are not one and the same person.

The Father Speaking to the Son

Psalm 2:7 (cited in Heb. 1:5) declares, “I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, ‘You are my Son; today I have become your Father.’ ” Also, “The LORD [Father] says to my Lord [Son]: ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet’ ” (Ps. 110:1). Jesus used this very passage to show His deity (Matt. 22:41–46). Again, the Father says, “Your throne, O God [Son], will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom. You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God [the Father], your God, has set you above your companions” (Ps. 45:6–7). Likewise, the book of Hebrews applies this passage to Christ (Heb. 1:8–9). Indeed, three times in the New Testament the Father spoke from heaven approving of Christ, His Son (Matt. 3:17; 17:5; John 12:28).

The Son Speaking to the Father

“Then the angel of the LORD [the Son] said, ‘LORD Almighty [Father], how long will you withhold mercy from Jerusalem and from the towns of Judah?’ ” (Zech. 1:12). That the angel (messenger) of the LORD is God is clear from the fact that it is He who is called the LORD (***Yahweh***), a term reserved for God alone. He is also called the “I AM” in Exodus 3:14 (cf. vv. 13, 15), which clearly refers only to Deity (cf. John 8:58–59). There is also a reference in Proverbs 30:4 to both the Father and the Son: “Who has gone up to heaven and come down? Who has gathered up the wind in the hollow of his hands? Who has wrapped up the waters in his cloak? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and the name of his son? Tell me if you know!” “After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: ‘Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you’ ” (John 17:1). Again, Jesus [the Son] called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46).

All Three Persons Together at Once

Several times all three persons are present and operating at the same time. Once

in Isaiah it says, “I will tell of the kindnesses of the LORD, the deeds for which he is to be praised, according to all the LORD [***Father***] has done for us … and so he became their Savior. In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence [***Son***] saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them.… Yet they rebelled and grieved his ***Holy Spirit***” (Isa. 63:7–10).

At the baptism of Jesus (Matt. 3:16–17), all three members of the Trinity were present together: “As soon as Jesus [Son] was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God [Spirit] descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven [Father] said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’ ”

In the baptismal formula (Matt. 28:19) it places all three under one “name” (singular), saying: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

Likewise, in an apostolic benediction (e.g., 2 Cor. 13:14), all three names are present together. Paul prayed, “May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ [Son], and the love of God [Father], and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit [Spirit] be with you all.”

All of these passages and many more indicate that there are three different and distinct persons who exist simultaneously and eternally and who share one and the same essence or nature. This is in stark contrast to modalism (sabellianism), which claims there is only one person in God who appears at different times in the form of different persons.

The Trinity Is Implied in the Old Testament

While the Trinity is not formally and explicitly set forth in the Old Testament, all the elements of trinitarianism are found there. There is only one God (Ex. 20:3; Deut. 6:4; Isa. 45:18), yet there are three persons who are considered God. Sometimes two are speaking to each other (Ps. 45:6–8; 110:1; Zech. 1:12). Indeed, in one text all three are mentioned together (Isa. 63:7–10).

Even the Hebrew word of “one” (***echad***) God (Deut. 6:4) implies a plurality with unity, just as male and female are considered “one” (***echad***) flesh (Gen. 2:24). There is also a threefold praise to God by the angelic choir: “Holy, Holy, Holy ***is*** the LORD of hosts” (Isa. 6:3 NKJV).

The Trinity Is Taught in the New Testament

As the above discussion shows, the New Testament teaches clearly that there is only one God and that there are three distinct persons who are God: These two premises constitute the basic elements of trinitarianism. What brings the Trinity into focus in the New Testament is the presence of the second person of the Godhead (Jesus Christ) in bodily form, often conversing with His Father (cf. John 17). Indeed, as we have seen, at Christ's baptism all three members of the Trinity are present at the same time: The Father speaks from heaven, and the Holy Spirit descends from heaven on the Son, who is in the water (Matt. 3:16–17).

Later, again, all three names are mandated as the baptismal formula (Matt. 28:19) and used in apostolic benedictions (for instance, 2 Cor. 13:14).

There Is a Functional Order in the Trinity

All members of the Trinity are equal in ***essence***, but they do not have the same ***roles***. It is a heresy (called subordinationism) to affirm that there is an ***ontological subordination*** of one member of the Trinity to another, since they are identical in essence (examine the "ontological argument for God's existence" in Volume 1, chapter 2); nonetheless, it is clear that there is a ***functional subordination***; that is, not only does each member have a different function or role, but some functions are also subordinate to others.

The Function of the Father

By His very title of "Father" and His label of "the first person of the Trinity," it is manifest that His function is superior to that of the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Father, for example, is presented as the Source, Sender, and Planner of salvation.

The Function of the Son

The Son, on the other hand, is the Means, Sent One, and Achiever of salvation.

The Father sent, and the Son came to save us; the Father planned it, but the Son accomplished it on the cross. This is why it is a heresy (called patripassianism) to claim that the Father suffered on the cross—only the Son suffered and died.

Further, the Son is eternally "begotten" or "generated" [4] from the Father, but the Father is never said to be "begotten" or "generated" from anyone.

The Function of the Holy Spirit

According to orthodox theology, both East and West, the Holy Spirit is said to "proceed" from the Father, but the Father never proceeds from the Holy Spirit (see Appendix 7)—that is, the Father sends the Spirit, but the Spirit never sends the Father. In addition, however, according to orthodox ***Western*** theology, the Holy Spirit proceeds both from the Father and the Son (see John 15:26). This is an issue over which the Eastern Orthodox and Western Roman Catholic churches eventually split (around A.D. 1054), namely, over the *filioque* ("and the Son") clause that was added to the "procession from the Father" statement in Western creeds at the Council of Toledo (in A.D. 589), following Augustine's view. Mediators have sought to find common ground in the fact that Jesus said, "When the Counselor comes, whom I will sent to you ***from the Father***, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, He will testify about me" (John 15:26, emphasis added). Many Eastern Orthodox theologians are willing to say that the Holy Spirit is sent by the Father indirectly through the Son, but they deny that the Son has authority to send the Holy Spirit on His own. Be that as it may, all agree that there is a functional subordination of the Holy Spirit to the Father.

In brief, the Father is the Planner, the Son is the Accomplisher, and the Holy Spirit is the Applier of salvation to believers. The Father is the Source, the Son is the Means, and the Holy Spirit is the Effector of salvation—it is He who convicts, convinces, and converts (see Appendix 7).

One final word about the nature and duration of this functional subordination in the Godhead. It is not just temporal and economical; it is essential and eternal. For example, the Son is an eternal Son (see Prov. 30:4; Heb. 1:3). He did not become God's Son; He always was related to God the Father as a Son and always will be. His submission to the Father was not just for time but will be for all eternity. Paul wrote:

> Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom of God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power … When he has done this, then the

Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all, (

1 Cor. 15:24

,

28

)

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE TRINITY

From a theological vantage point, two things are necessary to defend the doctrine of the Trinity: ***first***, to demonstrate that God has one and only one essence (nature); ***second***, to show that it is not contradictory to have three persons in one essence.

God Can Have Only One Essence

By “essence” or “nature” is meant what something is, and essence is a set of characteristics—properties necessary to the thing being described. For example, it is necessary to the essence of a triangle that it has the following characteristics:

(1) It must have three sides.
(2) It must have three corners or angles.
(3) The sum of the three angles must be 180 degrees.

An essence is differentiated from other characteristics by the fact that its characteristics are essential to it, while the other characteristics (called accidents) are not. For instance, it is ***essential*** to the essence of a human being that he or she possess rationality, while his or her skin color (red, yellow, black, brown, or white) is ***accidental***. That God can have only one essence has already been demonstrated under His simplicity (see chapter 2). So the essential characteristics or properties of God must refer to one and the same essence.

It Is Possible to Have More Than One Person in One Essence

In order to complete what is understood by the Trinity, it remains only to show that there is no contradiction in having three persons in one essence. This is demonstrated by pointing out that the law of noncontradiction mandates that for two propositions to be contradictory, they must both affirm and deny something of

(1) the same thing;
(2) at the same time; and
(3) ***in the same sense*** (in the same relationship).

Clearly this is not the case in affirming,

(1) God is one and only one ***in relation*** to His essence;
(2) God is more than one (viz., three) ***in relation*** to His persons. These are two different senses or relations. Therefore, the Trinity is not contradictory.

Of course, this response depends on the words ***person*** and ***essence*** being defined in different ways. By person is meant ***who*** it is, and by nature is meant ***what*** it is. A person is a ***subject***, while a nature is an ***object***. Person is an ***I***, and an essence is an ***it***. So a person is a ***subjective center*** of intentionality and volitionality, and a nature is an ***objective center*** of essential properties.
No orthodox theologian denies that this is a mystery, but it is not a contradiction. While the Trinity may go beyond reason, it does not go against reason. It is beyond finite ability to comprehend how there can be three persons in one nature, but it is not beyond finite ability to apprehend the truthful (and noncontradictory) nature of both premises.

Illustrations of the Trinity

Many illustrations of the Trinity have been offered down through the centuries. Some are good and some are not. The bad ones usually imply some heresy such as modalism or tritheism.

Poor Illustrations of the Trinity

- ***Three States of Water***

One often-used bad illustration is that the Trinity is like water, which has three states (solid, liquid, and gas). The problem with this is that no given drop of water is in all three states at the same time.

[5]

Yet God is both three and one at the same time. So despite the good intentions, this illustration implies the heresy of modalism (that God has one essence but is not three distinct persons).

- ***Three Links in a Chain***

Another poor example offered of the Trinity is a three-link chain. The problem here is that the links are three different things. So in spite of whatever good motivations there may be behind it, what is being illustrated is tritheism, not trinitarianism. God is only one thing (substance), not three different ones joined together in some way.

- ***Human Body, Soul, and Spirit***

Yet another faulty illustration of the Trinity is that God is like man, who has body, soul, and spirit and yet is one. Even apart from the implied trichotomy (see part 2), one problem with this is that the human soul and body separate at death. The members of the Godhead are inseparable. Further, God has no body—He is pure Spirit (John 4:24).

- ***One Actor Playing Three Roles***

Most of us have seen a play where one person plays two or more roles. However, this is actually an illustration of the Sabellian heresy, not of the orthodox Trinity. In the latter, there are three different persons who exist and perform *at the same time*, yet share only one divine essence.

Better Illustrations of the Trinity

No illustration of the Trinity is perfect, but some are more helpful than others. Those that are better involve things where three different elements exist in an undivided oneness at the same time.

- ***A Triangle***

God is like a triangle, which is one figure yet has three different sides at the same time—there is a simultaneous threeness in the oneness. Of course, no analogy is perfect, since in every analogy there is a similarity and a difference. The difference here is that "corners" are not persons. Nonetheless, they do illustrate how there can be a "threeness" and a oneness at the same time.

- ***One to the Third Power***

Another helpful illustration is that God is like one to the third power (1×1×1=1). God is three ones in One; He is not 1+1+1=3. That is the heresy of tritheism, which holds three different gods, not just one God.

- ***Love Is Trifold***

"God is Love" (

1 John 4:16

), and love involves three elements: A lover, a beloved, and a spirit of love. These three are one. One advantage of this example is that it has a personal dimension, in that love is something only a person does.

- ***Mind, Ideas, and Words***

Further, God is like the relation between my mind, my ideas, and my words. They are all distinct, yet they are united, for one's words cannot be separated from his ideas, and his mind behind them.

- ***Allah and the Qur'an***

For Muslims (who deny the Trinity), a good illustration is the relationship between the Qur'an (which they believe is the eternal Word of God) and God (Allah), who expressed that Word. They believe there is only one God and that His Word is distinct from Him. Yet they also hold that there is a unity between them, since there is a unity between God and His Word. So they are admitting a plurality and yet unity between God and His eternal Word. The Qur'an is *not identical to Allah*, and yet it is *one with God*, who supposedly expressed Himself in the words of the Qur'an (see Geisler and Saleeb, *AI*, chapter 12).

Heresies Regarding God and Christ

Orthodox trinitarianism and Christology must be carefully distinguished from several heresies. Most of these have been condemned by Councils of the Christian Church: tritheism, modalism (sabellianism), arianism, docetism, nestorianism, monophysitism (eutychianism), patripassianism, monotholitism, apollinarianism, subordinationism, monarchianism, adoptionism, and binitarianism.

Tritheism

Tritheism is the belief that there are three gods or three separate beings in the Godhead. Few, if any, have held this view consciously, though unwittingly many have fallen into it verbally by their incautious language about the Godhead. By correctly stressing the three persons as ***distinct***, it is easy to slip into the language of tritheism, which wrongly posits three ***separate*** beings.

Modalism

Modalism is also called sabellianism after its founder, Sabellius (fl. c. 217–c. 220). Modalism holds that God is only one person who appears in different modes or roles at different times in the divine economy, from which it gets the title "Economic Trinity," as opposed to the ontological Trinity of orthodox theology.

Arianism

Following Arius (c.250–336), its founder, this heresy denies that Jesus is fully God, allowing Him a created status below God. Arianism was opposed by Athanasius and condemned as heretical at the Council of Nicea (A.D. 325).

Docetism

From the Greek word ***dokeo***, "I seem," docetism affirms the deity of Christ but denies His humanity, claiming it was only an apparent, but not real, humanity. Elements of this error had appeared already in New Testament times (1 John 4:1–3; 2 John 7; Col. 2:8–9); in some forms it held that Jesus escaped the ignominy of death by crucifixion when either Judas Iscariot or Simon of Cyrene exchanged places with Him on the cross. Muslims accept a form of this error (see Sura 4:187). Among those charged with this error were Cerinthus (fl. c. A.D. 100) and Serapion, the Bishop of Antioch (190–203).

Nestorianism

It is doubtful that Nestorius (d. c. A.D. 451) held the view bearing his name, though some of his followers are credited with it. This perspective posited not only two natures in Christ (which is orthodox) but also two persons (which is not). Allegedly, if there is both a human and a divine person in Christ, then it was only the human person who died on the cross; hence, His sacrifice for our sins would have no divine efficacy. The truth is, only if one and the same person, who was both God and man, died for our sins, can He truly be mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5).

It is against nestorianism that the creeds speak when they insist on a hypostatic union of the two natures in one person. While "hypostasis" literally means "substance,"[6] it also bore the meaning of "individual reality," and from the fourth century on it came to mean "person" (see Cross, ***ODCC***, 685).

Monophysitism

Monophysitism is also dubbed eutychianism after its alleged founder, Eutyches (c.375–454). Monophysitism confuses the two natures of Christ, so that the divine and human natures intermingle. Besides being a heresy, it is a contradiction, since it holds that there is an infinite finite and an uncreated created blending of the two natures of Christ.

Patripassianism

Patripassianism means literally the "Father suffered." It arose in the early third century in the form of monarchianism (see below), holding that God the Father suffered on the cross as well as Christ. However, the divine nature possessed by Christ did not suffer or die: God is impassible (see chapter 5) and, hence, incapable of undergoing suffering. Only the Son became incarnated in a human nature; thus, only the Son, not the Father or the Spirit, suffered on the cross.

Monotholitism

From two Greek words meaning "one" and "to will," this unorthodox seventh-century view held that Jesus has only one will, not both a human and a divine

will. This is contrary to our Lord's words in Gethsemane, where He said, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as ***I will***, but as ***you will***" (Matt. 26:39, emphasis added). Further, by insisting that Christ has only one will, monotholitism in effect confuses His two natures through which He (one person) operated. This doctrine was condemned as a heresy by the Lateran Council of 649 and the Council of Constantinople of 680.

Apollinarianism

Following their leader, Apollinarius (c. 310–c. 390), this sect diminished the humanity of Christ; that is, while affirming His full deity, they denied His full humanity by claiming that Jesus had no human spirit (only a body and a soul). They held that the divine
Logos
replaced the human spirit in Jesus. Apollinarianism was condemned by the Synods in Rome (374–380) and the Council of Constantinople (381).

Subordinationism

This heresy was held by Justin Martyr (c. 100–c. 165) and Origen (c. 185–c. 254) and condemned at the Council of Constantinople (381). It asserts that the Son is subordinate in ***nature*** to the Father. Subordinationism is not to be confused with the orthodox belief that the Son (Christ) is ***functionally*** subordinate to (i.e., subject to) the Father, though ***essentially*** equal with Him.

Monarchianism

This second and third century nontrinitarian heresy stressed the unity (monarchy) of God to the neglect of Christ's deity. Supposedly, Jesus was only a power or influence from God. There were two main groups of monarchianists: modalists (see above) and adoptionists (see below). The modalists were represented by Noetus, Praxeas, and Sabellius. The main adoptionists were Theoadotus and Artemon and, perhaps, Paul of Samosata (see Cross, ***ODCC***, 929).

Adoptionism

Adoptionism was rooted in second-and third-century monarchianism but flourished in the eighth century. According to this view, Jesus was only a man but was adopted by God because of His divine powers. This is said to have occurred when God declared from heaven: “This is my Son” (Matt. 3:17).

Binitarianism

According to binitarianism, there are only two persons in the Godhead. While few, if any, early Fathers explicitly affirmed binitarianism, some inadvertently and implicitly fell into it by denying the deity of the Son. Some modern proponents of this view deny the personality of the Holy Spirit, thus leaving only two persons in the Godhead. Both the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ (sister group to the Mormons) and the old Worldwide Church of God under Herbert W. Armstrong embraced this view.
The main views regarding the relation between the nature and person (s) of the Godhead can be summarized as follows:

	PERSON(S)	**NATURE(S)**
Trinitarianism	Three	One
Tritheism	Three	Three
Polytheism	Many	Many
Modalism	One	One
Binitarianism	Two	One

The main views, orthodox and unorthodox, concerning Christ and His two natures can be charted as follows:

	DEITY	HUMANITY	RELATION
Athanasian Creed (orthodoxy)	Affirmed	Affirmed	United
Arianism	Denied	Affirmed	United
Nestorianism	Affirmed	Affirmed	Separated
Eutychianism (Monophysitism)	Affirmed	Affirmed	Merged
Docetism	Affirmed	Denied	United
Adoptionism	Denied	Affirmed	Adopted
Apollinarianism	Affirmed	Diminished	United
Subordinationism	Diminished	Affirmed	United
MODALISM (SABELLIANISM)	Affirmed	Affirmed	Separated[7]

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S TRIUNITY

Not all doctrine is revealed immediately and completely by God; most teachings are revealed progressively. This is true of the Trinity.

The Early Church Fathers on the Trinity

The earliest Fathers of the church spoke of the Trinity by doctrine and even by name. This begins with a disciple of one of Jesus' apostles.

Polycarp (c. 70–155)

Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, was taught by the apostle John. He wrote, “May the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ Himself, who is the Son of God, and our everlasting High Priest, build you up in faith and truth” (***EPE***, chapter 12).

Ignatius

“Our Physician is the only true God, the unbegotten and unapproachable, the Lord of all, the Father and Begetter of the only-begotten Son. We have also as a Physician the Lord our God, Jesus the Christ, the only-begotten Son and Word, before time began; but who afterward became also man, of Mary the virgin” (ibid., chapter 7).

Justin Martyr

Justin, an early Christian apologist right after the apostles, affirmed the Trinity: “The most true God is the Father of righteousness.… We worship and adore Him, the Son (who came forth from Him and taught us these things, along with the host of the other good angels who follow and are made like Him), and the prophetic Spirit” (in Bercot, ***DECB***, 652).

Irenaeus

Irenaeus learned under Polycarp, the disciple of John, and later became bishop of Lyons. He asserted the doctrine of the Trinity in these words:

> The church, though dispersed throughout the whole world, even to the ends of the earth, has received from the apostles and their disciples this faith in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are in them; and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit. (*AH* in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, X, 1)
>
> One God the Father is declared, who is above all, through all, and in all. The Father

> is indeed above all, and He is the Head of Christ. But the Word is through all things and is Himself the Head of the church. While the Spirit is in us all, and He is the living water, (in Bercot, *DECB*, 652)

Clement of Alexandria

Clement affirmed that "the universal Father is one. The universal Word is one. And the Holy Spirit is one" (ibid., 652).

Tertullian

Tertullian, an African apologist and theologian, was the first to use the term "Trinity," though the truth of the Trinity was taught in the New Testament and by church Fathers before him. He declared,

> We define that there are two, the Father and the Son, and three with the Holy Spirit, and this number is made by the pattern of salvation … [which] brings about unity in Trinity, interrelating the three, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They are three, not in dignity, but in degree, not in substance but in form, not in power but in kind. They are of one substance and power, because there is one God from whom these degrees, forms and kinds devolve in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. (*PAH*, 23)

He added, "I testify that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are inseparable from each other.… My assertion is that the Father is one, the Son is one, and the Spirit is one—and that they are all distinct from each other" (in Bercot, ***DECB***, 653).

Origen

Origen was an Alexandrian defender of Christianity. He too defended the Trinity, writing,

> If anyone would say that the Word of God [Christ] or the Wisdom of God had a beginning, let him beware lest he direct his impiety rather against the unbegotten Father, since he denies that he was always Father.… There can be no more ancient title of almighty God than that of Father, and it is through the son that he is Father. (*DP* in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, 1.2)

Further, “the Holy Spirit would never have been reckoned in the unity of the trinity, i.e., along with the unchangeable Father and His Son, unless He had always been the Holy Spirit” (ibid., 1:111:4).
Origin spoke of the fact that

> the person of the Holy Spirit was of such authority and dignity, that saving baptism was not complete except by the authority of the most excellent Trinity of them all, i.e., by the naming of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and by joining them to the unbegotten God the Father, and to His only-begotten Son, the name also of the Holy Spirit, (ibid., 1.2)

Athenagoras

> Though the poets, in their fictions, represent the gods as no better than men, our mode of thinking is not the same as theirs, concerning either God the Father or the Son. But the Son of God is the Logos of the Father, in idea and in operation; for after the pattern of Him and by Him were all things made, the Father and the Son being one. And, the Son being in the Father and the Father in the Son, in oneness and power of spirit, the understanding and reason. (*WA*, 10 in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, II)
>
> Who, then, would not be astonished to hear men called atheists who speak of God the Father, and of God the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and who declare both their power in union and their distinction in order?
>
> We acknowledge a God, and a Son (His *Logos* [“Word”]), and a Holy Spirit. These are united in essence—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Now, the Son is the Intelligence, Reason, and Wisdom of the Father. And the Spirit is an emanation, as light from fire, (in Bercot, *DECB*, 652)
>
> That we are not atheists, therefore, seeing that we acknowledge one God, uncreated, eternal, invisible, impassible, incomprehensible, illimitable, who is apprehended by the understanding only and the reason, who is encompassed by light, and beauty, and spirit, and power ineffable, by whom the universe has been created through His Logos, and set in order, and is kept in being—I have sufficiently demonstrated. (I say “His Logos,” for we acknowledge also a Son of God. Nor let any one think it ridiculous that God should have a Son …). But the Son of God is the Logos of the Father, in idea and in operation; for after the pattern of Him and by Him were all things made, the Father and the Son being one. And, the Son being in the Father and the Father in the Son, in oneness and power of spirit, the understanding and reason of the Father is the Son of God.… I will state briefly that He is the first product of the Father, not as having been brought into existence (for from the beginning, God, who is the eternal mind, had the Logos in Himself, being from eternity instinct with Logos …). The Holy Spirit Himself also, which operates in the prophets, we assert to be an effluence

> of God, flowing from Him, and returning back again like a beam of the sun. Who, then, would not be astonished to hear men who speak of God the Father, and of God the Son, and of the Holy Spirit and who declare both their power in union and their distinction in order, called atheists? (op. cit.)

Hippolytus

> Therefore, a man … is compelled to acknowledge God the Father Almighty, and Christ Jesus the Son of God—who, being God, became man, to whom also the Father made all things subject (Himself excepted)—and the Holy Spirit; and that these are three [Persons]. However, if he desires to know how it is shown that there is still one God, let him know that His power is one. As far as regards the power, therefore, God is one. But as far as regards the Economy, there is a threefold manifestation, (in Bercot, *DECB*, 655)

Novatian of Rome

Novatian, a bishop in Rome, wrote a work titled *De Trinitate De Reula Fidei*, defending the deity of Christ and the Trinity. He declared,

> The rule of truth demands that, first of all, we believe in God the Father and Almighty Lord.… The same rule of truth teaches us to believe, after the Father, also in the Son of God, Christ Jesus, our Lord God, but the Son of God.… Moreover, the order of reason and the authority of faith … admonishes us, after this, to believe also in the Holy Ghost, (in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, 21)

Gregory Thaumaturgus

Gregory was the pupil of Origen and bishop of Neo-Caesaria who played a prominent part in the Synod of Antioch (A.D. 269). He confessed,

> There is one God, the Father of the living Word.… There is one Lord, one of one (only of only), God of God, the true Son of the true Father, Invisible of Invisible, and Immortal of Immortal, and Everlasting of Everlasting. And there is one Holy Ghost … a perfect Trinity, not divided nor differing in glory and eternity and sovereignty. (*DF*, 7 in ibid., 25)

The Early Creeds and Councils on the Trinity

As was shown above, the Fathers of the first two centuries after Christ followed the teachings of the New Testament in affirming the Trinity. In the next two centuries the universal church affirmed that the doctrine of the Trinity was normative for all believers.

The Apostles' Creed

The Trinity is implied in the Apostles' Creed, which, in its old Roman form, declares: "I believe in God the Father Almighty. And in Jesus Christ his only begotten Son our Lord.… And in the Holy Ghost" (in Schaff, ***CC***, 47–48). The Trinity was made explicit by later church councils when the proponents of Arianism denied what was taught from the time of the apostles.

The Council of Constantinople (A.D. 381)

This great ecumenical council declared as a norm for orthodoxy:

> I believe in one God the Father Almighty: maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all Worlds, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father.… And [I believe] in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life, (ibid., 58–59)

The Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451)

By the time of this second great ecumenical council, deviant doctrines called for an even more explicit statement on the Trinity. It declared,

> We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable rational soul and body; consubstantial with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood … one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, in-divisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or

> divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ. (ibid., 62)

The Medieval Fathers on the Trinity

The Fathers of the Middle Ages produced some of the great treatises on the doctrine of the Trinity.

Augustine

> Let it not be supposed that in this Trinity there is any separation in respect of time or place, but that these Three are equal and co-eternal, and absolutely of one nature: and that the creatures have been made, not some by the Father, and some by the Son, and some by the Holy Spirit, but that each and all that have been or are now being created subsist in the Trinity as their Creator; and that no one is saved by the Father without the Son and the Holy Spirit, or by the Son without the Father and the Holy Spirit, or by the Holy Spirit without the Father and the Son—but by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the only one, true, and truly immortal (that is, absolutely unchangeable) God. (*L*, 169.2)
>
> The Spirit is other than the Father and the Son because He is neither the Father nor the Son. I say "other than," not "different from," because, equally with them, He is the simple, unchangeable, co-eternal Good. This Trinity is one God. And, although it is a Trinity, it is nonetheless simple. For we do not say that the nature of this good is simple because the Father alone shares in it, or the Son alone, or the Holy Spirit alone. Nor do we say with the Sabellian heretics that it is but a nominal Trinity without subsistent Persons. Our reason for calling it simple is because it is what it has—with the exception of the real relations in which the Persons stand to each other.
>
> It is, therefore, because we are men, created in the image of a Creator, whose eternity is true, His truth eternal, His love both eternal and true, a Creator who is the eternal, true, and lovable Trinity in whom there is neither confusion nor division, that, wherever we turn among the things which He created and conserved so wonderfully, we discover His footprints, whether lightly or plainly impressed. (*CG*, 11.10, 11.28)

Anselm

> First, all three together are one supreme essence (even though each, perfectly, is the supreme essence). And the one supreme essence cannot exist without

itself, outside itself, or greater or less than itself. And, secondly, the Father, as a complete whole, exists in the Son and in their mutual Spirit, the Son in Father and in Spirit, and Spirit in Father and in Son. This is because the supreme essence's consciousness is, as a complete whole, in its understanding and in its love, and its understanding in its consciousness and in its love, and its love in its consciousness and in its understanding. The supreme spirit understands and loves its whole consciousness. It is conscious of and loves its whole understanding. It is conscious of and understands its whole love. By consciousness we understand the Father, by understanding, the Son, and by love, their Spirit. Such, therefore, is the equality of the mutual embrace and the mutual indwelling of Father, Son and Spirit. It demonstrates that none of them is greater than, or can exist without, the others. (*ACMW*, 66–67)

Father, Son, and Spirit exist in each other, and with such equality that none is greater than the others. What a joy it is to behold this! Their equality is demonstrable first in terms of their shared essence, and secondly—and no less—in terms of each individually. (*SABW*, 66–67)

Thomas Aquinas

In like manner, as in God the persons are multiplied, and the essence is not multiplied, we speak of one essence of the three persons, and three persons of the one essence, provided these genitives be understood as designating the form. (*ST*, Ia.39.2)

If there were any inequality in the divine persons, they would not have the same essence; and thus the three persons would not be one God; which is impossible. We must therefore admit equality among the divine persons. (ibid., Ia.42.2)

There can be only three persons in God. For as it was shown above, the several persons are the several subsisting relations really distinct from each other. But a real distinction between the divine relations can come only from relative opposition. Therefore, only three persons exist in God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost (ibid., Ia.30.2)

The Reformers on the Trinity

The basic doctrine of the Trinity—one nature and three persons—has been the same since the controversy was settled in the early church. The Reformers affirmed the same.

Martin Luther

Christ shows forcefully that the Holy Spirit is an actual Being in the Godhead and a separate, distinct Person by Himself, one who is not the Father or the Son. For all these expressions obviously refer to a separate Person: the Comforter, who will come; again: “whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak” (John 16:13). If He is to come or (as He said above) to be sent or to proceed; again, if He is to hear and speak, He must certainly be Someone. Now He is, of course, not the Father, because the Father neither comes nor is sent; nor is He the Son, who has already come and now returns to the Father, of whom the Holy Spirit is to preach and whom He is to glorify.

“Whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak” (John 16:13). For here He speaks of a conversation that is carried on within the Godhead, apart from all creatures, and sets up a pulpit with both a Speaker and a Hearer, making the Father the Preacher but the Holy Spirit the Hearer. To be sure, this is a sublime matter, and it is above the ability of human reason to determine how it takes place. But because we are unable to comprehend it with human words or reason, we are to believe it.… Accordingly, it [the Word] has a true divine nature from the Father; yet it does not depart from the Father (as a corporeal, natural word, spoken by a man, is a voice or breath which does not stay in him but comes from him and stays away from him) but stays forever in Him. These, then, are the two distinct Persons: the Speaker and the Word that is spoken, that is, the Father and the Son. And now the third follows: the Hearer of both the Speaker and the spoken Word; for where a Speaker and a Word are to be, a Hearer is required. But all this speaking, being spoken, and hearing takes place within the divine nature and stays within it. There no creature is or can be. But Speaker and Word and Hearer must be God Himself, all three equally eternal in the indivisible one Majesty. For in the divine Being there is no change or inequality and neither beginning nor end. Therefore, no one can say that the Hearer is Someone apart (*ausser*) from God or each Person is as entirely the whole Godhead (*tota divinitas*) as if there were no other. And yet it is true that no Person is the Godhead so exclusively that the others are not also the Godhead. This distinction of Persons is so great that only the Person of the Son assumed human nature.… Therefore, the entire science of metaphysics is in error and must be boldly crucified when we are in search of God. (*WLS*, 1384–85)

John Calvin

Because the Father, though distinguished by his own peculiar properties, has expressed himself wholly in the Son, he is said with perfect reason to have

rendered his person (hypostasis) manifest in him. And this aptly accords with what is immediately added—viz., that he is “the brightness of his glory.” The fair inference from the Apostle’s words is, that there is a proper subsistence (hypostasis) of the Father, which shines refulgent in the Son. From this, again, it is easy to infer that there is a subsistence (hypostasis) of the Son, which distinguishes him from the Father. The same holds in the case of the Holy Spirit; for we will immediately prove both that he is God and that he has a separate subsistence from the Father. This, moreover, is not a distinction of essence, which it [would be] impious to multiply.

The whole Father is in the Son, and the whole Son in the Father, as the Son himself also declares (

John 14:10

), “I am in the Father, and the Father in me”; nor do ecclesiastical writers admit that the one is separated from the other by any difference of essence. “By those names which denote distinction,” says Augustine, “is meant the relation which they mutually bear to each other, not the very substance by which they are one” (*ICR*, 1.13.2, 19).

The Post-Reformers on the Trinity

John Miley

Trinitarianism is not tritheism; nor are trinitarians less pronounced on the unity of God than unitarians. The sense of this unity is embodied in the term designative of the personal distinctions in the Godhead. It follows that the unity of God is the basal truth in the doctrine of the Trinity. But as this question is not in issue as between trinitarianism and unitarianism, and especially as we have previously considered it in its distinctive application to God, it requires no further treatment here. (*ST*, 223)

“The doctrine of the Trinity asserts the personal distinctions of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and the essential unity of each” (ibid., 224).

What then is this doctrine? It is that God is one being in such a modified and extended sense of the language, as to include three persons in such a modified and restricted sense of the terms that he is qualified, in a corresponding restricted sense.… Does it assert that one God is three Gods, or that there are more Gods than one? It admits of no such construction, for it expressly affirms that there is but one God, and that the three persons, as *persons*, are not three beings or three Gods, (ibid., 230)

Jacob Arminius

"For the Son and the Divine Essence differ in relation" (***WJA***, II.481).

> The Divine persons are not modes of being or of existing, or modes of the Divine Essence: For they are things with the mode of being or existing. The Divine Persons are distinguished by a real distinction, not by the degree and mode of the thing. A Person is an individual subsistence itself, not a characteristic property, nor is it an individual principle; though it be not an individual, nor a person without a characteristic property or without an individual principle (ibid., 481–82)

OBJECTIONS TO THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

Many objections have been leveled against the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, both biblical and philosophical. The most important one will be treated here.

Objection One—Based on Alleged Counter-Claims to Christ's Deity

Several passages are used by critics to show that neither Jesus nor His disciples actually claimed deity for Him. This they claim by offering many counter-texts to the above affirmations. A brief examination of these passages is in order here.

Response to Objection One

Matthew 19:16–30 NKJV

The rich young ruler called Jesus "Good Teacher," and Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Why do you call Me good? No one ***is*** good but One, ***that is***, God." If Jesus was really God, then why did He appear to deny the same to the young ruler, even rebuking Him for implying so?

In response, it should be observed that Jesus did not deny He was God to the young ruler. He simply asked him to examine the implications of what he was saying. In effect, Jesus was saying to him, “Do you realize what you are saying when you call Me good? Do you realize that this is something you should attribute only to God? Are you saying I am God?”
The young man did not realize the implications of what he was saying; thus, Jesus was forcing him into a very uncomfortable dilemma. Either Jesus was good and was God, or else He was bad and was merely a man. A good God or a bad man, but not a good man: These are the real alternatives with regard to Christ, for no good man would claim to be God when he was not. The Christ who was a good moral teacher but not God is a figment of human imagination.

Matthew 24:36

The Bible teaches that Jesus is God (John 1:1) and that He knows all things (John 2:24; Col. 2:2–3). On the other hand, He “grew in wisdom” (Luke 2:52) and sometimes did not seem to know certain things (cf. John 11:34). Indeed, He denied knowing the time of His own second coming here and in Mark 13:32, saying, “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”
In response, we must distinguish between what Jesus knew ***as God*** (everything) and what He knew ***as man*** (not everything). As God, Jesus was omniscient (all-knowing), but as man He was limited in His knowledge. The situation can be schematized as follows:

Jesus As God	**Jesus As Man**
Unlimited in knowledge	Limited in knowledge
No growth in knowledge	Growth in knowledge
Knew time of His coming	Did not know time of His coming

Therefore, properly understood, this passage is not a denial of the deity of Christ; rather, it is in harmony with the distinction between the two natures of

Christ, one divine and one human.

John 1:1

This text is used by Arians to show that Jesus was only “a” god, not “the” God, because there is no definite article (“the”) in the Greek of this verse. This is a misunderstanding. In Greek, when the definite article is used, it often stresses the ***individual***, and when it is not present, it refers to the ***nature*** of the one denoted. Thus, the verse can be rendered “And the Word was of the nature of God.”
Further, as mentioned previously, “Father” is often used of God in the New Testament without the definite article, and even critics do not take this as a disclaimer of full deity for the Father.
The full deity of Christ is supported not only by general usage of the same construction but also by other references in John to Jesus being God (cf. John 8:58; 10:30; 20:28) and in the rest of the New Testament (cf. Col. 1:15–16; 2:9; Titus 2:13).
Furthermore, some New Testament texts use the definite article and speak of Christ as “the God.” So it does not matter whether John did or did not use the definite article here—the Bible clearly teaches that Jesus is God, not just ***a*** god (cf. Rom. 9:5; Titus 2:13; Heb. 1:8).
Indeed, the Father is sometimes referred to as God with the definite article, but no one takes this to be a denial of His deity (see, for example, 2 Cor. 1:3).
That Jesus is Jehovah (Yahweh) is clear from the fact that the New Testament attributes to Jesus properties and powers that in the Old Testament apply only to God (see above).

John 14:28

Another alleged counter-example is found here, where Jesus said, “The Father is greater than I.” How can the Father be greater if Jesus is equal to God?
In response, there is an important difference. ***As a man***, the Father was greater than Jesus, and Jesus was a human being. But the Father was not greater than Christ ***as God***, for Jesus was also God. Also, the Father is greater than the Son ***by office***, but not ***by nature***, since both are God (see John 1:1; 8:58; 10:30). Just as an earthly father is equally human with but holds a higher office than his son, even so the Father and the Son in the Trinity are equal in ***essence***, but different

in ***function***. In like manner, we speak of the president of our country as being a greater man, not by virtue of his ***character***, but by virtue of his ***position***. Therefore, Jesus cannot ever be said to say that He considered Himself anything less than God by nature.

Colossians 1:15–17

In verse 15 Paul calls Christ the "firstborn." This seems to imply that Christ was only a creature; that is, the first one born (created) in the universe. However, careful examination of this verse in its context reveals that Paul clearly declares Christ to be God in this very letter by saying He created all things (1:16) and has "the fullness of the Godhead" (2:9 NKJV). The reference to "firstborn" does not mean He is the firstborn ***in*** creation, but the "firstborn ***over*** all creation" (1:15), since "He is before all things" (1:17). "Firstborn" in this context does not mean the first one to be born, but the Heir of all, the Creator and Owner of all things. As Creator of "all things," He could not have been a created thing.

Revelation 3:14

This is another verse used by those who deny the deity of Christ. Here John refers to Christ as the "Beginning of the creation of God" (NKJV). This too may sound to the casual observer like Christ is the first created being. However, "Beginning of the creation of God" must mean that Christ is the Beginner ***of*** God's creation, not the beginning ***in*** God's creation. This is clear from the fact that the same word ***beginning*** is used of God the Father in Revelation 21:6–7 (emphasis added): "He said to me: 'It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and ***I will be his God*** and he will be my son.' " Hence, if "beginning" disproved that Christ is God, then it would also disprove that the Father is God, which is absurd.

Objection Two—Based on God's Simplicity

Trinitarian theists affirm a multiplicity in God of three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Thus, it would seem that God cannot be absolutely one, or else He could not also be three persons, for if the persons are truly different, then God cannot be absolutely the same, and if they are not really distinct (but only in our minds), then modalism (sabellianism) follows and not trinitarianism.

Response to Objection Two

The first thing to note about this objection is that it confuses person and essence: Simplicity refers only to God's essence. Clearly, the orthodox view of the Trinity has a plurality of persons within the unity of one essence. The early creeds were very careful to distinguish the persons in the Godhead without dividing His essence (see Schaff, ***CC***, Volume 1).

As Aquinas noted, in reference to the divine essence, each person is identical to the essence. But in respect to one another, each person is mutually distinct and not united with the others (***OPG***, 3:7:1). Therefore, the Trinity and simplicity are not contradictory.

Classical theists do not deny relationships in God, for the relationships really exist in Him. Even so, the distinctions in God are not according to essence, but according to what is relative, namely, to personhood. God is essentially one but relationally three. Therefore, relationality in God does not entail composition (Aquinas, ***ST***, la.28:3).

Objection Three—Based on the Identity of Persons of the Trinity

It is objected that all things identical to the same thing are identical to one another. For example, if A is identical to B, and C is identical to B, then A must be identical to C. All the members of the Godhead are identical to the same thing (viz., God's essence). Therefore, it would seem to follow that all the members of the Trinity are identical to one another.

Response to Objection Three

First, no trinitarian would want to make this claim, for it denies the plurality of persons in God. It is, in fact, the proposition made by Sabellian heretics.
Second, Thomas Aquinas responded to this very objection in his *Summa Theologica* (la.28, 4). Citing Aristotle, he noted that this objection is telling only where there is identity between object and meaning. But such is not the case in God, for while Fatherhood and Sonship in reality refer to the same thing (essence), yet their meaning implies opposing relationships.
Third, God can be one and have two or more relations, in the way there is one and the same road between two different cities. The relation between Father and Son is the same relationship, yet Father and Son are not the same (ibid.): They are different persons within the same God. Likewise, one and the same triangle has three corners—this neither destroys the unity of the nature of a triangle, nor does this unity do away with its three corners. The same is true of the Trinity.

Objection Four—Based on the Traditional Definition of Personhood

The traditional definition of personhood includes that which has mind, feelings, and will. However, on this definition, one could not distinguish the two natures of Christ, since each nature has a mind of its own. For example, the divine nature of Jesus knew everything, but the human mind of Christ was limited (Matt. 24:36). If "person" includes mind, then how can we distinguish two different minds (and wills) in Christ, one mind being infinite and the other finite?

Answer to Objection Four

The "traditional" definition of personhood only speaks about the power of a person by virtue of the nature in which he participates. The core of personhood

is a “who” or an “I”—a subject. But there are no “naked persons”; each person has a nature, and in Christ’s unique case, He has two natures. So “person” is defined by the powers it possesses—mind, emotion, and will. But the person himself ***is*** not these powers; he simply ***has*** them. What is more, there is a difference between having the ***powers*** of intellect and a nature that contains the ***content*** that particular intellect holds.

In brief, one and the same person, in the sense of an “I” or “who,” can have two different natures through which it operates. Further, even one and the same person in the sense of having the ***powers*** of intellect, emotion, and will can have two different natures through which it operates, since this differs from the ***content*** these natures can possess. For example, an infinite Mind has more content than a finite mind, even though the same “person” (understood as having the ***power*** of intellect) can have two different minds, one finite and the other infinite in ***content***.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The nature of God is the most fundamental factor in evangelical theology; on it rests all other theological doctrines, either explicitly or implicitly. According to sound biblical, theological, and historical reasoning, the God of the Bible is the God of trinitarian monotheism. He is tri-personal, infinite, indivisible, immutable, eternal, all-knowing, all-powerful, all-loving, and absolutely perfect and just. Deviation from any of these attributes results in an unorthodox view of God.

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

GOD'S HOLINESS AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

As we have seen, God has both moral and nonmoral attributes and characteristics. All of the preceding ones (in chapters 2–12) are non-moral in character. (They are also called "metaphysical attributes," since they describe God's actual nonmoral nature.) The first group of these is also called "incommunicable," since they cannot be communicated to creatures. God alone is Pure Actuality, simple, self-existent, necessary, immutable, eternal, impassible, infinite, immaterial, immense, omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, and ineffable. The other attributes are communicable but still nonmoral: These include wisdom, light, majesty, beauty, life, and immortality.

God also has moral attributes and characteristics; these are communicable to creatures, since they do not necessitate infinitude. They include holiness, righteousness (justice), jealousy, perfection, truthfulness, goodness (love), mercy, and wrath (although, again, these last two may be activities, not attributes as such, which flow from God's goodness and justice, respectively).

GOD'S HOLINESS

God's attribute of holiness defies simple categorization, for it combines both

metaphysical and moral dimensions. In the latter sense, it fits with the other moral attributes just listed and will be treated here.

THE DEFINITION OF GOD'S HOLINESS

The biblical Hebrew words for holy are ***godesh***, meaning "apartness" or "sacredness," and ***gadosh***, translated "sacred" or "holy." The Greek word ***hagios*** means "righteous," "holy," or "pious."

Theologically, God's holiness means that He is totally and utterly set apart from all creation and evil. His holiness is associated with His jealousy (Josh. 24:19), His exaltation (Ps. 99:9; Isa. 5:16), His righteousness (Isa. 5:16; Luke 1:75), His almightiness (Rev. 4:8), His absolute uniqueness (Ex. 15:11), His moral purity (2 Cor. 7:1), and His being vexed by evil (Ps. 78:41). As such, His holiness should inspire a deep sense of awe (Isa. 29:23) and perpetual worship (1 Chron. 16:29; Rev. 4:8) in His creatures.

As mentioned above, God's holiness is both a metaphysical and a moral attribute: It refers to His absolute moral uniqueness as well as His total separateness from all creatures. In one sense, holiness is an overall attribute of God that distinguishes Him from everything else that exists (see Sproul, ***HC***).

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S HOLINESS

God is holy by His very nature. Exodus 15:11 declares, "Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you—majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?" In Leviticus 11:44, God affirms, "I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy. Do not make yourselves unclean by any creature that moves about on the ground." Leviticus 11:45 adds, "I am the LORD who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy." In Leviticus 19:2, He says, "Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: 'Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.' "

And in Leviticus 20:7, He orders, "Consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am the Lord your God." Once again God says (in Leviticus 21:8), "I the Lord am holy—I who make you holy."

In Joshua 24:19, He told the people, “You are not able to serve the LORD. He is a holy God; he is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins.” First Samuel 2:2 affirms that “there is no one holy like the LORD; there is no one besides you [God]; there is no Rock like our God.” First Samuel 6:20 continues, “Who can stand in the presence of the LORD, this holy God?” First Chronicles 16:29 commands, “Ascribe to the LORD the glory due to his name. Bring an offering and come before him; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness.” Psalm 78:41 asserts that “again and again they put God to the test; they vexed the Holy One of Israel.” We are told in Psalm 99:5 to “exalt the Lord our God and worship at his footstool; he is holy.” Psalm 99:9 affirms, “Exalt the LORD our God and worship at his holy mountain, for the Lord our God is holy.” The prophet (Isaiah 5:16) said, “The LORD Almighty will be exalted by his justice, and the holy God will show himself holy by his righteousness.” Again Isaiah 29:23 says, “When they see among them their children, the work of my hands, they will keep my name holy; they will acknowledge the holiness of the Holy One of Jacob, and will stand in awe of the God of Israel.” Numerous biblical passages speak of God as “the Holy One” (Ps. 71:22; Ps. 78:41; Isa. 5:19; 29:23; 43:3; cf. 48:17; 54:5; 55:5; 60:9; Jer. 51:5; Hosea 11:9, 12; Hab. 1:12; 3:3; Mark 1:24; Luke 1:35; 4:34; John 6:69).

In the New Testament, the apostle wrote in 2 Corinthians 7:1, “Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us ***purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God***” (emphasis added). John informs us in Revelation 4:8 that “each of the four living creatures [around God’s throne] had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying, “***Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come***” (emphasis added).

In addition to direct references to God as holy, ***the Godhead has a Holy Spirit*** (Acts 2:33; 4:31; 5:32; 7:55; 10:38; 15:8; 20:28; Rom. 14:17; 15:13, 16; 1 Cor. 6:19; 12:3; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:30; 1 Thess. 4:8; Heb. 2:4; 2 Peter 1:21). ***God has a holy name*** (Lev. 22:2; 1 Chron. 16:35; Ps. 106:47). ***God makes the ground holy where He stands*** (Ex. 3:5). ***He has holy ways*** (Ps. 77:13). ***He takes an unchangeable oath by His holiness*** (Ps. 89:35). ***God has a holy arm*** (Ps. 98:1; Isa. 52:10). ***God sits on a holy throne*** (Ps. 47:8). ***His throne is on a holy mountain*** (Ps. 48:1; Ezek. 28:14). ***God has holy angels*** (Deut. 33:2; Job 15:15; Acts 10:22). ***God ordained a holy day*** (***Sabbath***) ***for Israel*** (Gen. 2:3; Ex. 20:11; Neh. 13:22). ***He also established holy fasts*** (Joel 1:14). ***God has holy prophets***

(Acts 3:21). ***God has a holy place*** (***heaven***) ***where He dwells*** (2 Chron. 30:27; Ps. 46:4; 68:5; Matt. 3:17). ***He had a most holy place in His tabernacle*** (1 Chron. 6:49; 1 Kings 6:16; Ps. 79:1). ***In it God had holy things*** (***furniture and utensils***) (Ex. 25:23ff.; Lev. 5:15; 1 Chron. 23:13).
God chose a holy people (***Israel***) (Deut. 7:6; 14:2, 21; 26:19; 28:9; Col. 1:2; 1 Peter 2:9). ***He also picked special holy men*** (2 Kings 4:9). ***He elected a holy church*** (1 Cor. 1:2). ***He set aside a holy land*** (Zech. 2:12). ***God chose a holy city on earth*** (***Jerusalem***) (Neh. 11:1; Isa. 52:1). ***God's holy city sits on a holy mountain*** (Ps. 15:1; 48:1; Dan. 9:20). ***He also has a holy city in heaven*** (Rev. 21:2, 10). ***God ordained holy priests*** (in Leviticus). ***God even designated a holy dumpsite*** (Jer. 31:40), that is, a special place set apart to dispose of things. ***God demands a holy tithe of His people*** (Lev. 27:30). ***God had holy food*** (Lev. 21:22). ***He expects us to live a holy life*** (Rom. 12:1; 1 Thess. 4:7).

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S HOLINESS

God's holiness follows from several other attributes. The metaphysical aspect of holiness follows from many of His metaphysical attributes, and the moral dimension follows from His absolute perfection.

Holiness Follows From Transcendence

God's transcendence over the world (see chapter 22) sets Him apart from everything in the world. What is so set apart is holy, since holiness means to be set apart from everything in the world. Therefore, the holiness of God follows from His transcendence.

Holiness Follows From Infinity

God is an infinite Being (see chapter 5), and there can be only one infinite

Being, for if there were two infinite Beings, then there would be more than an infinite, which is impossible. Thus, the infinite Being is a class of one, and what is in a class of one is unique and set apart from all other beings—which is what is meant by being holy.

Holiness Follows From Absolute Perfection

Sacred Scripture asserts that God is absolutely perfect (see chapter 14). There cannot be two beings who are absolutely perfect, for to be two they must differ; otherwise they would be the same. To differ, one would have to possess some perfection that the other lacked. But the one who lacked some perfection would not be absolutely perfect; therefore, there can be only one Being who is absolutely perfect—holy, in the metaphysical sense.

Further, if perfection is thought of as moral perfection, then absolute perfection implies holiness as well. God is absolutely perfect, and what is absolutely perfect is set apart from all else. Therefore, God is holy: He is perfect in and of Himself; all else is perfect by participation in His perfection.

An Important Implication of the Moral Attributes of God

The moral dimension of God's holiness, unlike the metaphysical, can be emulated by creatures. This is the sense in which the Bible declares, we "may participate in the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). Thus, God declares, "I am the LORD who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy" (Lev. 11:45). And, "God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life" (1 Thess. 4:7). Thus, Paul urges, "Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God" (2 Cor. 7:1). So we can be like God in His moral attributes, but we cannot emulate Him in His metaphysical attributes. This is why the Bible never says, "I am infinite; be you infinite." Or, "I am a necessary Being; therefore, be you a necessary Being."

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S HOLINESS

Holiness was recognized as a moral attribute of God by the earliest theologians of the church. This begins with the early Fathers.

The Early Church Fathers on God's Holiness

Ignatius

God the Word, the only-begotten Son, was of the seed of David according to the flesh, by the Virgin Mary; was baptized by John, that all righteousness might be fulfilled by Him; that He lived a life of holiness without sin, and was truly under Pontius Pilate and Herod the tetrarch, nailed [to the cross] for us in His flesh. From whom we also derive our being, from His divinely-blessed passion, that He might set up a standard for the ages, through His resurrection, to all His holy and faithful [followers], whether among Jews or Gentiles, in the one body of His Church. (***TE***, 20 in Roberts and Donaldson, ***ANF***, 1)

Justin Martyr

Again, in another prophecy, the Spirit of prophecy, through the same David, intimated that Christ, after He had been crucified, should reign, and spoke as follows: "Sing to the Lord, all the earth, and day by day declare His salvation. For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, to be feared above all the gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols of devils; but God made the heavens. Glory and praise are before His face, strength and glorying are in the habitation of His holiness. Give Glory to the Lord, the Father everlasting. Receive grace, and enter His presence, and worship in His holy courts. Let all the earth fear before His face; let it be established, and not shaken. Let them rejoice among the nations." The Lord hath reigned from the tree.
And then, what is said by David, "In the splendors of Thy holiness have I begotten Thee from the womb, before the morning star. The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek"

(***FA***, 1.41 in ibid., 1).

Clement of Alexandria

This is the eternal adjustment of the vision, which is able to see the eternal light, since like loves like; and that which is holy, loves that from which holiness proceeds, which has appropriately been termed light.
Guide [us], Shepherd of rational sheep; guide unarmed children, O holy King, O footsteps of Christ, O heavenly way, perennial Word, immeasurable Age, Eternal Light, Fount of mercy, performer of virtue; noble [is the] life of those who honor God, O Christ Jesus, heavenly milk of the sweet breasts of the graces of the Bride, pressed out of Thy wisdom. (I, 1.6, 3.1 in ibid., 2)

Tertullian

Moreover, it would be a more unworthy course for God to spare the evil-doer than to punish him, especially in the most good and holy God, who is not otherwise fully good than as the enemy of evil, and ***that*** to such a degree as to display His love of good by the hatred of evil, and to fulfill His defense of the former by the extirpation of the latter. (***FBAM***, 2.1.27 in ibid., 3)

Commodianus (fl. between A.D. third and fifth centuries)

Avoid the worship of temples, the oracles of demons; turn yourselves to Christ, and ye shall be associates with God. Holy is God's law, which teaches the dead to live. God alone has commanded us to offer to Him the hymn of praise. All of you shun absolutely the law of the devil. (IC, 35 in ibid., 4.1.26)

Origen

Isaiah spake of two seraphim alone, who with two wings cover the countenance of God, and with two His feet, and with two do fly, calling to each other alternately, and saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of Sabbath; the whole earth is full of Thy glory." That the seraphim alone have both their wings over the face of God, and over His feet, we venture to declare as meaning that neither the hosts of holy angels, nor the "holy seats," nor the "dominions," nor the

“principalities,” nor the “powers,” can fully understand the beginning of all things, and the limits of the universe. (***DP***, 4.1.26 in ibid.)

The Medieval Fathers on God’s Holiness

The major theological minds of the Middle Ages spoke with reverence of God’s awesome holiness.

Augustine

Augustine spoke of “my holy God, that Thou givest when what Thou commandest to be done is done” (***C***, 13.10.31.45 in Schaff, ***NPNF***, 1.1). “And in another psalm we read, ‘Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of His holiness,’ increasing the joy of the whole earth” (***CG***, 11.1 in ibid., 1.2). Again, Augustine wrote about “the image of God answering to the holiness of the Lord, the brighter portion of the flock of Christ” (***OCD***, 4.21.27 in ibid., 1.2).
“When we praise God directly, we do it as we celebrate His Holiness, who is without sin: but when we accuse ourselves we give Him glory, by whom we have risen again” (***SSLG***, 17.4 in ibid., VI).

> Strengthen me, that I may be able. Give what Thou commandest, and command what Thou wilt. He confesses to have received, and when he glorieth, he glorieth in the Lord. Another have I heard entreating that he might receive, “Take from me,” saith he, “the greediness of the belly”; by which it appeareth, O my holy God, that Thou givest when what Thou commandest to be done is done. (*C*, 10.31.45 in ibid., 1.1)

Anselm

Holiness means to be set apart; this is true of God both morally and metaphysically. Anselm stressed the latter when he said,

> Of all the things that can be said of something, could any be appropriate to the substance of so wonderful a nature as this? This is the question to ask as carefully as possible at this point. I would be surprised if we could find anything from among the nouns and verbs which we apply to things created from nothing that could worthily be said of the substance that created all.… Hence,

> the mere fact that the supreme nature is greater than everything that it has created clearly does not specify its natural essence. (*ACMW*, 26)

Hence, "neither nothing, nor something, went before or will come after the supreme essence; and that nothing existed before or will exist after it—this will be totally true" (ibid., 33).

Thomas Aquinas

> We are drawn to goodness as by an end. What our ends are ultimately decides whether our voluntary acts are right or wrong. Consider then how the love which loves the supreme good which is God, is so excellent that it is called *holy* —whether that means *pure*, as the Greeks say, for God's is sheer goodness quite unflecked, or firm, as the Latins say, for God's is immutable goodness. Fittingly, therefore, we speak of the Spirit which is God's love of himself as the Holy Spirit. (Aquinas, *CT*, 47 in Gilby, *PTTA*, 89)

The Reformation Theologians on God's Holiness

The great Reformers, with their focus on the doctrine of God's grace, could not help but place it in the context of His holiness.

Martin Luther

> We should not be holy in order to earn or prevent something. For people who do this are hirelings, servants, and day laborers. They are not willing children and heirs who are holy for the sake of holiness, that is, for the sake of God alone; for God Himself is Righteousness, Truth, Goodness, Wisdom, and Holiness. And he who seeks no more than holiness itself, seeks and finds God Himself. But he who seeks reward and flees punishment never finds God but makes reward his god. For that which moves a man to do something is his god. (*WLS*, 655–56)

"God must administer justice, for He has Himself been called a righteous Judge" (***WL***, 4.33).

John Calvin

"With what better foundation can it begin than by reminding us that we must be holy, because 'God is holy?' (Leviticus 19:2; 1 Peter 1:16.)" (***ICR***, 3.6.2).

> Assuredly, the attributes which it is most necessary for us to know are these three: Loving-kindness, on which alone our entire safety depends; Judgment, which is daily exercised on the wicked, and awaits them in a severer form, even for eternal destruction; Righteousness, by which the faithful are preserved, and most benignly cherished. The prophet declares, that when you understand these, you are amply furnished with the means of glorying in God. Nor is there here any omission of his truth, or power, or holiness, or goodness. For how could this knowledge of his loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, exist, if it were not founded on his inviolable truth? (ibid., 1.10.2)

Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531)

If they will not retain God in their knowledge (Rom. *I*), or nourish their hungry soul with a sweet hope in God, God the righteous Judge will undoubtedly fill their hearts with the foreboding fear and anguish of eternal torment, so that not having the desire to enter now upon eternal life in quiet expectation, they begin to experience already that eternal perdition which in the world to come they will fulfill eternally. (Bromley, *ZB*, 63)

The Post-Reformation Theologians on God's Holiness

Jonathan Edwards

> The reason why it is not dishonourable to be necessarily *most* holy is because *holiness* in itself is an excellent and honourable thing. For the same reason, it is no dishonour to be necessarily *most wise*, and, in every case, to act most wisely, or do the thing which is the wisest of all; for wisdom is also in itself excellent and honourable. (*WJE*, 1.71)
>
> Being thus infinite in understanding and power, he must also be perfectly holy; for unholiness always argues some defect, some blindness. Where there is no darkness or delusion, there can be no unholiness. It is impossible that wickedness should consist with infinite light, (ibid., 2.108)

Thus, “God is essentially holy, and nothing is more impossible than that God should do amiss” (ibid., Seven Sermons, 2).

Stephen Gharnock

> Never did Divine holiness appear more beautiful and lovely, than at the time our Saviour’s countenance was most marred in the midst of his dying groans. This himself acknowledges in that prophetical psalm [22:1–2], when God had turned his smiling face from him, and thrust his sharp knife into his heart, which forced that terrible cry from him, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” He adores this perfection of his holiness.... In this his purity did sparkle, and his irreversible justice manifested that all those that commit sin are worthy of death; this was the perfect index of his “righteousness” [Rom. 3:25], that is, of his holiness and truth; then it was that God that is holy was “sanctif in righteousness” [Isa. 5:16] (*EAG*, 2.135).

In fact, “God always acts according to the immutable nature of his holiness, and can no more change in his affections to evil, than he can [change] in his essence” (ibid., 1.345).

R. L. Dabney

> Most frequently it seems to express the general idea of His moral purity, as in Lev. 11 ; Ps. 65 ; 1 Peter 1:15–16 ; sometimes it seems to express rather the idea of His majesty, not exclusive of His moral perfections, but inclusive also of His power, knowledge and wisdom, as in Ps. 22:3 ;

Is. 6:3

;

Rev. 4:8

. Holiness, therefore, is to be regarded, not as a distinct attribute, but as the resultant of all God’s moral attributes together. And as His justice, goodness, and truth are all predicated of Him as a Being of intellect and will, and would be wholly irrelevant to anything unintelligent and involuntary, so His holiness implies a reference to the same attributes. His moral attributes are the special crown; His intelligence and will are the brow that wears it. His holiness is the collective and consummate glory of His nature as an infinite, morally pure, active, and intelligent Spirit. (*LST*, 172–73)

William G. T. Shedd

The Holiness of God is the perfect rectitude of his will. The divine will is in absolute harmony with the divine nature.

Isa. 6:3

, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.”

Isa. 57:15

;

Ex. 15:11

;

Ps. 89:35

;

145:17

;

Amos 4:2

;

Rev. 4:8

;

15:4

. God’s word is holy,

Rom. 1:2

. His promise is holy,

Ps. 105:42

. His Sabbath is holy,

Isa. 58:13

. His people are holy,

Isa. 62:12

. His residence is holy,

Isa. 57:15

. His angels are holy,

Rev. 14:10

.

> *Holiness*
> in God cannot be defined in the same terms in which *holiness* in man or angel is defined, namely, as conformity to the moral law. The moral law supposes a superior being whose love and service are obligatory upon the inferior.... Holiness in God must, consequently, be defined as conformity to his own perfect nature. (*DT*, 362)

OBJECTION TO GOD'S HOLINESS

Criticisms of the doctrine of God's holiness have come from many quarters. It is much more popular to speak of a loving God than a holy God. Further, it is difficult for many to understand how an absolutely simple Being can be more than one thing. What is more, some attributes, like holiness and love, seem to be incompatible.

Objection One—Based on God's Love

It is objected that God cannot be both loving and holy at the same time, for one attribute would lead God to save all, but the other to condemn all. These appear to be contradictory desires, and God cannot contradict Himself. Hence, it seems impossible for God to be holy if He is a God of love. But the Bible declares, "God is love" (1 John 4:16).

Response to Objection One

It is true that God cannot be or do contradictory things. However, there is no contradiction here for two reasons.
First, God's love can be expressed even toward those who reject it. For example, the waterfall that would fill two cups underneath it is flowing on both. But only the one that is right side up is going to be filled with water.
Second, the wrath of God falling on the condemned in hell and the love of God showering the saints in heaven are not being received by one and the same

group. Hence, there is no contradiction, since the same persons are not receiving opposite expressions of God. God has different attributes, and each is expressed on different objects, depending on their condition.

Objection Two—Based on God's Simplicity

God is absolutely one, with no multiplicity or divisibility in His Being whatsoever. What is absolutely one cannot be many different things; thus, if God is love, then it would seem to follow that He cannot also be holy (or have any other attribute).

Response to Objection Two

God can be absolutely one and still have many attributes in the same way that the radii of a circle are one at the center and many at the circumference. Further, as we have seen, one and the same rock has many attributes at the same time: It is hard, round, and solid. Thus, one and the same God can have many attributes. The insistence that God cannot be one in essence and many in attributes is due to a failure to understand analogy (see Volume 1, chapter 9). Each attribute of God is being affirmed of Him in an analogous way, not in a univocal way; a contradiction emerges only if different attributes are affirmed of God in exactly the same way, for then God would be different things in the same way, which is impossible.

GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS (JUSTICE)

God's righteousness (or justice) is a moral attribute; as such, it is intrinsic to God (and extrinsic to creatures). Being an infinite and unchanging Being, God is infinitely and immutably righteous.

THE DEFINITION OF GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS

Literally, the word ***righteous*** (Gk: ***dikaios***) means "to be just" or "right." Theologically, it refers to the intrinsic characteristic of God wherein He is absolutely just or right and is the ultimate standard of justice and rightness.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS

The biblical basis for God's righteousness is found in the many ways the word is used regarding God.

(1) Righteousness involves His true ordinances (Ps. 19:9): "The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous."

(2) Righteousness is the foundation of His throne (Ps. 89:14): "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you."

(3) Righteousness is the scepter of his kingdom (Heb. 1:8): "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom."

(4) Righteousness does no injustice (Zeph. 3:5): "The Lord within her is righteous; he does no wrong. Morning by morning he dispenses his justice, and every new day he does not fail."

(5) Righteousness will endure forever (2 Cor. 9:9): "As it is written: 'He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures for ever.' "

(6) Righteousness is the ultimate standard of judgment for the world (Acts 17:31): "For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed."

(7) Righteousness renders to all according to their deeds (Rom. 2:6): "God will give to each person according to what he has done."

(8) Righteousness is the basis for the believer's rewards (2 Tim. 4:8): "Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the LORD, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to

all who have longed for his appearing."
(9) Righteousness is revealed in the law of God (Rom. 10:5): "Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law."

Being a moral attribute, righteousness can also be possessed by creatures: It is a communicable characteristic of God. Hence, it is something

(1) we should be ***instructed in*** (2 Tim. 3:16–17);
(2) we should ***seek*** (Matt. 6:33);
(3) we should ***pursue*** (2 Tim. 2:22);
(4) we should ***thirst after*** (Matt. 5:6);
(5) we should ***suffer for*** (1 Peter 3:14; 2 Tim. 3:12);
(6) we should ***submit to*** (Rom. 10:3);
(7) we should ***be slaves of*** (Rom. 6:18);
(8) we should ***practice*** (1 John 3:7).

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S RIGHTEOUNESS

Theologically, God's righteousness is grounded in His morality and immutability: God is metaphysically absolute and morally perfect. The reasoning goes like this:

(1) God is an immutable (unchanging) Being.
(2) God is also a moral Being.
(3) Hence, God must be unchangingly moral.
(4) But being righteous is a characteristic of a moral Being.
(5) Therefore, God must be unchangingly righteous; that is, He must be absolutely right in everything He is and does.

The same logic can be applied this way:

(1) God is a moral Being.
(2) God is a perfect Being.
(3) Hence, God is a morally perfect Being. One characteristic of being moral is being righteous; therefore, God is a perfectly righteous Being.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS

The Early Church Fathers on God's Righteousness

From earliest times the church Fathers spoke of God's righteousness. This practice continues to the present.

Ignatius

Again,

> God the Word, the only-begotten Son, was of the seed of David according to the flesh, by the Virgin Mary; was baptized by John, that all righteousness might be fulfilled by Him; that He lived a life of holiness without sin, and was truly, under Pontius Pilate and Herod the tetrarch, nailed [to the cross] for us in His flesh. From whom we also derive our being, from His divinely blessed passion, that He might set up a standard for the ages, through His resurrection, to all His holy and faithful [followers], whether among Jews or Gentiles, in the one body of His Church. (*ES*, 1 in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, 1)

Irenaeus

> Wherefore also he shall be justly condemned, because, having been created a rational being, he lost the true rationality, and living irrationally, opposed the righteousness of God, giving himself over to every earthly spirit, and serving all lusts; as says the prophet, "Man, being in honor, did not understand: he was assimilated to senseless beasts, and made like to them" (*AH*, 4.4 in ibid., 1).
> Inasmuch, then, as in both Testaments there is the same righteousness of God [displayed] when God takes vengeance, in the one case indeed typically, temporarily, and more moderately; but in the other, really, enduringly, and more rigidly: for the fire is eternal, and the wrath of God which shall be revealed from heaven from the face of our Lord, (ibid., 4.28.1)

Justin Martyr

But if we do not admit this, we shall be liable to fall into foolish opinions, as if it were not the same God who existed in the times of Enoch and all the rest, who neither were circumcised after the flesh, nor observed Sabbaths, nor any other rites, seeing that Moses enjoined such observances; or that God has not wished each race of mankind continually to perform the same righteous actions: to admit which, seems to be ridiculous and absurd. Therefore we must confess that He, who is ever the same, has commanded these and such like institutions on account of sinful men, and we must declare Him to be benevolent, foreknowing, needing nothing, righteous and good. (*DJ*, 23 in ibid.,

Theophilus

Wisdom, I speak of His offspring; if I call Him Strength, I speak of His sway; if I call Him Power, I am mentioning His activity; if Providence, I but mention His goodness; if I call Him Kingdom, I but mention His glory; if I call Him Lord, I mention His being judge; if I call Him Judge, I speak of Him as being just; if I call Him Father, I speak of all things as being from Him; if I call Him Fire, I but mention His anger. You will say, then, to me, “Is God angry?” Yes; He is angry with those who act wickedly, but He is good, and kind, and merciful, to those who love and fear Him; for He is a chastener of the godly, and father of the righteous; but he is a judge and punisher of the impious. (*TA*, 1:3 in ibid., 2)

Shepherd of Hermas (c. early second century)

Give ear unto me, O Sons: I have brought you up in much simplicity, and guilelessness, and chastity, on account of the mercy of the Lord, who has dropped His righteousness down upon you, that ye may be made righteous and holy from all your iniquity and depravity; but you do not wish to rest from your iniquity. Now, therefore, listen to me, and be at peace one with another, and visit each other, and bear each other’s burdens, and do not partake of God’s creatures alone, but give abundantly of them to the needy. (*PH*, 3:9 in ibid.)

Clement of Alexandria

> Truly, he who worships gods that are visible, and the promiscuous rabble of creatures begotten and born, and attaches himself to them, is a far more wretched object than the very demons. For God is by no manner or means unrighteous, as the demons are, but in the very highest degree righteous; and nothing more resembles God than one of us when he becomes righteous in the highest possible degree. (*EH*, 10 in ibid.)

Terlullian

> It was once the law; now it is "the righteousness of God which is by the faith of [Jesus] Christ." What means this distinction? Has your god been subserving the interests of the Creator's dispensation, by affording time to Him and to His law? Is the "Now" in the hands of Him to whom belonged the "Then"? Surely, then, the law was His, whose is now the righteousness of God. (*FBAM*, 2.5.11.13 in ibid., 3)

The Medieval Fathers on God's Righteousness

Following the patristic Fathers, medieval theologians had high regard for God's righteousness. They spoke of it often, stressing its importance among God's moral attributes.

Augustine

Thee do I long for, O righteousness and innocency, fair and comely to all virtuous eyes, and of a satisfaction that never palls! With thee is perfect rest, and life unchanging. He who enters into thee enters into the joy of his Lord, and shall have no fear, and shall do excellently in the most Excellent. I sank away from Thee, O my God, and I wandered too far from Thee, my stay, in my youth, and became to myself an unfruitful land. (C, 2.10.18 in Schaff, ***NPNF***, 1.1)
Lord, have mercy on me and hear my desire. For I think that it is not of the earth, nor of gold and silver, and precious stones, nor gorgeous apparel, nor honors and powers, nor the pleasures of the flesh, nor necessaries for the body and this life

of our pilgrimage, all of which are added to those that seek Thy kingdom and Thy righteousness, (ibid., 11.3.4)
And who is this but Thee, our God, the sweetness and well spring of righteousness, who renderest “to every man according to his deeds,” and a contrite heart! (ibid., 4.3.4).
The more we ardently love God, the more certainly and the more calmly do we see Him, and we behold in God the unchangeable form of righteousness according to which we judge that man ought to live (***OTT***, 8.9.13 in op. cit, 1.3).

Anselm

> How do You spare the wicked if You are all just and supremely just? For how does the all just and supremely just One do something that is unjust? Or what kind of justice is it to give everlasting life to him who merits eternal death? How then, O good God, good to the good and to the wicked, how do You save the wicked if this is not just and You do not do anything which is not just? Or, since Your goodness is beyond comprehension, is this hidden in the inaccessible light in which You dwell? Truly in the deepest and most secret place of Your goodness is hidden the source whence the stream of Your mercy flows. For though You are all just and supremely just You are, however—precisely because You are all just and supremely just—also beneficent even to the wicked. You would, in fact, be less good if You were not beneficent to any wicked man. For he who is good to both good and wicked is better than he who is good only to the good. And he who is good to the wicked by both punishing and sparing them is better than he who is good to the wicked only by punishing them. You are merciful, then, because You are all-good and supremely good. (*ACMW*, 191)

Thomas Aquinas

It is impossible for God to will anything but what His wisdom approves. This is, as it were, His law of justice, in accordance with which His will is right and just. Hence, what He does according to His will He does justly: as we do justly what we do according to law. But whereas law comes to us from some higher power God is a law unto Himself. (***ST***, la.21.1)
God is sheer goodness, whereas other things are credited with the sort of goodness appropriate to their natures. Justice, for example, is defined with reference to one type of activity. God’s being is identical with his acting; therefore for him to be good and to be just is one and the same. We do not touch this simplicity, our substance and our activity are distinct, and the goodness

attributed to us because we exist is not identical with the goodness attributed to us because our dealings are fair.
Goodness is a general term, under which justice, and the other virtues, are special headings. God's is goodness at full strength, whereas not every type of goodness is discovered in other things, for the type varies from one to another. Though all are good in some way, not all possess the type of goodness called justice. Some are just, others have their different but appropriate kind of goodness. Yet all are good because they flow from the fount of goodness. God be praised through all things. (*Exposition de Hebdomadibus*, 5 in Gilby, ***TTA***, 38–39)

The Reformation Theologians on God's Righteousness

The doctrine of God's justice came into bright focus during the Reformation, with its emphasis on justification by faith. As Paul put it in Romans 3, the question became how God could be just and still justify the unjust.

Martin Luther

"God standeth in His congregation and judgeth the gods; that is, He rebukes them. For He keeps the upper hand over them and the right to judge them" (***WL***, 4.295).
And,

> if the Lord our God appoints anything for us, whether it is good or evil, brings weal or woe, is shame or honor, prosperity or adversity, I am to consider it not only good but actually sacred, and I am to say: This is a pure and precious blessing. I am not worthy to have it touch me. So says the prophet (Ps. 145:17): "The Lord is righteous in all His ways and holy in all His works." If I give God praise for such matters and consider them good, holy, and excellent, I sanctify Him in my heart.
>
> But those who consult books of law, complain that an injustice is being done them, and say God is asleep and will not help the just and restrain injustice—they dishonor Him and consider Him neither just nor holy. But whoever is a Christian should attribute justice to God and injustice to himself, should consider God holy and himself unholy, and should say that in all His deeds and works He is

holy and just. This is what He requires.... If we sing
Deo gratias
and
Te Deum laudamus
and say, God be praised and blessed, when misfortune overtakes us, that is what Peter and Isaiah (
8:12f
.) call a true hallowing of the Lord. (*WLS*, 555–56)

John Calvin

The Scripture system of which we speak aims chiefly at two objects. The former is, that the love of righteousness, to which we are by no means naturally inclined, may be instilled and implanted into our minds. The latter is (see chapter 2) to prescribe a rule which will prevent us while in the pursuit of righteousness from going astray. It has numerous admirable methods of recommending righteousness. Many have been already pointed out in different parts of this work; but we shall here also briefly advert to some of them. With what better foundation can it begin than by reminding us that we must be holy, because "God is holy"? [Leviticus 19:1; 1 Peter 1:16] (***ICR***, 3.6.2).
Read this again:

> Assuredly, the attributes which it is most necessary for us to know are these three: Loving kindness, on which alone our entire safety depends: Judgment, which is daily exercised on the wicked, and awaits them in a severer form, even for eternal destruction: Righteousness, by which the faithful are preserved, and most benignly cherished. The prophet declares, that when you understand these, you are amply furnished with the means of glorying in God. Nor is there here any omission of his truth, or power, or holiness, or goodness. For how could this knowledge of his loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness, exist, if it were not founded on his inviolable truth? (ibid., 1:10:2)
>
> But though in every passage where the favour or anger of God is mentioned, the former comprehends eternity of life and the latter eternal destruction, the Law, at the same time, enumerates a long catalogue of present blessings and curses (
> Lev. 26:4
> ;
> Deut. 28:1
>). The threatenings attest the spotless purity of God, which cannot bear iniquity, while the promises attest at once his infinite love of righteousness (which he cannot leave unrewarded), and his wondrous kindness. Being bound to do him homage with all that we have, he is perfectly entitled to demand everything which he requires of us as a debt; and as a debt, the payment is unworthy of reward. He therefore foregoes his right, when he holds forth reward for services

> which are not offered spontaneously, as if they were not due. (ibid., 1:8:4)

Jacob Arminius

The Justice of God, considered universally, is a virtue of God according to which He administers all things correctly and in a suitable manner, according to that which his Wisdom dictates as befitting Himself. In conjunction with Wisdom, it presides over all his acts, decrees and deeds: And according to it, God is said to be "just and right," his way "equal," and himself to be "just in all his ways." The particular Justice of God is that by which He consistently renders to every one his own: to God himself that which is His, and to the creature that which belongs to itself. We consider it both in the words of God and in his deeds. In this, the method of the decrees is not different; because whatever God does or says, he does or says it according to his own eternal decree. This Justice likewise contains a moderator partly of his love for the good of obedience, and partly of his love for the creature, and of his goodness. (***WJA***, 11:48)

The Post Reformation Teachers on God's Righteousness

Jonathan Edwards

[About the resurrection], God willing the event was the most holy volition of God that ever was made known to men; and God's act in ordering it was a divine act, which, above all others, manifests the moral excellency of the Divine Being. (***WJE***, 1.78)

Stephen Charnock

As we have seen,

> Never did Divine holiness appear more beautiful and lovely than at the time our Saviour's countenance was most marred in the midst of his dying groans. This himself acknowledges in that prophetical psalm [xxii. 1–2], when God had turned his smiling face from him, and thrust his sharp knife into his heart, which forced that terrible cry from him, "My God, my God, why hast thou

forsaken me?" He adores this perfection of his holiness.... In this his purity did sparkle, and his irreversible justice manifested that all those that commit sin are worthy of death; this was the perfect index of his "righteousness" [Rom. 3:25], that is, of his holiness and truth; then it was that God that is holy, was "sanctified in righteousness" [Isa. 5:16]. (*EAG*, 2.135)

John Miley

In every form and in the deepest sense God is righteous. Abraham apprehended this truth in his profound question, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" There was a special case in question; but there is no sense of a local or temporary limitation in the meaning of the words. There is a universal and eternal righteousness of the divine agency. "He is the Rock, his work is perfect; for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he."

"Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and thy law is the truth." These texts express the same deep sense of an ever-present holiness in the divine moral government. "The law of the Lord is perfect"—perfect as the expression of this divine holiness; perfect therefore as the standard of right; perfect in its requirements; perfect in its sanctions. All this is summed into one sentence by St. Paul: "The law is holy and the commandment holy, and just, and good" [Rom. 7:12] (***ST***, 200).

William G. T. Shedd

It is here and thus that we can explain the blessedness of God in connection with his omniscience and omnipresence. We know that sin and the punishment of sin are ever before him. The feeling of wrath against the wickedness of man and devils, is constantly in the Divine essence. Yet God is supremely and constantly blessed. He can be so, only because there is a just and proper harmony between the wrath and the object upon which it falls; only because he hates that which is hateful, and condemns what is damnable. Hence he is called "God over ***all*** [hell as well as heaven] blessed forever." The Divine blessedness is not destroyed by the sin of his creatures, or by his own holy displeasure against it. And here, also,

is seen the compatibility of some everlasting sin and misery with the Divine perfection. If the feeling of wrath against moral evil is right and rational, there is no impropriety in its exercise by the Supreme being, and its exercise by him is the substance of hell. If the feeling is proper for a single instant, it is so forever. (***DT***, 177–78)

J. I. Packer

[Anger] is, instead, a right and necessary reaction to objective moral evil. God is only angry where anger is called for. Even among humans, there is such a thing as ***righteous*** indignation, though it is, perhaps, rarely found. But all God's indignation is righteous. Would a God who took as much pleasure in evil as he did in good be a good God? Would a God who did not react adversely to evil in his world be morally perfect? Surely not. But it is precisely this adverse reaction to evil, which is a necessary part of moral perfection, that the Bible has in view when it speaks of God's wrath. (***KG***, 151)

God is the judge of all the earth, and he will do right, vindicating the innocent, if such there be, but punishing … lawbreakers. God is not true to himself unless he punishes sin. And unless one knows and feels the truth of this fact, that wrongdoers have no natural hope of anything from God but retributive judgment, one can never share the biblical faith in divine grace, (ibid., 130–31)

God has resolved to be every person's Judge, rewarding every person according to his works. Retribution is the inescapable moral law of creation; God will see that each person sooner or later receives what he deserves—if not here, then hereafter. This is one of the basic facts of life. And, being made in God's image, we all know in our hearts that this is right. This is how it ought to be. (ibid., 143)

OBJECTIONS TO GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS

The primary objection to God's righteousness is the doctrine of His grace. How can God justly save the unjust? The objection is penetrating, but the answer is profound.

Objection One—Based on Transferred Righteousness

According to Scripture, God punished the Righteous (Christ) for the unrighteous (sinners) and transferred His righteousness to our account (see Volume 3, chapter 9). This seems like an unrighteous (unjust) process: Why should the innocent be punished for the guilty, and why should the guilty receive the alien righteousness of Another?

Response to Objection One

This problem is answered in many passages of Scripture, the most succinct of which is Romans 3:21–26:

> But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

In essence, the answer is this: God punished the Righteous (Christ) for the unrighteous, so that His righteousness (justice) could be satisfied (propitiated) and His mercy released to all who believe. So He can be both just and the Justifier of the unjust because His justice was satisfied, and so His grace can be freely exercised on all who receive His gift of salvation by faith (see Volume 3, chapter 9).

Humans Are Utterly Unrighteous

Measured by God's perfect righteousness, fallen human beings are wholly unrighteous. Our unrighteousness is ***universal*** (Rom. 3:10): As it is written, "There is no one righteous, not even one"; our righteousness is ***inadequate*** (Matt. 5:20): "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven"; our unrighteousness is ***pervasive*** (Rom. 3:11–18); our righteousness is ***hopeless*** (Jer. 13:23): "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its

spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil"; our righteousness is ***worthless*** (Isa. 64:6): "All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away"; our righteousness is ***helpless*** (cf. Titus 3:5–7).

Christ's Righteousness Is Perfect

In contrast to our utter unrighteousness, Christ's righteousness is completely perfect. He lived a perfect life (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb 4:15; 1 Peter 3:18; 1 John 3:3), and He fulfilled the demands of the law. Jesus said at His baptism: "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15). Later He said He came to fulfill, not destroy, the righteous demands of the law: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matt. 5:17).

Christ's Righteousness Is Imputed to Believers

In addition to living a perfect life and fulfilling the righteous demands of the law, Christ's righteousness is transferred to believers:

> For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit. (
>
> Rom. 8:3–4
>
>)

Paul added, "Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes" (Rom. 10:3–4).

Christ Satisfied God's Righteous Demands on Our Behalf

Christ's absolute righteousness alone satisfies (propitiates) the demands of an absolutely righteous God. The Greek term "propitiate" (***hilasteerion***) is used

only three times in the New Testament. John informs us that “He [Christ] is the atoning sacrifice [propitiation] for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2). He adds, “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice [propitiation] for our sins” (1 John 4:10). Thus, “God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement [propitiation], through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished” (Rom. 3:25).

Christ’s Righteousness Is Imputed Only to Believers

It is noteworthy from the proceeding passage that the imputation of God’s righteousness to unrighteous human beings is not automatic; it is only “***for everyone who believes***.” As Paul said earlier, we

> are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. (
>
> Rom. 3:24–27
>
>)

Jesus became a perfect substitute for our unrighteousness, for “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21). As Peter put it, “Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God” (1 Peter 3:18). So “by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast” (Eph. 2:8–9).
God imputed our unrighteousness to Christ that the gift of His righteousness might be imputed to us by faith.

> For if, by the trespass of the one man [Adam], death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men,

so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. (Rom. 5:17–18)

So

to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited [imputed] as righteousness. David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits [imputes] righteousness apart from works. (Rom. 4:5–6)

Speaking of Abraham being justified by faith, Paul declared, “This is why ‘it was credited to him as righteousness’ ” (Rom. 4:22). So “The words ‘it was credited to him’ were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead” (Rom. 4:23). Thus, believers are “found in him [Christ], not having a righteousness of [our] own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith” (Phil. 3:9).

How is this fair? It was voluntarily given and it must be voluntarily received. It is fair because God’s justice was satisfied so His mercy could be released.

Objection Two—Based on the Concept of Justice

As we have seen, justice is traditionally defined as “to each his due, or getting what one deserves.” If so, then the sinner deserves death (Rom. 6:23) and hell (Rev. 20:11–15). Those who believe are excused from this consequence; hence, it would seem that justice has not been satisfied.

Response to Objection Two

As pointed out in the previous response, justice has been satisfied—not by the sinner himself, but by his substitute, Christ. Therefore, while the just punishment due the sinner was not executed on him, it was taken up—fully—by the sinless Savior. This is what makes grace shine so brightly.
As Aquinas (1225–1274) put it,

> God acts mercifully, not indeed by going against His justice, but by doing something more than justice; thus a man who pays another two hundred pieces of money, though owing him only one hundred, does nothing against justice, but acts liberally or mercifully. The case is the same with one who pardons an offense committed against him, for in remitting it he may be said to bestow a gift. Hence the Apostle calls remission a forgiving: "Forgive one another, as Christ has forgiven you" [Eph. 4:32]. Hence it is clear that mercy does not destroy justice, but in a sense is the fullness thereof. And thus it is said: "Mercy exalteth itself above judgment" [James 2:13] (*ST*, 1.21.3).

In addition, while it is unjust to ***charge*** another person for my crime, it is not unjust for them to voluntarily ***pay*** the fine. Christ was not charged by God with our crime—He ***paid*** it for us, but it was ***our*** crime and God charged ***us*** with it. Hence, rather than being immoral, a voluntary substitutionary atonement is the apex of morality. As Paul said,

> Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Rom. 5:7–8)

In short, God's justice demands that ***all sin be punished***, but not necessarily that ***all sinners be punished*** for their sin.

Further, since Christ was God (see chapter 12), in His case the one who demanded the penalty (God) was the One who paid it—the Judge atoned for the defendant. Like an earthly judge who takes off his robe, reaches into his wallet, and pays the fine for his child, the defendant, even so God did this for us—Christ's death replaced our death sentence. Thus, by example, the complaint that it is unjust to pay the penalty for another's sin vanishes (see Volume 3, chapter

10, for further discussion).

CONCLUSION

God's holiness designates His total and utter separation from all creation and evil. Holiness is both a metaphysical and a moral attribute: It refers to His absolute moral uniqueness as well as His total separateness from all creatures. As established above, in one sense holiness is an overall attribute of God that distinguishes Him from everything else that exists.
God's righteousness refers to His absolute justice or rightness. Righteousness is the intrinsic characteristic of God wherein He is the ultimate standard of just and right actions and because of which He must punish all unjust and evil acts.

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

GOD'S JEALOUSY AND PERFECTION

Two more of God's moral attributes are jealousy and perfection. Admittedly, jealousy is a surprising attribute, yet it is one of only a few that the Bible declares is God's "name," a distinctive title of one of God's essential characteristics. In fact, this raises the unique problem (discussed below) as to why what is a sin for creatures is a moral attribute of God.

THE DEFINITION OF GOD'S JEALOUSY

The root meanings of the basic Old Testament word for "jealous" (***kannaw***) are "to be desirous of," "to be zealous about," "to be excited to anger over," and "to execute judgment because of."

The Bible speaks of man's jealousy ("zealous envy," "angry fury") in many places. It talks of being jealous of one's brother (Gen. 37:11); of having jealousy over a wife (Num. 5:14); of jealousy leading to rage (Prov. 6:34); of jealousy being as cruel as death (Song 8:6 NKJV); of jealousy and selfish ambition (James 3:16); and of Paul's jealous zeal for the church (2 Cor. 11:2—see below, under "An Objection to God's Jealousy").

As will be shown (in the texts cited below), jealousy is used of God in terms of His holy zeal and His angry wrath. God has holy zeal to protect His supremacy, and God has angry wrath on idolatry and other sins.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S JEALOUSY

God's jealousy can be understood by looking at its nature, its subject, and its object.

The Nature of God's Jealousy

God's jealousy carries the connotation of anger, fury, and wrath. ***Anger*** (Deut. 29:20): "The LORD will never be willing to forgive him; his wrath and zeal will burn against that man. All the curses written in this book will fall upon him, and the Lord will blot out his name from under heaven." ***Fury*** (Zech. 8:2): "This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'I am very jealous for Zion; I am burning with jealousy for her.' " Wrath (Isa. 42:13): "The LORD will march out like a mighty man, like a warrior he will stir up his zeal; with a shout he will raise the battle cry and will triumph over his enemies."

The Subject of God's Jealousy

God's jealousy is vented on images, idols, other gods, and other sins. ***Images*** (Ps. 78:58): "They angered him with their high places; they aroused his jealousy with their idols." ***Idols*** (1 Cor. 10:19–22): "Do I mean then that a sacrifice offered to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God.… Are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy?" ***Other gods*** (Deut. 32:16): "They made him jealous with their foreign gods and angered him with their detestable idols." ***Other sins*** (1 Kings 14:22): "Judah did evil in the eyes of the Lord. By the sins they committed they stirred up his jealous anger more than their fathers had done."

The Object of God's Jealousy

The object of God's jealousy is first and foremost His own nature, then His name, His people (Israel), His land (the Holy Land), and His city (Jerusalem). ***His own nature*** (Ex. 34:14): "Do not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God." ***His name*** (Ezek. 39:25): "Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will now bring Jacob back from captivity and will have compassion on all the people of Israel, and I will be zealous for my holy name." ***His people*** (Zech. 8:2): "This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'I am very jealous for Zion; I am burning with jealousy for her.' " ***His land*** (Joel 2:18): "Then the LORD will be jealous for his land and take pity on his people." ***His city*** (Zech. 1:14): "Proclaim this word: This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'I am very jealous for Jerusalem and Zion.' "

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S JEALOUSY

A combination of other attributes forms the basis for God's jealousy. Foremost among these is God's holiness; God is particularly jealous about preserving His own uniqueness. Of course, all of God's attributes are unique and comprise the one infinite, absolutely perfect, and supreme God. The theological argument for God's jealousy can be formulated as follows:

(1) God is unique and supreme (see His metaphysical attributes—chapters 2–12).
(2) God is holy, loving, and morally perfect (see His moral attributes—chapters 13–17).
(3) Hence, God is uniquely and supremely holy, loving, and morally perfect.
(4) Whatever is supremely holy, loving, and perfect is to be preserved with the utmost zeal.
(5) God's jealousy is His zeal to preserve His own holy supremacy.
(6) Therefore, He is eminently justified in His jealousy. Indeed, it is essential to His very nature: His name is Jealous (Ex. 34:14).

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S JEALOUSY

The Early Church Fathers on God's Jealousy

Although not one of the more noted attributes of God, His jealousy did not go unnoticed by the early church Fathers. There are considerable references to God's jealousy.

Justin Martyr

> They sacrificed to demons whom they knew not; new gods that came newly up, whom their fathers knew not. Thou hast forsaken God that begat thee, and forgotten God that brought thee up. And the Lord saw, and was jealous, and was provoked to anger by reason of the rage of His sons and daughters.... They have moved Me to jealousy with that which is not God, they have provoked Me to anger with their idols; and I will move them to jealousy with that which is not a nation, I will provoke them to anger with a foolish people. For a fire is kindled from Mine anger, and it shall burn to Hades. (*DJ*, 119 in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, 1)

Irenaeus

> It is therefore one and the same God the Father who has prepared good things with Himself for those who desire His fellowship, and who remain in subjection to Him; and who has the eternal fire for the ringleader of the apostasy, the devil, and those who revolted with him, into which [fire] the Lord has declared those men shall be sent who have been set apart by themselves on His left hand. And this is what has been spoken by the prophet, "I am a jealous God, making peace, and creating evil things"; thus making peace and friendship with those who repent and turn to Him, and bringing [them to] unity, but preparing for the impenitent, those who shun the light, eternal fire and outer darkness, which are evils indeed to those persons who fall into them. (*AH*, 4.40.1 in ibid., I)

Tertullian

Even His severity then is good, because [it is] just: when the judge is good, that is just. Other qualities likewise are good, by means of which the good work of a good severity runs out its course, whether wrath, or jealousy, or sternness. For all these are as indispensable to severity as severity is to justice. The shamelessness of an age, which ought to have been reverent, had to be avenged. Accordingly, qualities which pertain to the judge, when they are actually free from blame, as the judge himself is, will never be able to be charged upon him as a fault. (*FBAM*, 2.216 in ibid., 3)

Cyprian

There is no ground, therefore, dearest brother, for thinking that we should give way to heretics so far as to contemplate the betrayal to them of that baptism, which is only granted to the one and only Church. It is a good soldier's duty to defend the camp of his general against rebels and enemies. It is the duty of an illustrious leader to keep the standards entrusted to him. It is written, "The Lord thy God is a jealous God" (*EC*, 72.10 in ibid., 5.787, 5).

The Medieval Fathers on God's Jealousy

Augustine

For Him doth "the friend of the bridegroom" sigh, having now the first-fruits of the Spirit laid up with Him, yet still groaning within himself, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of his body; to Him he sighs, for he is a member of the Bride; for Him is he jealous, for he is the friend of the Bridegroom; for Him is he jealous, not for himself; because in the voice of Thy "waterspouts," not in his own voice, doth he call on that other deep, for whom being jealous he feareth, lest that, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so their minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in our Bridegroom, Thine only Son. (C, 13.13 in Schaff, *NPNF*, 1.1)

Ineffable is therefore that patience, as is His jealousy, as His wrath, and whatever there is like to these. For if we conceive of these as they be in us, in Him are there none. We, namely, cancel none of these without molestation: but be it far from us to surmise that the impassible nature of God is liable to any molestation. But like as He is jealous without any darkening of spirit, wroth without any perturbation, pitiful without any pain, repenteth Him without any wrongness in Him to be set right; so is He patient without aught of passion.

(*OP*, 1 in ibid., 1:3)

Because “the Lord our God is a jealous God,” let us refuse, whenever we see anything of His with an alien, to allow him to consider it his own. For of a truth the jealous God Himself rebukes the woman who commits fornication against Him, as the type of an erring people, and says that she gave to her lovers what belonged to Him, and again received from them what was not theirs but His. In the hands of the adulterous woman and the adulterous lovers, God in His wrath, as a jealous God, recognizes His gifts; and do we say that baptism, consecrated in the words of the gospel, belongs to heretics? (*BAD*, 3.19.25 in ibid., 1:4)

The Reformation Leaders on God’s Jealousy

Martin Luther

“For Him Who once drowned the whole world in the Flood and sank Sodom with fire, it is a simple thing to slay or to defeat so many thousands of peasants. He is an almighty and terrible God” (***WL***, 4.226).

God says: “I the Lord thy God am jealous God.” Now, God is jealous in two manners of ways; first, God is angry as one that is jealous of them that fall from him, and become false and treacherous, that prefer the creature before the Creator; that build upon the favors of the great; that depend upon their friends, upon their own power—riches, art, wisdom, etc.; that forsake the righteousness of faith, and condemn it, and will be justified and saved by and through their own good works. God is also vehemently angry with those that boast and brag of their power and strength; as we see in Sennacherib, king of Assyria, who boasted of his great power, and thought utterly to destroy Jerusalem.… Secondly, God is jealous for them that love him and highly esteem his word; such God loves again, defends and keeps as the apple of his eye, and resists their adversaries, beating them back that they are not able to perform what they intended. Therefore, this word jealous comprehends both hatred and love, revenge and protection; for which cause it requires both fear and faith; fear, that we provoke not God to anger, or work his displeasure; faith, that in trouble we believe he will help, nourish, and defend us in this life, and will pardon and forgive us our sins, and for Christ’s sake preserve us to life everlasting. (*TT*, 135–36)

John Calvin

But though in every passage where the favour or anger of God is mentioned, the

former comprehends eternity of life and the latter eternal destruction, the Law, at the same time, enumerates a long catalogue of present blessings and curses (Lev. 26:4; Deut. 28:1). The threatenings attest the spotless purity of God, which cannot bear iniquity, while the promises attest at once his infinite love of righteousness (which he cannot leave unrewarded), and his wondrous kindness. Being bound to do him homage with all that we have, he is perfectly entitled to demand everything which he requires of us as a debt; and as a debt, the payment is unworthy of reward. He therefore foregoes his right, when he holds forth reward for services which are not offered spontaneously, as if they were not due. (*ICR*, 1.8.4)

Jacob Arminius

Hatred is an affection of separation in God; whose *primary* object is injustice or unrighteousness; and the *secondary*, the misery of the creature: The former is from "the love of complacency"; the latter, from "the love of friendship." But since God properly loves himself and the good of justice, and by the same impulse holds iniquity in detestation; and since he secondarily loves the creature and his blessedness, and in that impulse hates the misery of the creature, that is, He wills it to be taken away from the creature; hence it comes to pass, that He hates the creature who perseveres in unrighteousness, and He loves his misery. (*WJA*, 11.44)

The Post-Reformation Theologians on God's Jealousy

Jonathan Edwards

Those who come to Christ need not be afraid of God's wrath for their sins; for God's honor will not suffer by their escaping punishment and being made happy. The wounded soul is sensible that he has affronted the majesty of God, and looks upon God as a vindicator of his honor; as a jealous God that will not be mocked, an infinitely great God that will not bear to be affronted, that will not suffer his authority and majesty to be trampled on, that will not bear that his kindness should be abused. (*WJE*, 376)

For we see that when men come to be under convictions, and to be made sensible that God is not as they have heretofore imagined, but that he is such a jealous, sin-hating God, and whose wrath against sin is so dreadful, they are much more

apt to have sensible exercises of enmity against him than before, (ibid., 1021)

William G. T. Shedd

There is a kind of wrath in the human soul that resembles the wrath of God, and constitutes its true analogue. It is the wrath of the human conscience, which is wholly different from that of the human heart. That kind of anger is commanded in the injunction “Be ye angry and sin not” (Eph. 4:26). Were this species of moral displacency more often considered, and the Divine anger illustrated by it, there would be less of the common and unthinking opposition to the doctrine of the Divine wrath. (*DT*, 176)

Stephen Charnock

God is a jealous God, very sensible of any disgrace, and will be as much incensed against an inward idolatry as an outward: that command which forbade corporeal images, would not indulge carnal imaginations; since the nature of God is as much wronged by unworthy images, erected in the fancy, as by statues carved out of stone or metals. (*EAG*, 1.198)

J. I. Packer

God’s jealousy is not a compound of frustration, envy and spite, as human jealousy so often is, but appears instead as a [literally] praiseworthy zeal to preserve something supremely precious.

Zeal to protect a love relationship or to avenge it when broken [is a good sort of jealousy]. This jealousy also operates in the sphere of sex; there, however, it appears not as the blind reaction of wounded pride but as the fruit of marital affection. As Professor Taylor has written, married persons “who felt no jealousy at the intrusion of a lover or an adulterer into their home would surely be lacking in moral perception; for the exclusiveness of marriage is the essence of marriage” [*The Epistle of James*, 106]. This sort of jealousy is a positive virtue, for it shows a grasp of the true meaning of the husband-wife relationship, together with a proper zeal to keep it intact.… God’s jealousy is of this kind; that is, as an aspect of his covenant love for his people. The Old Testament regards God’s covenant as his marriage with Israel, carrying with it a demand for unqualified love and loyalty.

From these passages we see plainly what God meant by telling Moses that his name was “Jealous.” He meant that he demands from those whom he has

loved and redeemed utter and absolute loyalty, and he will vindicate his claim by stern action against them if they betray his love by unfaithfulness. (*KG*, 170–71)

AN OBJECTION TO GOD'S JEALOUSY

Objection One—Based on an Alleged Inconsistency

This objection points to an apparent inconsistency: Why is jealousy right for God but wrong for us? All other moral attributes of God we are asked to emulate: God is love, and we should be loving (1 John 4:19); God is holy, and we should be holy (Lev. 11:45). Why, then, if God is jealous, should we not also be jealous?

Response to Objection One

The answer to this objection is simple: There is no inconsistency; jealousy can be right sometimes and wrong at other times. Wrong jealousy for us is about being jealous for what does not belong to us. God cannot ever be jealous of what does not belong to Him, since He owns everything. Psalm 24:1 declares: "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it." Deuteronomy 32:21 adds, "They made me jealous by what is no god and angered me with their worthless idols. I will make them envious by those who are not a people; I will make them angry by a nation that has no understanding." Everything belongs to God, ***even the things He has entrusted to the care of others***; hence, it is not right for us to be jealous about what is not ours. Jealousy, as such, is not evil; what is evil is being jealous about what is not ours. Therefore, there is no inconsistency in it being right for God to be jealous for our affection (which belongs to Him) and it being wrong for us.

Note, however, that not all jealousy is wrong for human beings—***godly jealousy is right***. For example, Paul's jealousy for the church was commendable. He

wrote, “I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him” (2 Cor. 11:2). Likewise, there is nothing wrong with a husband having appropriate jealousy over his wife (or vice versa), since she belongs to him (cf. Num. 5:14) and he to her.

GOD’S MORAL PERFECTION

Another attribute of God is that of absolute moral perfection. God is morally impeccable: He is not simply an infinite Being; He is an infinitely perfect Being.

THE DEFINITION OF GOD’S MORAL PERFECTION

The English word ***perfect*** means “flawless” or “excellent.” There are several Hebrew words for “perfect”: ***tamim***, meaning “complete,” “sound,” “blameless,” “perfect,” “without blemish”; ***shalem***, meaning “complete,” “safe,” “blameless”; ***tam***, which is rendered “complete,” “blameless,” “perfect”; ***omen***, translated “perfect,” “faithful”; ***kalil***, meaning “entire,” “whole,” “perfect”; and ***taman***, which is expressed by words like “complete,” “finished,” and “blameless.” The Greek words for “perfect” are ***teleios***, which means “complete,” “perfect,” “mature”; ***teleioō***, which bears the idea of “bringing to an end,” “completing,” “perfecting”; ***teleiotes***, a kindred concept that can be rendered “completeness,” “perfection”; and ***katartizo***, meaning “to complete,” “to perfect,” “to prepare.”

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR GOD’S MORAL PERFECTION

God is perfect in every way. “He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he” (Deut. 32:4). “As for God, his way is perfect” (2 Sam. 22:31). “It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect” (2 Sam. 22:33). “Do you know how

the clouds hang poised, those wonders of him who is perfect in knowledge? (Job 37:16). “As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the LORD is flawless” (Ps. 18:30). “The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul” (Ps. 19:7). “The LORD will fulfill [perfect] ***his purpose*** for me; your love, O LORD, endures forever—do not abandon the works of your hands” (Ps. 138:8). “O LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you and praise your name, for in perfect faithfulness you have done marvelous things, things planned long ago” (Isa. 25:1). “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). “Then you will be able to test and approve … God’s … good, pleasing and perfect will” (Rom. 12:2). “When perfection comes, the imperfect disappears” (1 Cor. 13:10). “We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ” (Col. 1:28). “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows” (James 1:17). “The man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom … will be blessed in what he does” (James 1:25). “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear” (1 John 4:18).

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR GOD’S MORAL PERFECTION

That God is morally perfect can be derived from several theological premises.

Knowledge of the Imperfect Implies the Perfect

We know what is imperfect; however, we cannot know the not-perfect unless we know what is perfect—hence, there must be a Perfect (God). We cannot know a circle is imperfect unless we have an idea of a perfect one; likewise, moral imperfections cannot be detected unless we possess some idea of what moral perfection is.

God’s Metaphysical Attributes Demand His Moral Perfection

It is granted that God is a moral Being. If He possesses moral characteristics, then He must possess them perfectly. The reasoning goes like this:

(1) God's nature is morally perfect.
(2) God is infinite, unchangeable, and necessary by nature.
(3) Therefore, God is infinitely, unchangeably, and necessarily morally perfect.

God's Function As the Ultimate Moral Standard Demands His Moral Perfection

It is recognized that God is the ultimate standard for what is morally right: He is the ultimate Moral Lawgiver. The ultimate source of all moral perfection cannot be less than ultimately perfect; the ultimate measure of morality is by its very nature morally perfect. God can no less be perfect than a good yardstick can be less than three feet long.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S MORAL PERFECTION

The Christian God has always been viewed as absolutely perfect, both morally and metaphysically. This is evident from the very beginning.

The Early Church Fathers on God's Moral Perfection

Justin Martyr

"God, the Father of the universe … is perfect intelligence" (***FLWR***, I in Roberts and Donaldson, ***ANF***, I). "Neither is there straitness with God, nor anything that

is not absolutely perfect" (***OFLWJ***, 6 in ibid., I).

Clement of Alexandria

"Be perfect as the heavenly Father [is perfect]" (S, 12, 546).

Theophilus

> For the sun is a type of God, and the moon of man. And as the sun far surpasses the moon in power and glory, so far does God surpass man. And as the sun remains ever full, never becoming less, so does God always abide perfect, being full of all power, and understanding, and wisdom, and immortality, and all good. But the moon wanes monthly, and in a manner dies, being a type of man; then it is born again, and is crescent, for a pattern of the future resurrection. (*TA*, 2.15 in op. cit, II)

Athenagoras

> I pass over those who lacerate with knives and scourges of bones, and shall not attempt to describe all the kinds of demons; for it is not the part of a god to incite to things against nature.... But God, being perfectly good, is eternally doing good. (*PC*, 26 in ibid., II)

Tertullian

> What new god is there, except a false one? Not even Saturn will be proved to be a god by all his ancient fame, because it was a novel pretense which some time or other produced even him, when it first gave him godship. On the contrary, living and perfect Deity has its origin neither in novelty nor in antiquity, but in its own true nature. Eternity has no time. It is itself all time. It acts; it cannot then suffer. It cannot be born, therefore it lacks age. (*FBAM*, 2.1.8 in ibid., III)

The Medieval Church Fathers on God's Moral Perfection

Augustine

“For certainly He would not be the perfect worker He is, unless His knowledge were so perfect as to receive no addition from His finished works” (***CG***, 11.21 in Schaff, ***NPNF***, 1. II).

> “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father who is in heaven is perfect.” … Moreover, the perfection of that mercy, wherewith most of all the soul that is in distress is cared for, cannot be stretched beyond the love of an enemy; and therefore the closing words are: “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father who is in heaven is perfect.” Yet in such a way that God is understood to be perfect as God, and the soul to be perfect as a soul. (*SM*, 1.21.69 in ibid., 1. VI)

Anselm

Anselm argued that since we know things that are more or less perfect, there must be a most Perfect by which we know this. Of all the things that exist, there is one nature that is supreme: It alone is self-sufficient in its eternal happiness, yet through its all-powerful goodness it creates and gives to all other things their very existence and their goodness.

Quite certain, indeed, and clear to all who are willing to see, is the following: take some things that are said to be (say) X, and relative to each other are said to be less, more, or equally X. It is through this X that they are said to be so, and this X is understood as the very same thing in the various cases and not something different in each case (whether X is considered to be in them equally or not equally).

Necessarily, therefore, everything beneficial or excellent is, if it is truly good, good through that same one thing, through which all good things necessarily are good, whatever that thing may be. And who would doubt that that through which all things are good is a great good?

In conclusion,

> Because, then, it is that through which every good thing is good, it is good through itself. It therefore follows that all the other good things are good through something other than what they themselves are, while this thing alone is good through itself. But nothing that is good through something other than itself is equal to or greater than that good which is good through itself. The one thing, therefore, that is good through itself is the one thing that is supremely good. (*ACMW*, 11–13)

Thomas Aquinas

Aquinas also argued for a God of absolute perfection in his famous "Five Ways." The fourth "way" states,

> Among beings there are some more and some less good, true, noble, and the like. But more and less are predicated of different things according as they resemble in their different ways something which is the maximum [i.e., the Most Perfect]. (*ST*, Ia.2.3)

Later, Aquinas added,

> Hence, the first active principle [God] must needs be most actual, and therefore most perfect. [For] matter as such is merely potential … and thus most imperfect.… God is the first active principle, not material, but in the order of efficient cause, which must be most perfect. Hence, the first active principle [God] must needs be most actual, and therefore most perfect; for a thing is perfect in proportion to its state of actuality, because we call that perfect which lacks nothing of the mode of its perfection, (ibid., 1.4.1)

The Reformation Leaders on God's Moral Perfection

Martin Luther

> God has given me prescriptions as to how I am to live and how I am to serve Him. Then I imagine that He also ought to live in that way. He lays down the Law here below but does not apply it to Himself above. It behooves no one except God to give laws and directions as to how we are to live and be pious; but I am not to lay down any law to God as to how He may rule the world or human beings. Therefore, think whatever you please, what God does is nonetheless right. (*WLS*, 745)

John Calvin

> You shall therefore be perfect. This perfection does not mean equality, but relates solely to resemblance. However distant we are from the perfection of God, we are said to be perfect, as he is perfect, when we aim at the same object, which he presents to us in Himself. Should it be thought preferable, we may state it

thus. There is no comparison here made between God and us: but the perfection of God means, first, that free and pure kindness, which is not induced by the expectation of gain—and, secondly, that remarkable goodness, which contends with the malice and ingratitude of men. (*CC*, 16.308)

It must be acknowledged, therefore, that in each of the works of God, and more especially in the whole of them taken together, the divine perfections are delineated as in a picture, and the whole human race thereby invited and allured to acquire the knowledge of God, and, in consequence of this knowledge, true and complete felicity. Moreover, while his perfections are thus most vividly displayed, the only means of ascertaining their practical operation and tendency is to descend into ourselves, and consider how it is that the Lord there manifests his wisdom, power, and energy—how he there displays his justice, goodness, and mercy. (*ICR*, 1.5.10)

The Post-Reformation Theologians on God's Moral Perfection

Stephen Charnock

God is thus good, because his nature is infinitely perfect; he hath all things requisite to the completing of a most perfect and sovereign Being. All good meets in his essence, as all water meets in the ocean. Under this notion all the attributes of God, which are requisite to so illustrious a Being, are comprehended. (*EAG*, 2.217)

J. I. Packer

Goodness, in God as in human beings, means something admirable, attractive and praiseworthy. When the biblical writers call God *good*, they are thinking in general of all those moral qualities which prompt his people to call him *perfect*, and in particular of the generosity which moves them to call him *merciful* and *gracious* and to speak of his love.

Generosity means a disposition to give to others in a way which has no mercenary motive and is not limited by what the recipients deserve but consistently goes beyond it. Generosity expresses the simple wish that others should have what they need to make them happy. Generosity is, so to speak, the focal point of God's moral perfection; it is the quality which determines how all God's other excellencies are to be displayed. (*KG*, 161, 62)

The biblical judge is expected to love justice and fair play and to loathe all ill treatment of one person by another. An unjust judge, one who has no interest in seeing right triumph over wrong, is by biblical standards a monstrosity. The Bible leaves us in no doubt that God loves righteousness and hates iniquity,

and that the ideal of a judge wholly identified with what is good and right is perfectly fulfilled in him. (ibid., 141)

OBJECTIONS TO GOD'S MORAL PERFECTION

Four main objections to God's moral perfection call for answers. The first is based on the problem of evil, and the second on an alleged fallacy. The third springs from a supposed incompatibility between the attributes of perfect love and perfect justice, and the fourth is founded on the idea that there is a need for a loving being to change.

Objection One—Based Upon Injustice in the World

Both theists and nontheists (except pantheists) agree that evil is real: There is real injustice in this world. But an all-perfect and all-powerful God would not allow any injustice; hence, there cannot be any such theistic God.

Response to Objection One

First, this argument, ***at best***, does not disprove that God is morally perfect, for it has not addressed the possibility that God could be all-perfect but not all-powerful and, thus, not able to overcome all injustice. (This is what many finite godists believe.)
Second, if God ***is*** infinite in power, it is argued by neotheists that God did not know in advance what creatures would do with their freedom, and, hence, He did not foresee all this injustice. Since humans are free, God cannot eliminate all injustice without destroying all free will, yet this would be injustice, since He created them with free will.[1]
Third, from a traditional theistic position, this objection does not follow for two reasons: For one thing, the in-just (not-just) implies the Just (i.e., God): One

could not know there is an ultimate injustice in the world unless he had some ultimate standard of justice by which he could know it was ultimately unjust. *Fourth,* for another, this objection overlooks an important fact: That there is ***present*** injustice does not mean there will be ***ultimate*** injustice. The biblical theist notes that the story is not over yet; a day of ultimate justice is coming (Rev. 20). If God is all-powerful, then He can overcome all injustice, and if He is all-just, He ***will*** overcome it. If He is all-perfect, God has the desire to overcome all evil, and if He is all-powerful, He can do it. One day He will.

Objection Two—Based Upon Alleged Incompatibility With Love

According to this objection, God cannot be both perfectly holy and perfectly loving, for a perfectly holy God must judge and condemn all sinners, while a perfectly loving God wants to save all sinners. Wrath flows from God's holiness, and blessing flows from His love. Aren't these incompatible? God cannot be both at the same time, or He would seem to violate the law of noncontradiction.

Response to Objection Two

God can be both completely just and perfectly loving at the same time, provided it is not on the same person at the same time. His wrath flowing from His holiness rests on all unrepentant sinners, and blessed acts flowing from His love on all repentant sinners. This is not contradictory, since it is manifest in the same persons at ***different*** times (before and after repentance). This does not mean there is a change in God, since He always consistently manifests wrath on unrepentant sinners, and He always consistently manifests love on the repentant. The only thing that changes is that the person (by repentance) moves from under one attribute to under another.

Further, God's attributes are tied together in one essence: God is holy love and loving holiness, each attribute complimenting the other. There is no contradiction in God's desiring the good of even those whom He must justly punish, for it is good to punish evil.

Objection Three—Based Upon the Supposed Impossibility of Having a Perfect Being

Many contemporary theologians reject God's absolute perfection because of what they call "the difficulties of a perfect being theology" (Pinnock, ***OG***, 132). As the traditional reasoning is stated:

> If God were to change, so the argument goes, then He would change either for the better or for the worse. But God cannot change for the better, since He is already perfect. And He cannot change for the worse, for this would mean that He would no longer be perfect. So God cannot change, (ibid., 131)

Some neotheists reject this argument, not because God is imperfect, but because they say that "it rests on the assumption that all change is either for the better or for the worse, an assumption that is simply false" (ibid., 132). As we have seen, they offer the "immutable watch" as a counterexample: It registers the same time day in and day out. By contrast, an "extremely accurate watch" always registers the correct time, even though it is constantly changing. When it changes, its change is not for the better or worse—it remains the same in its changes, namely, an extremely accurate watch.

Response to Objection Three

One way to respond to this objection is to point out that it contains a category mistake by comparing a changing thing with an unchanging Being. It only shows how one changing thing (the clock) is not better when it changes to another changing thing (time); it does not show that a changing God is better than an unchanging God.

Another way to pinpoint the error is to note that this argument begs the question in favor of a non-immutable view of God. The clock illustration does not tick if one assumes that God does not change, for in that case anything that represented Him as changing would be inaccurate.

Further, as we have seen, even the objection implies that God does not really change, for it asserts that whatever changes there are in God are "consistent with

and/or required by a ***constant state of excellence***" (ibid., 133, emphasis added). What is this "constant state of excellence" but the equivalent of an unchanging nature? Thus, in order to defend their view, neotheists fall back on the theistic view of an unchanging nature in God.

Finally, the objection presupposes that God must be perfect, for neo-theists speak of the possibility of an unchanging God suffering from "imperfection" (ibid., 132). How could one know God was imperfect unless he presupposed an absolute, unchanging standard of perfection (which they would have to say is God; otherwise, there would be something more ultimate than God, which is platonic dualism, not neotheism)?

Objection Four—Based Upon the Need for a Loving Being to Change

Objectors to God's unchanging perfection argue that a truly loving God will change. They agree that God is perfect love: "The statement ***God is love*** is as close as the Bible comes to giving us a definition of the divine reality" (Pinnock, ***OG***, 18). Again, "Love is the essence of the divine reality, the basic source from which ***all*** of God's attributes arise" (ibid., 21).

Their argument for the necessity of change in a God of love goes like this:

(1) God is essentially love.
(2) Love, of necessity, involves the possibility of change.
(3) Therefore, God's love necessitates the possibility of change.

The crucial second premise is supported by showing that God's love is a dynamic, interactive activity whereby God engages in a give-and-take activity with His creatures. Love suffers with the loved one (ibid., 46), and, hence, God cannot be impassible, as traditional theism affirms.

Response to Objection Four

At the start, one notices something strange about this objection to God's unchangeableness—the very first premise begins with a God who cannot change. It affirms that God is "essentially" love. If God by His very essence is love and cannot be otherwise, then God cannot change in His nature. Indeed, neotheists admit the same when they affirm that "God's essential nature and his ultimate purpose did not change" (Pinnock, ***OG***, 28). The premise that "God cannot change in His essential nature as love" is not consistent with their conclusion from this premise that God must be able to change because He is love.

Also, once again, who said God has to love the way we love? To be sure, human love is changing, because human beings are changing beings. Theism affirms that God is an unchanging Being (see chapter 4) and, therefore, He must love in an unchanging way.

God can do whatever good we can do, but He does not do it in the way we do it. He does it in an infinitely better way than we do—an unchanging way. All theists insist that God is infinite, ontologically independent, uncreated, and transcendent. Even granted that God is infinite demands that He is and does things differently than finite beings do.

CONCLUSION

God possesses a holy jealousy and a morally perfect character. The former is what gives God zeal to protect and preserve His own holiness; the latter is the absolute moral perfection that pervades the character of God. These attributes are firmly grounded in Scripture, sound theological reasoning, and the history of the Christian church. All objections stated against these attributes fail; the attributes are internally consistent.

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

GOD'S TRUTHFULNESS AND GOODNESS (LOVE)

God is not only absolutely truthful, but He is also all-good (omnibenevolent). It is impossible for Him to lie (Heb. 6:18), and He is love by His very nature (1 John 4:16).

THE DEFINITION OF GOD'S TRUTHFULNESS

The Hebrew word for "truth" (***emeth***) means "firm," "stable," "faithful," "reliable," "correct." The Greek word for "truth" (***aletheia***) means "truthful," "dependable," "upright," "real." In brief, the term "truth," as used in Scripture, means that which, because it corresponds to reality (the facts, the original), is reliable, faithful, and stable. Used of words, ***truth is telling it like it is***. True statements are those that correspond to reality and, hence, are dependable. By contrast, falsehood is telling it like it is not (1 John 2:21) and, therefore, is not reliable. False expressions do not correspond to reality, and the devil is the father of all lies (John 8:44). Truth is absolute: God cannot lie (2 Cor. 1:18; Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18), and His Word cannot pass away (Mark 13:31; cf. Ps. 117:2).

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S TRUTHFULNESS

Many things are involved in God's truthfulness, but most fundamentally God ***is*** truth by His very nature. Creatures ***have*** truth, but God is truth, and He is truthful. Just a sampling of verses demonstrates the point.

"He is the Rock, his work ***is*** perfect: for all his ways ***are*** judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right ***is*** he" (Deut. 32:4 KJV). "God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?" (Num. 23:19). "He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man, that he should change his mind" (1 Sam. 15:29). "Into your hands I commit my spirit; redeem me, O LORD, the God of truth" (Ps. 31:5). "For the word of the LORD is right and true; he is faithful in all he does" (Ps. 33:4). "Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me' " (John 14:6). "When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me" (John 15:26). "They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (1 Thess. 1:9). "God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged" (Heb. 6:18). "This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood" (1 John 4:6).

Because God is truthful, we can trust His promises (Ps. 89:35); we can be assured of our salvation (2 Tim. 2:13); we are protected (Ps. 91:4); we are saved (Eph. 1:13); we are sanctified (2 Thess. 2:13); we are liberated (John 8:32); we are established forever (Ps. 117:2); we should always speak the truth (Eph. 4:25); we should walk in His truth (Ps. 86:11); we should serve Him in truth (1 Sam. 12:24 NKJV); we should diligently study His truth (2 Tim. 2:15; John 17:17); we should worship Him in truth (John. 4:24); and we should pray to be led in truth (Ps. 25:4–5).

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S TRUTHFULNESS

God's absolute truthfulness follows from several of His other attributes. If God is truthful, then He must be absolutely truthful, for He can only be ***morally*** what His nature allows Him to be ***metaphysically***.

God's Truthfulness Follows From His Simplicity

If God is truthful, then He must be truthful in accordance with His nature. God is simple (indivisible) by nature; thus, God cannot be partly anything—whatever He is, that He must be totally and completely. Hence, God must be totally and completely truthful.

God's Truthfulness Follows From His Immutability

If God is truthful, again, He must be truthful in accordance with His nature. God is immutable (unchangeable) by nature; hence, God must be unchangeably truthful. Indeed, the Bible declares that "if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself (2 Tim. 2:13).

God's Truthfulness Follows From His Infinity

God is also infinite (see chapter 5). Since He is truthful, it follows, then, that He must be infinitely truthful. Whoever is infinitely truthful is not partly truthful, but wholly and completely truthful.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS OF GOD'S TRUTHFULNESS

God’s absolute truthfulness is a hallmark of His moral nature. This has been recognized by Christian theologians down through the ages.

The Early Church Fathers on God’s Truthfulness

The patristic Fathers declared and defended the attribute of truthfulness in God. Polycarp, the disciple of John the apostle (who spoke of Jesus as the Truth—John 14:6), echoed his mentor’s reflections.

Polycarp

> I give Thee thanks that Thou hast counted me worthy of this day and this hour, that I should have a part in the number of Thy martyrs, in the cup of thy Christ, to the resurrection of eternal life, both of soul and body, through the incorruption [imparted] by the Holy Ghost. Among whom may I be accepted this day before Thee as a fat and acceptable sacrifice, according as Thou, the ever-truthful God, hast foreordained, hast revealed beforehand to me, and now hast fulfilled. Wherefore also I praise Thee for all things, I bless Thee, I glorify Thee, along with the everlasting and heavenly Jesus Christ, Thy beloved Son, with whom, to Thee, and the Holy Ghost, be glory both now and to all coming ages. Amen. (*EE*, 14 in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, 1)

Mathetes

> As I said, this was no mere earthly invention which was delivered to them, nor is it a mere human system of opinion, which they judge it right to preserve so carefully, nor has a dispensation of mere human mysteries been committed to them, but truly God Himself, who is almighty, the Creator of all things, and invisible, has sent from heaven, and placed among men, [Him who is] the truth, and the holy and incomprehensible Word, and has firmly established Him in their hearts. (*EMD*, 7 in ibid., 1)

Ignatius

> Since, also, there is but one unbegotten Being, God, even the Father; and one

only-begotten Son, God, the Word and man; and one Comforter, the Spirit of truth; and also one preaching, and one faith, and one baptism; and one Church which the holy apostles established from one end of the earth to the other by the blood of Christ, and by their own sweat and toil; it behooves you also, therefore, as "a peculiar people, and a holy nation," to perform all things with harmony in Christ. (*EP*, 5 in ibid., 1)

Justin Martyr

The word of His truth and wisdom is more ardent and more light-giving than the rays of the sun, and sinks down into the depths of heart and mind. Hence also the Scripture said, "His name shall rise up above the sun" (*DJ*, 12:2 in ibid.).

Irenaeus

They have fallen into error, too, respecting Zoe, by maintaining that she was produced in the sixth place, when it behooved her to take precedence of all [the rest], since God is life, and incorruption, and truth. And these and such like attributes have not been produced according to a gradual scale of descent, but they are names of those perfections which always exist in God, so far as it is possible and proper for men to hear and to speak of God. For with the name of God the following words will harmonize: intelligence, word, life, incorruption, truth, wisdom, goodness, and such like. (***AH***, 2:13:9 in ibid.)

The Shepherd of Hermas

Again he said to me, "Love the truth, and let nothing but truth proceed from your mouth, that the spirit which God has placed in your flesh may be found truthful before all men; and the Lord, who dwelleth in you, will be glorified, because the Lord is truthful in every word, and in Him is no falsehood." They therefore who lie deny the Lord, and rob Him, not giving back to Him the deposit which they have received. For they received from Him a spirit free from falsehood. (***C***, 2:3 in ibid., 2)

Clement of Alexandria

Of the same sentiments is Plato, who somewhere alludes to God thus: “Around the King of all are all things, and He is the cause of all good things.” Who, then, is the King of all? God, who is the measure of the truth of all existence. As, then, the things that are to be measured are contained in the measure, so also the knowledge of God measures and comprehends truth. And the truly holy Moses says: “There shall not be in thy bag a balance and a balance, great or small, but a true and just balance shall be to thee,” deeming the balance and measure and number of the whole to be God. For the unjust and unrighteous idols are hid at home in the bag, and, so to speak, in the polluted soul. But the only just measure is the only true God, always just, continuing the selfsame; who measures all things, and weighs them by righteousness as in a balance, grasping and sustaining universal nature in equilibrium. (***EH***, 6 in ibid., 2)

The Medieval Fathers on God’s Truthfulness

Augustine

I said, “Is Truth, therefore, nothing because it is neither diffused through space, finite, nor infinite?” And Thou criedst to me from afar, “Yea, verily, ‘I AM THAT I AM.’ ” And I heard this, as things are heard in the heart, nor was there room for doubt; and I should more readily doubt that I live than that Truth is not, which is “clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made” (***C***, 7.10). It is, therefore, because we are men, created in the image of a Creator, whose eternity is true, His truth eternal, His love both eternal and true, a Creator who is the eternal, true, and lovable Trinity in whom there is neither confusion nor division, that, wherever we turn among the things which He created and conserved so wonderfully, we discover His footprints, whether lightly or plainly impressed.

The holy angels gain knowledge of God not by the spoken word but by the presence in their souls of that immutable Truth which is the only-begotten Word of God. They know this Word and the Father and their Holy Spirit, understanding that this Trinity is indivisible and that each of the Persons is substantial, although there are not three Gods but only one. (***CG***, 11.28, 11.29)

Anselm

> You are this good, O God the Father; this is Your Word, that is to say, Your Son. For there cannot be any other than what You are, or any thing greater or lesser than You, in the Word by which You utter Yourself. For Your Word is as true as You are truthful and is therefore the very truth that You are and that is not other than You. (*ACMW*, 100)
>
> Have you found, O my soul, what you were seeking? You were seeking God, and you found Him to be something which is the highest of all, than which a better cannot be thought, and to be life itself, light, wisdom, goodness, eternal blessedness and blessed eternity, and to exist everywhere and always. If you have not found your God, how is He this which you have found, and which you have understood with such certain truth and true certitude? But if you have found [Him], why is it that you do not experience what you have found? Why, O Lord God, does my soul not experience You if it has found You? Or has it not found that which it has found to be the light and the truth? But then, how did it understand this save by seeing the light and the truth? Could it understand anything at all about You save through “Your light and Your truth” [Ps. 43:3]? If, then, it saw the light and the truth, it saw You. If it did not see You then it d not see the light or the truth, (ibid., 98)

Thomas Aquinas

> As said above, truth is found in the intellect according as it apprehends a thing as it is; and in things according as they have being conformable to an intellect. This is to the greatest degree found in God. For His being is not only conformed to His intellect, but it is the very act of His intellect; and His act of understanding is the measure and cause of every other being and of every other intellect, and He Himself is His own existence and act of understanding. Whence it follows not only that truth is in Him, but that He is truth itself, and the sovereign and first truth. (*ST*, la. 16, 5)

The Reformation Leaders on God’s Truthfulness

Martin Luther

> God seems as though he had dealt inconsiderately in commanding the world to be governed by the Word of Truth, especially since he has clothed and hooded it

with a poor, weak, and condemned Word of the cross. For the world will not have truth, [but] lies. (*TT*, 45)

Truly, in this case, we must not only be well armed with God's Word and versed therein, but must have also certainty of the doctrine, or we shall not endure the combat. A man must be able to affirm, I know for certain, that what I teach is the only Word of the high Majesty of God in heaven, his final conclusion and everlasting, unchangeable truth, and whatsoever concurs and agrees not with this doctrine, is altogether false, and spun by the devil. I have before me God's Word, which cannot fail, nor can the gates of hell prevail against it; thereby will I remain, though the whole world be against me. (ibid., 22)

John Calvin

We must go, I say, to the Word, where the character of God, drawn from his works, is described accurately and to the life; these works being estimated, not by our depraved judgment, but by the standard of eternal truth. (*ICR*, 1.6.3)

Therefore, in reading profane authors, the admirable light of truth displayed in them should remind us, that the human mind, however much fallen and perverted from its original integrity, is still adorned and invested with admirable gifts from its Creator. If we reflect that the Spirit of God is the only fountain of truth, we will be careful, as we would avoid offering insult to him, not to reject or condemn truth wherever it appears. In despising the gifts, we insult the Giver, (ibid., 2.2.15)

In the first place, we must consider what an oath is. An oath, then, is calling God to witness that what we say is true. Execrations being manifestly insulting to God, are unworthy of being classed among oaths. That an oath, when duly taken, is a species of divine worship, appears from many passages of Scripture. … Swearing by the name of the Lord here means that they will make a profession of religion. In like manner, speaking of the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom, it is said, "He who blesseth himself in the earth shall bless himself in the God of truth: and he that sweareth in the earth shall swear by the God of truth" [

Isaiah 65:16

] (ibid., 2.8.23).

The Post-Reformation Theologians on God's Truthfulness

The concept of God's unswerving truth did not change in the writings of those of the post-Reformation period. They too saw it as the Gibraltar of God's character.

Jacob Arminius

> Justice in Words is also threefold: (1) Truth, by which He always enunciates or declares exactly as the thing which is opposed to falsehood. (2) Sincerity and Simplicity, by which He always declares as He inwardly conceives, according to the meaning and purpose of His mind; to which are opposed hypocrisy and duplicity of heart. And (3) Fidelity, by which He is constant in keeping promises and in communicating privileges; to which are opposed inconstancy and perfidy. (*WJA*, 351)

Stephen Charnock

"He is as unchangeable in his essence as in his veracity and faithfulness: they are perfections belonging to his nature" (***EAG***, 1.187).

Charles Hodge

> The true, therefore, is, (1) That which is real, as opposed to that which is fictitious or imaginary. Jehovah is the true God, because He is really God, while the gods of the heathen are vanity and nothing, mere imaginary beings, having neither existence nor attributes. (2) The true is that which completely comes up to its idea, or to what it purports to be. A true man is a man in whom the idea of manhood is fully realized. The true God is He in whom is found all that the Godhead imports. (3) The true is that in which the reality exactly corresponds to the manifestation. God is true, because He really is what He declares Himself to be; because He is what He commands us to believe Him to be; and because all His declarations correspond to what really is. (4) The true is that which can be depended upon, which does not fail, or change, or disappoint. In this sense also God is true as He is immutable and faithful. His promises cannot fail; His word never disappoints. His word abideth forever. When our Lord says, "Thy word is truth," He says that all that God has revealed may be confided in as exactly corresponding to what really is, or is to be. His word can never fail, though heaven and earth pass away.
>
> The truth of God, therefore, is the foundation of all religion. It is the ground of our assurance that what He has revealed of Himself and of His will, in His works and in the Scriptures, may be relied upon. He certainly is, and wills, and will do, whatever He has thus made known. It is no less the foundation of all knowledge. That our senses do not deceive us; that consciousness is trustworthy in what it teaches; that anything is what it appears to us to be; that our existence is not a delusive dream, has no other foundation than the truth of

God. In this sense, all knowledge is founded on faith, i.e., the belief that God is true. (*ST*, 1.436–37)

William G. T. Shedd

Again, God cannot do anything inconsistent with the perfection of the Divine nature. Under this category, fall the instances mentioned in Heb. 6:18, "It is impossible for God to lie"; and 2 Tim. 2:13, "He cannot deny himself"; and James 1:13, "God cannot be tempted." God cannot sin: (a) Because sin is imperfection, and is contradictory to say that a necessarily perfect Being may be imperfect, (b) God cannot sin, because he cannot be tempted to sin, and sinning without temptation or motive to sin is impossible. God cannot be tempted, because temptation implies a desire for some good that is supposed to be greater than what is already possessed. But God cannot see anything more desirable than what he already has; and his understanding is infallible, so that he cannot mistake an apparent for a real good. (*DT*, 360)

John Miley

Veracity is the source of truthfulness in expression, whether in the use of words or in other modes. It is deeper than mere intellect; deep as the moral nature. With all true moral natures veracity is felt to be a profound obligation. Veracity is revered, while falsehood, deceit, hypocrisy are abhorred. In the truest, deepest sense of veracity there is profound moral feeling. The divine veracity is more than truthfulness of expression from absolute knowledge; it is truthfulness from holy feeling. As God solemnly enjoins truthfulness upon men, and severely reprehends its violation, in whatever forms of falsehood or deceit, so his words and ways ever fulfill the requirements of the most absolute veracity. (*ST*, 210)

J.I. Packer

"All your commands are true" [Ps. 119:151]. Why are they so described? First, because they have stability and permanence as setting forth what God wants to see in human lives in every age; second, because they tell us the unchanging truth about our own nature. For this is part

> of the purpose of God's law; it gives a working definition of true humanity. It shows us what we were made to be, and teaches us how to be truly human, and warns us against moral self-destruction. (*KG*, 114)
>
> He never becomes less truthful, or merciful, or just, or good than he used to be. The character of God is today, and always will be, exactly what it was in Bible times, (ibid., 78)
>
> That is why his words to us are true, and cannot be other than true. They are the index of reality: they show us things as they really are, and as they will be for us in the future according to whether we heed God's word to us or not. (ibid., 113)

OBJECTIONS TO GOD'S TRUTHFULNESS

The most important objections to God's absolute truthfulness come from instances in the Bible where God is alleged to approve of actions that appear to be less than completely truthful.

Objection One—Based on Samuel's Alleged Partial Truth

If God is totally truthful, then why did He tell Samuel to utter a partial truth? He instructed Samuel to give only part of the truth when He said to tell Saul that he had come to offer a sacrifice (1 Sam. 16:1–3). In fact, he had also come to anoint David to be king.

Response to Objection One

What God told Samuel to say was completely truthful, not partly truthful. He ***did*** come to offer a sacrifice. Saul never asked him, and he never answered the question, as to whether Samuel had any other purposes for his trip there. That God does not condone partial truths that directly imply a falsehood is clear from His condemnation of Abraham when he asked Sarah to say she was his "sister." She was his half-sister, but answering the question this way led the king of Egypt to believe she was not his wife, which is what he wanted to know. So in

implying she was not Abraham's wife, Sarah lied.

Objection Two—Based on God's Commanding Lying Spirits

In 1 Kings, God ordered lying spirits (demons) to lie to king Ahab (1 Kings 22:19–22). How can a God of absolute truth ever condone a lie? It is contrary to His very nature.

Response to Objection Two

God does not and cannot condone a lie as such, for lying ***is*** contrary to His nature, and He cannot condone what is contrary to His very nature (Heb. 6:18). But God did not ***command*** or ***condone*** this lie; He simply ***permitted*** it and used it to accomplish His sovereign will. He ***knew*** this spirit would lie, and He knew this would accomplish His sovereign purpose to a good, namely, to judge wicked King Ahab. As Joseph said to his brothers who had sold him into slavery, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives" (Gen. 50:20). So God uses evil to accomplish His purposes, but He does not ***promote*** evil; He simply ***permits*** it to produce a greater good.

Objection Three—Based on God's Condoning the Midwives' Lie

In Exodus 1:15–22, the pharaoh commanded the Hebrew midwives to kill all male babies. They not only refused, but they also lied about it to the king when he inquired (vv. 17, 19). Verse 20 says, "So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous." Thus, it appears that God condoned their lie.

Response to Objection Three

Scholars differ on how to interpret this passage. Some claim that God blessed the midwives for their refusal to kill the children but not for their lie. They claim God blessed them, like Rahab (Josh. 2), ***in spite*** of but not ***because of*** their lie. Other scholars claim that God does not condone this or any other lie, even in a conflict situation; rather, we ought to do the lesser evil (of lying) and then confess our sin to God. However, it is difficult to make any sense out of a view that says we have a moral obligation to do what is not moral. Further, Jesus faced all kinds of evil situations, yet He never sinned. If sin is ***unavoidable*** in this kind of scenario, then Jesus sinned (while the Bible declares He did not). If He did not face extremely difficult situations, then He could not be our complete moral example, since we would then not have His example to follow.
It would seem better to argue that in unavoidable conflicts, we should suspend our obligation to keep the lower command in view of our overriding obligation to keep the higher one (see Geisler, ***CE***, chapter 7). Thus, in the case of the midwives, mercy-showing was a greater duty than truth-telling. For example, if an angry neighbor asks you to return the gun you had borrowed so that he can kill his wife, your duty to save her life takes precedence over your obligation to return his property. In either way of viewing this situation, God never condones telling a lie as such: It is only when there is a higher duty to another attribute of God (like mercy) that one's duty to tell the truth is suspended. And even in this case, the conflict is not in God (His attributes are all harmonious); it is in this finite fallen world.

Objection Four—Based on Progressive Revelation

According to the doctrine of progressive revelation, God does not reveal all His truth at once, but only part at a time, progressively, over a period of time (see Geisler, "RP" in ***BECA***). For example, God did not reveal explicitly from the very beginning the doctrine of the Trinity: He first revealed that He was one (cf. Deut. 6:4) and then later that there are three persons in this one God (cf. Matt. 28:18–20). The same is true about God's plan of salvation; it was unveiled only

a piece at a time from the beginning (from Gen. 3:15 to John 3:16).

Response to Objection Four

Revealing only part of the truth is not necessarily a lie. At no time in this progressive revelation did God affirm what was false. All that He said was true, but He did not say all from the very beginning. He told the whole truth about part of what He wanted to reveal, but He never revealed the whole of what He wanted to say at once.

Objection Five—Based on Divine Accommodation

According to the doctrine of divine accommodation, God adapts Himself to human finitude in order to communicate with us effectively. For example, He uses metaphors and figures of speech that are not true literally so that we can understand Him better; as we have seen, portraying God with hands, eyes, and arms is an example. God does not actually have these bodily parts, since He is a pure Spirit (John 4:24), but God accommodates Himself to us in these terms. Yet if God is not really this way, then how can His accommodation avoid the charge of being less than fully truthful?

Response to Objection Five

There is a significant difference between God's ***adapting*** to our finitude and His ***accommodating*** to error; He does the former, but not the latter. For instance, there is a big difference between a parent (1) telling the "stork story" to a small child and (2) only telling part of the truth when the child first asks where babies come from and the mother says, "From my tummy." In a kind of progressive revelation, the mother may some years later explain how the baby gets inside her by saying, "Daddy placed a seed there," and so on. Each revelation is only part

of the whole truth, but each is wholly true. This is in contrast to the stork story, which is wholly false in any literal sense of the term.
Further, anthropomorphisms and figures of speech are appropriate forms of divine communication because they convey a literal truth: While they are not true literally; they are literally true. For example, when Jesus said, “I am the Vine,” He was not literally a vine. However, it is literally true that He is the source of our spiritual nourishment. Even “God is a rock,” while not true literally, is literally true when it is realized that God is the rocklike, firm, solid basis for our lives (see Volume 1, chapter 9, for an explanation of analogy). In short, there is nothing false about divine adaptation to finitude in metaphors and figures of speech. What they convey is literally true, even though it is not intended that they be taken as true literally, but only figuratively.

GOD’S OMNIBENEVOLENCE (ALL-LOVINGNESS)

One of the best-known moral attributes of God is His love. Some theologians stress God’s love to the neglect of His holiness and justice; others diminish it by limiting it to only some people. The former tend toward universalism, while the latter use it as a basis for particularism, i.e., limited atonement (see Volume 3). It is debated by orthodox theologians whether goodness and love are the same thing or whether they are different. And, if different, whether love is an attribute of God or an activity of God. Some hold that goodness is an attribute of God and that love is an act of His goodness. But 1 John 4:16 says God ***is*** love, seemingly applying the term to His essence.

DEFINITION OF GOD’S OMNIBENEVOLENCE

If “love” is defined as “willing the good of its object,” then for all practical purposes “love” and “goodness” can be treated synonymously. Literally, the word ***omnibenevolent*** means “all-good.” Biblically, the basic Hebrew term for “love” (***chesed***) used of God means “goodness,” “affection,” “good-will,” “loving-kindness” or “tender loving-kindness.” The Greek word ***agape*** used of God’s love means “benevolence,” a self-less “sacrificial” love. Theologically,

God’s omnibenevolence refers to His infinite or unlimited goodness.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR GOD’S OMNIBENEVOLENCE

The biblical basis for God’s omnibenevolence is widespread: “Yet the Lord set his affection on your forefathers and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations, as it is today” (Deut. 10:15). “For I, the LORD, love justice; I hate robbery and iniquity” (Isa. 61:8). “In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them” (Isa. 63:9). “The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: ‘I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness’ ” (Jer. 31:3). “The LORD said to me, ‘Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites’ ” (Hosea 3:1). “I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love; I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them” (Hosea 11:4). “The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing” (Zeph. 3:17).

“But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back” (Luke 6:35). “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). “God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us” (Rom. 5:5). “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? … For I am convinced that neither death nor life … nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:35–39). “Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died” (2 Cor. 5:14). “But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ” (Eph. 2:4–5). [Paul prayed] “that you may know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:19). “Live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Eph. 5:2). “But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us,

not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy" (Titus 3:4). "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!" (1 John 3:1). "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers" (1 John 3:16). "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God" (1 John 4:7). "Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love" (1 John 4:8). "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him" (1 John 4:9). "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10). "And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him" (1 John 4:16).

Then, of course, there is the greatest description of love in the Bible—1 Corinthians 13:

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.… And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S OMNIBENEVOLENCE

God's omnibenevolence is logically connected to several of His metaphysical attributes. Granted that love is a characteristic of God, as the above verses demonstrate, He must be all-loving.

God's Infinity Implies Omnibenevolence

God is infinite in His essence, and love is of the essence of God. Therefore, God is infinite love: His love can no more be limited than His nature, and His nature is unlimited.

God's Simplicity Implies Omnibenevolence

Again, love is of the essence of God (1 John 4:16), and God is simple in His essence; that is, He is indivisible, having no parts. Thus, God cannot be partly anything: Whatever a simple Being is, it is wholly and completely. Hence, God must be wholly and completely love.

God's Necessity Implies Omnibenevolence

God's necessity (see chapter 3) implies that He is all-loving, for a necessary Being is what it is necessarily. God is love; therefore, God necessarily is love—He cannot not love. God by His very nature must love.

Some Implications of God's Omnibenevolence.

A number of important implications follow from the omnibenevolence of God; two are worth noting here. One is related to His omnipotence, and the other to the extent of salvation.

Implications for the Doctrine of Irresistible Grace

All Calvinists believe in some form of irresistible grace: Strong Calvinists believe grace is irresistible on the unwilling, and moderate Calvinists believe it is irresistible on the willing (see Volume 3, chapter 3). But in view of God's

omnibenevolence, it follows that grace ***cannot*** be irresistible on the unwilling, for a God of complete love cannot force anyone to act against his will. Forced love is intrinsically impossible: A loving God can work persuasively, but not coercively.

Implications for Universalism

Another implication of God's omnibenevolence is that it renders universalism untenable, for in spite of the fact that an omnipotent God can do whatever is possible, an omnibenevolent God will only do what is moral. And it is not morally right to force moral beings against their will. God wants all to be saved, but it is not possible morally to save people against their will (by irresistible grace on the unwilling). Hence, there is no guarantee that all people will be saved. God can only save the willing; His omnibenevolence will not allow Him to do everything His omnipotence could otherwise do (see Volume 3, chapter 13).

On the other hand, if strong Calvinism is correct, and God can force people by irresistible grace to be saved, then the only way ***they*** can avoid universalism is to deny that God is omnibenevolent. If God can save anyone He wants to save, even apart from free choice, and if God really loves all and wants all to be saved, then all ***will*** be saved (universalism). Thus, the only true way to avoid universalism is to insist that God is all-loving and, as such, cannot coerce free choices, because it is contradictory to do so, and God cannot do what is contradictory.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S OMNIBENEVOLENCE

Church history gives abundant testimony to God's omnibenevolence. This is true of every period, beginning with the patristic Fathers.

The Early Church Fathers on God's Omnibenevolence

Mathetes

For God, the Lord and Fashioner of all things, who made all things, and assigned them their several positions, proved Himself not merely a friend of mankind, but also long-suffering [in His dealings with them]. Yea, He was always of such a character, and still is, and will ever be, kind and good, and free from [unjustified] wrath, and true, and the only one who is [absolutely] good; and He formed in His mind a great and unspeakable conception, which He communicated to His Son alone. (*EMD*, 8 in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, 1)

Justin Martyr

Therefore we must confess that He, who is ever the same, has commanded these and such like institutions on account of sinful men, and we must declare Him to be benevolent, foreknowing, needing nothing, righteous and good. (*DJ* in ibid., 1.389)

Clement of Alexandria

“God himself is love” (ibid., 2.1218).

It is then now clear to us, from what has been said, that the beneficence of God is eternal, and that, from an unbeginning principle, equal natural righteousness reached all, according to the worth of each several race, never having had a beginning. For God did not make a beginning of being Lord and Good, being always what He is. Nor will He ever cease to do good, although He bring all things to an end. And each one of us is a partaker of His beneficence, as far as He wills. For the difference of the elect is made by the intervention of a choice worthy of the soul, and by exercise. (S, 5.14 in ibid., II)

Theophilus

You will say, then, to me, “Do you, who see God, explain to me the appearance of God?” Hear, O man. The appearance of God is ineffable and indescribable, and cannot be seen by eyes of flesh. For in glory He is incomprehensible, in greatness unfathomable, in height inconceivable, in power incomparable, in

> wisdom unrivaled, in goodness inimitable, in kindness unutterable.... For if I say He is Light, I name but His own work; if I call Him Word, I name but His sovereignty; if I call Him Mind, I speak but of His wisdom; if I say He is Spirit, I speak of His breath; if I call Him Wisdom, I speak of His offspring; if I call Him Strength, I speak of His sway; if I call Him Power, I am mentioning His activity; if Providence, I but mention His goodness; if I call Him Kingdom, I but mention His glory; if I call Him Lord, I mention His being judge; if I call Him Judge, I speak of Him as being just; if I call Him Father, I speak of all things as being from Him; if I call Him Fire, I but mention His anger. (*TA*, 1:4 in ibid., III)

Tertullian

"We first of all indeed know God Himself by the teaching of Nature, calling Him God of gods, taking for granted that He is good" (C, 1.4.6 in ibid., III). "And as God is good, He so loves infants as to have blessed the midwives in Egypt, when they protected the infants of the Hebrews which were in peril from Pharaoh's command" (***FBAM***, 4.23 in ibid.).

Origen

"This just and good God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Himself gave the law and the prophets, and the Gospels, being also the God of the apostles and of the Old and New Testaments" (***DP***, preface 4.1 in ibid., 4).

> Are we to suppose that that Providence which in the sacred Scriptures has ministered to the edification of all the Churches of Christ, had no thought for those bought with a price, for whom Christ died; whom, although His Son, God who is love spared not, but gave Him up for us all, that with Him He might freely give us all things? (*DP*, 414 in ibid.)

The Medieval Fathers on God's Omnibenevolence

During the Middle Ages, Christian thinkers undergirded the love of God with a strong metaphysical structure. They grounded it in His necessity, unchangeability, and infinity.

Augustine

There is, accordingly, a good which alone is simple and, therefore, which alone is unchangeable—and this is God. This good has created all goods; but these are not simple and, therefore, they are mutable. They were created, I repeat, that is, they were made, not begotten. For, what is begotten of the simple good is likewise simple and is what the Begetter is. These two we call the Father and the Son and, together with their Spirit, are one God. (*CG*, 11.10)

Aught else except Thee there was not whence Thou mightest create these things, O God, One Trinity, and Triune Unity; and, therefore, out of nothing didst Thou create heaven and earth—a great thing and a small—because Thou art Almighty and Good, to make all things good, even the great heaven and the small earth. Thou wast, and there was nought else from which Thou didst create heaven and earth; two such things, one near unto Thee, the other near to nothing—one to which Thou shouldest be superior, the other to which nothing should be inferior. (C, 12.7)

Anselm

Again,

What then are You, Lord God, You than whom nothing greater can be thought? But what are You save that supreme being, existing through Yourself alone, who made everything else from nothing? For whatever is not this is less than that which can be thought of but this cannot be thought about You. What goodness, then, could be wanting to the supreme good, through which every good exists? Thus You are just, truthful, happy, and whatever it is better to be than not to be—for it is better to be just rather than unjust, and happy rather than unhappy.

That there is only one God and not several, we easily establish because either God is not the supreme good, or there are several supreme goods, or there is one sole God and not several. And no one denies that God is the supreme good, since anything less than something is in no way God, and anything not the supreme good is less than something, since it is less than the supreme good. The supreme good surely does not allow that there be duplication of itself, so that there be several supreme goods. For if there are several supreme goods, they are equal. But the supreme good is the good that surpasses other goods, so that it has neither an equal nor anything that surpasses it. Therefore, there is one and only one supreme good. Therefore, there is one and only one God and not several gods, just as there is one and only one supreme good, and as there is one and only one supreme substance or essence or nature (which the same argument as in the case of the supreme good proves cannot be in any way affirmed of several things). (*ACMW*, 89, 248)

Thomas Aquinas

"And when it is said, None is good but God alone, this is to be understood of essential goodness" (***ST***, la.6.2).

> He is not directed to anything else as to an end, but is Himself the last end of all things. Hence it is manifest that God alone has every kind of perfection by His own essence; therefore He Himself alone is good essentially, (ibid., la.6.3)
>
> God loves all existing things. For all existing things, insofar as they exist, are good; since the existence of a thing is itself a good; and likewise, whatever perfection it possesses. Now it has been shown above [Q. 19, A. 4] that God's will is the cause of all things. It must needs be, therefore, that a thing has existence, or any kind of good, only inasmuch as it is willed by God. To every existing thing, then, God wills some good. Hence, since to love anything is nothing else than to will good to that thing, it is manifest that God loves everything that exists, (ibid., la.20.2)
>
> For good is attributed to God inasmuch as all desired perfections flow from Him as from the first cause. They do not, however, flow from Him as from a univocal agent … but as from an agent which does not agree with its effects either in species or genus.… Therefore, as good is in God as in the first, it must be in Him in a most excellent way; and therefore He is called the supreme good, (ibid., la.6.2)

The Reformation Leaders on God's Omnibenevolence

With their powerful stress on God's gracious provision of salvation, the Reformers placed a strong emphasis on God's love. This is evident in their focus on God's unconditional election and unmerited favor toward sinners.

Martin Luther

> Wherefore He has bidden us, in the Lord's Prayer, to pray for nothing more than our daily bread, so that we may live and act in fear and know that at no hour are we sure of either life or property, but may await and receive everything from His hands. That is what true faith does. Indeed we daily see in many of God's works that things must happen thus, whether it suits us or not. (*WL*, 4.20)
>
> God indeed gives to some many good things and richly adorns them, as He did Lucifer in heaven. He scatters His gifts broadcast among the multitude; but He does not therefore regard them. His good things are merely gifts, that last but for a season; but His grace and regard are the inheritance, which lasts forever,

(ibid., 3.159)

True, the malicious devil deceived and seduced Adam; but we ought to consider that, soon after the fall, Adam received the promise of the woman's seed that should crush the serpent's head, and should bless the people on earth. Therefore, we must acknowledge that the goodness and mercy of the Father, who sent his Son to be our Savior, is immeasurably great towards the wicked ungovernable world. Let, therefore, his good will be acceptable unto thee, oh, man, and speculate not with thy devilish queries, thy whys and thy wherefores, touching God's words and works. For God, who is creator of all creatures, and orders all things according to his unsearchable will and wisdom, is not pleased with such questionings. (*TT*, 33)

John Calvin[1]

Therefore, in order that all ground of offense may be removed, and he may completely reconcile us to himself, he, by means of the expiation set forth in the death of Christ, abolishes all the evil that is in us, so that we, formerly impure and unclean, now appear in his sight just and holy. Accordingly, God the Father, by his love, prevents and anticipates our reconciliation in Christ. Nay, it is because he first loves us, that he afterwards reconciles us to himself. But because the iniquity, which deserves the indignation of God, remains in us until the death of Christ comes to our aid, and that iniquity is in his sight accursed and condemned, we are not admitted to full and sure communion with God, unless insofar as Christ unites us. (*ICR*, 2.16.3)

The other course, which has a closer relation to faith, remains to be considered—viz., that while we observe how God has destined all things for our good and salvation, we at the same time feel his power and grace, both in ourselves and in the great blessings which he has bestowed upon us, thence stirring up ourselves to confidence in him, to invocation, praise, and love, (ibid., 1.14.22)

The Post Reformation Theologians on God's Omnibenevolence

Jacob Arminius

The Goodness of the Essence of God is that according to which it is, essentially in itself, the Supreme and very Good; from a participation in which all other things have an existence and are good; and to which all other things are to be referred as to their supreme end: For this reason it is called communicable. (*WJA*, 1.442)

Love is an affection of union in God; whose objects are not only God himself and the good of justice, but also the creature, imitating or related to God either according to likeness, or only according to impress, and the felicity of the creature … God loves himself with complacency in the perfection of his own nature, wherefore He likewise enjoys himself. He also loves himself with the love of complacency in his effects produced externally; both in acts and works which are specimens and evident, infallible indications of that perfection.

Grace is a certain adjunct of Goodness and Love, by which is signified that God is affected to communicate his own good and to love the creatures, not through merit or of debt, not by any cause impelling from without; nor that something may be added to God himself, but that it may be well with him on whom the good is bestowed and who is beloved, which may also receive the name "Liberality." According to this, God is said to be "rich in Goodness, Mercy," etc. (ibid., 456)

Stephen Charnock

Every creature is capable of a death in sin. "None is good but God," and none is naturally free from change but God, which excludes every creature from the same prerogative; and certainly, if one angel sinned, all might have sinned, because there was the same root of mutability in one as well as another. It is as impossible for a creature to be a Creator, as for a creature to have naturally an incommunicable property of the Creator. All things, whether angels or men, are made of nothing, and therefore, capable of defection; because a creature being made of nothing, cannot be good, or essentially good, but by participation from another. (*EAG*, 2.230)

Pure and perfect goodness is only the royal prerogative of God; goodness is a choice perfection of the Divine nature. This is the true and genuine character of God; he is good, he is goodness, good in himself, good in his essence, good in the highest degree, (ibid., 2.214)

God is good himself, and to himself … whereby he loves himself and his own excellency; but as it stands in relation to his creatures, it is that perfection of God whereby he delights in his works, and is beneficial to them. God is the highest goodness, because he doth not act from his own profit, but for his creatures' welfare, and the manifestation of his own goodness, (ibid., 2.219)

God gave him a law, taken from the depths of his holy nature, and suited to the original faculties of man. The rules which God hath fixed in the world, are not the resolves of bare will, but the result particularly from the goodness of his nature; they are nothing else but the transcripts of his infinite detestation of sin, as he is the unblemished governor of the world, (ibid., 2.128)

God only is originally good, good of himself. All created goodness is a rivulet from this fountain, but Divine goodness hath no spring; God depends upon no other for his goodness; he hath it in, and of, himself: man hath no goodness from himself, God hath no goodness from without himself: his goodness is no more derived from another than his being; if we were good by any external thing, that thing must be before him, or after him; if before him, he was not then himself from eternity; if after him, he was not good in himself from eternity,

(ibid., 2.210–11)

R. L. Dabney

> “The world is full of the goodness of the Lord.” I only aim to classify the evidences that God is benevolent. And [first], generally: since God is the original Cause of all things, all the happiness amidst His works is of His doing; and therefore proves His benevolence. [Second], more definitely: the natures of all orders of sentient beings, if not violated, are constructed, in the main, to secure their appropriate well-being. Instance the insect, the fish, the bird, the ox, the man. [Third], many things occur in the special providence of God which show Him benevolent; such as providing remedial medicines, etc., for pain, and special interpositions in danger. [Fourth], God might, compatibly with justice, have satisfied Himself with so adapting external nature to man’s senses and mind as to make it minister to his being and intelligence, and thus secure the true end of his existence, without, in so doing, making it pleasant to his senses. Our food and drink might have nourished us, our senses of sight and hearing might have informed us, without making food sweet, light beautiful, and sounds melodious to us.… Such, in a word, is God’s goodness, that He turns aside to strew incidental enjoyment. The more unessential these are to His main end, the stronger the argument. [Fifth], God has made all the beneficent emotions—love, sympathy, benevolence, forgiveness, delightful in their exercise; and all the malevolent ones, as resentment, envy, revenge, painful to their subjects; thus teaching us that He would have us propagate happiness and diminish pain. Last: Conscience, which is God’s imperative, enjoins benevolence on us as one duty, whenever compatible with others. Benevolence is therefore God’s will; and doubtless He who wills us to be so, is benevolent Himself. (*LST*, 52)

Francis Turretin

> The goodness of God is that by which he is conceived not only absolutely and in himself as supremely good and perfect (as it were) and the only good (*autoagathon*,
>
> Mark 10:18
>
>) because he is such originally, perfectly and immutably; but also relatively and extrinsically as beneficent towards creatures (which is called benignity) because it is of the reason of good to be communicative of itself.
>
> Although the goodness of God extends itself to all creatures, yet not equally, but exhibits the greatest diversity in the communication of good. Hence one is general (by which he follows all creatures,
>
> Ps. 36:6–7

); another special (which has respect to men,
Acts 14:17
) and another most special (relating to the elect and referred to in
Ps. 73:1
: “God is good to Israel”). If you seek the causes of this diversity, various ones c
be assigned besides his will: (1) It was in accordance with his supreme dominion to show the most free power in diffusing his gifts (which in this inequality is exhibited in the highest manner). (2) The wisdom of God demanded that a certain order should exist in things (which is beheld in the connection of superiors and inferiors). (3) It conduced to the beauty of the universe (which creatures differing in form, actions and qualities render perfect). (4) It afforded a better demonstration of the inexhaustible fountain of divine goodness, since one creature could not receive the full communication of good (thus it should be imparted to more). (*IET*, 1.241)

William G. T. Shedd

The Goodness of God is the Divine essence viewed as energizing benevolently, and kindly, towards the creature. It is an emanant, or transitive attribute issuing forth from the Divine nature, and aiming to promote the welfare and happiness of the universe. It is not that attribute by which God is good; but by which he *does* good. As good in himself, God is holy; as showing goodness to others, he is good or kind. (*DT*, 385)

In
Luke 18:19
, the reference is to benevolence, not to holiness: “None is good save one, that i
God.” (ibid., 377)

J. I. Packer

[The] assertion that God is love [tells us] that, in other words, the love which he shows to humanity, and which Christians know and rejoice in, is a revelation of his own inner being. (*KG*, 119)

The measure of love is how much it gives, and the measure of the love of God is the gift of his only Son to become human, and to die for sins, and so to become the one mediator who can bring us to God. The New Testament writers constantly point to the cross of Christ as the crowning proof of the reality and boundlessness of God’s love, (ibid., 125)

God’s love is an exercise of his goodness towards sinners. As such, it has the nature of grace and mercy. It is an outgoing of God in kindness which not merely is undeserved, but is actually contrary to desert; for the objects of God’s love are rational creatures who have broken God’s law, whose nature is corrupt in God’s sight, and who merit only condemnation and final banishment

from his presence, (ibid., 123)

OBJECTION TO GOD'S OMNIBENVOLENCE

Objection One—Based on the Idea That Necessary Love Is Contradictory

Love is a free act, flowing from one's free choice. A person cannot be forced to love; forced love is contradictory. If this is so, then love cannot flow from the essence of God, since God's essence is necessary. Hence, love cannot be of the essence of God: If it were, then God would be forced to love, which is contradictory. In other words, God loves because He wants to love, not because He has to love. Thus, love and necessity are incompatible.

Response to Objection One

Love and ***necessity*** are not contradictory, but love and ***compulsion*** are. It is of the nature of God to love, and since God's nature is necessary, it is necessary that God love. In addition, since love is a free act, it is necessary that God loves freely. Therefore, it is not contradictory for love to be both necessary and free: It simply means that God, by His very nature, must love. His will is in accord with His nature; consequently, His freely chosen love is in accordance with His necessary and unchanging nature. For instance, since God is essentially good, He cannot love evil. Likewise, He is not free to not be loving. God is free only within the bounds of His nature. Since God is just, He cannot love injustice or love in an unjust way. It is of God's essence that He love, but it is also of His essence that He loves freely. Nothing forces God to be loving; it comes naturally to Him.

Objection Two—Based on God's Unique Love for the Elect [2]

Strong Calvinists, who rightly deny universal atonement, claim that God does not love all people in a saving way, insisting that Christ died only for the elect. If this is so, then God would not be omnibenevolent. Some of the passages they appeal to include the following (emphasis added): "For he ***chose us*** in him before the creation of the world" (Eph. 1:4); "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for ***our sins*** according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3); "I lay down my life for [***my***] ***sheep"*** (John 10:15); "Husbands, love your wives, ***just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her"*** (Eph. 5:25); "In him we [believers] were also chosen" (Eph. 1:11). Christ's death is allegedly always for those who do or will (cf. John 20:29) believe in Him (cf. Gal. 1:3–4; Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 3:18).

Response to Objection Two

The fact that in some passages only believers are mentioned as the object of Christ's death does not prove the Atonement is limited, for several reasons (see Volume 3, chapter 12).

First, when the Bible uses terms like "we," "our," or "us" of the Atonement, it speaks only of those to whom it has been ***applied***, not for all those for whom it was ***provided***. In doing so it does not thereby limit the Atonement in its possible application to all humanity; it speaks only of some to whom it has been ***already*** applied.

Second, the fact that Jesus loves His bride and died for her (Eph. 5:25) does not mean that God does not love the whole world and desire all to be part of His bride, the church. Indeed, as the verses below will show, "God so loved the world that he gave His only son" (John 3:16).

Third, this reasoning overlooks the fact that there are many passages that do declare Jesus died for more than the elect (John 3:16; Rom. 5:6; 2 Cor. 5:19; Heb. 2:9; 1 John 2:2).

Fourth, nowhere in the New Testament does it say, "Christ died only for the elect," even though all of these words are part of the common vocabulary of the New Testament writers.

Fifth, and finally, numerous times the New Testament proclaims in so many

words that “God so loved the world” (John. 3:16); that “one [Christ] died for all” (2 Cor. 5:14); Jesus came to “taste death for everyone” (Heb. 2:9); God “wants all men to be saved” (1 Tim. 2:4); Christ “gave himself as a ransom for all” (1 Tim. 2:6); “He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2); “There were also false prophets … even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them” (2 Peter 2:1); “He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

Sixth, even though Paul says Christ died for the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:13) it does not mean he died ***only*** for them.

Objection Three—Based on God’s Loving Jacob and Hating Esau

According to Romans 9, God loved Jacob and hated Esau (v. 13). He has mercy on some, but not on others (v. 5:15). He destines some to destruction and not others (v. 22). He hardens the hearts of some in unbelief, but not others (v. 5:18). From this it seems obvious that God is not omnibenevolent when it comes to salvation.

Response to Objection Three

In response, it should be pointed out that this is not a correct interpretation of these texts, for several reasons.

First, this passage is not speaking about electing individuals, but nations. “Esau” is the nation of Edom that came from him (cf. Mal. 1:2–3), and “Jacob” is the nation of Israel that came from him (cf. 9:13).

Second, the election of the nation was temporal, not eternal; that is, Israel was chosen as a national channel through which the eternal blessing of salvation through Christ would come to all people (cf. Gen. 12:1–3; Rom. 9:4–5). Not every individual in Israel was elected to be saved (9:6).

Third, “hate” means to love less; it does not mean not to love at all or not to will the good of the person. This is evident from Genesis 29:30: The phrase “loved

Rachel more than Leah" is used as the equivalent of "Leah was hated" (cf. also Matt. 10:37).

Fourth, Pharaoh hardened his own heart against God (cf. Ex. 7:13–14; 8:15, 19, 32) before God hardened it (Ex. 9:12). The purpose of the plagues upon Egypt was to get Pharaoh to repent; since he refused, the result was that his heart was hardened. As we have seen before, the same sun that melts wax hardens clay. The problem is not with the sun, but with the receptivity of the agent it is acting upon.

Fifth, the "vessels of wrath" in Romans 9 (v. 22 NKJV) were not destined to destruction against their will. Indeed, they were such because they rejected God as He "endured with much longsuffering," waiting for them to repent (cf. 2 Peter 3:9).

Sixth, and finally, to take this passage out of its context and use it to support limited love is to go against numerous clear affirmations of God's universal saving love for all (see Volume 3).

Objection Four—Based on the Notion That Omnibenevolence Leads to Universalism

If God loves all people and desires all of them to be saved, then why are not all people saved? He is omnipotent, and an all powerful Being can do whatever He wants to do, can't He? Further, God is sovereign and in control of all things (see chapter 23): His will cannot be thwarted, and He also accomplishes whatever He sets out to do (Isa. 55:11). But if He can accomplish whatever He desires, and if He desires to save all, then doesn't it follow that all will be saved (universalism) ?

Response to Objection Four

God's ***ultimate*** will is always accomplished, but His ***immediate*** mil is not. God wills some things conditionally and some unconditionally. Salvation is one of those things that is willed on the condition of our free will (John 1:12; Matt.

23:37). God does not desire that anyone perish, but that all should repent (2 Peter 3:9). But ***not*** all will repent; hence, not all will be saved. Jesus lamented, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, ***but you were not willing'*** (Matt. 23:37, emphasis added). God is all-powerful, but He cannot do ***any***thing: He cannot do what is contradictory, and He cannot go against His own nature. For example, "It is impossible for God to lie" (Heb. 6:18), and "He cannot disown Himself" (2 Tim. 2:13). Once again, God cannot force someone to freely love Him. So while God is all-powerful, He must exercise His power in accordance with His love, and His love cannot force someone to love Him.

Objection Five—Based on God's Having Power That Is Not Used

It is objected by strong Calvinists that God does not have to exercise love toward everyone just because He is all-loving any more than God must exercise His power toward everyone just because He is omnipotent. That is, God can have more love than He uses, just as He has more power than He uses; thus, God does not have to love everyone simply because He is all-loving.

Response to Objection Five

First of all, love is a ***moral*** attribute of God; power is a ***nonmoral*** attribute. It is a category mistake to confuse them. Moral attributes bind God to act in a certain way because they are moral attributes, while ***nonmoral*** attributes do not. Further, it is inconsistent to argue, as strong Calvinists do, that God must always act justly because He is all-just, but that He does not always have to act lovingly simply because He is all-loving. If this were the case, then God's justice would not obligate Him to condemn all sin—but it does. Therefore, His love binds Him to love all sinners as well. Love is just as essential to God as justice. God is a simple, necessary, and infinite Being; hence, whatever attribute He has, He must have completely, necessarily, and infinitely. Thus, God cannot be all-loving

unless He shows love to all any more than He can be all-just unless He shows justice to all. In brief, if God is absolute truth, He must tell the truth to all. If God is all-just, He must be just to all. And if He is all-loving, He must be loving to all.

Objection Six—Based on What Sinners Deserve

By virtue of being a sinner, one gets what he deserves—justice. But grace is getting what one does not deserve. Hence, there is nothing in a sinner by which he deserves God's grace.

Response to Objection Six

We are saved by God's grace, but grace isn't deserved by any sinner. Rather, justice demands that sin be condemned. There is nothing ***in a sinner*** that prompts God to save him; instead, justice must condemn him. However, there is something ***in God*** that prompts Him to save sinners, namely, His love. Since God is all-loving by nature, He ***must*** try to save them. So God does not have to show love because we deserve it (we don't), but because His nature demands it. Love is not an arbitrary attribute of God; it is rooted in His necessary nature.

Objection Seven—Based on the Presence of Evil

This objection states that if God were all-powerful and all-loving, there would not be any evil. But there ***is*** evil; consequently, if God is all-powerful, then He cannot be all-loving. God ***is*** all-powerful (see chapter 7); therefore, God cannot be all-loving, for an all-powerful God ***can*** defeat evil and an all-loving God ***would*** defeat evil. Evil is not defeated; it seems to follow, then, that if God is all-powerful He cannot be all-loving (see Volume 3, chapter 6).

Response to Objection Seven

The above conclusion does not follow, though, because it wrongly assumes that since evil is ***not yet*** defeated it ***never will be*** defeated. To affirm that evil never will be defeated would assume omniscience, which only God has. Indeed, since it has already been shown that the Bible is God's Word (see Volume 1, part 2), we have the basis for asserting that evil will one day be vanquished (see Rev. 20–22).

Since God is both omniscient (see chapter 8) and omnipotent, we know that evil will be defeated, for an all-knowing God knows the end from the beginning, and an all-good God will assure that it is a good ending (where evil is defeated), and an all-powerful God can achieve what He knows will come to pass. Therefore, evil will be defeated someday, namely, when God by His predetermined foreknowledge has decided that it will be defeated.

CONCLUSION

God is not only completely truthful, but He is absolutely good. He has not only perfect integrity, but He has perfect charity (love). In short, He is all-truthful and all-loving. It is impossible for Him to lie (Heb. 6:18), and He is love by His very nature (1 John 4:16). As such, these attributes provide complete confidence in His pronouncements and promises. His work cannot be broken or perish (John 10:35; Matt. 5:17–18); likewise, we can trust that His love will never fail us (Rom. 8:35–39).

While God possesses truth and love in an absolute sense, He is able to communicate them to us in a ***limited*** degree. Hence, these moral attributes are called communicable characteristics of God.

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

GOD'S MERCY AND WRATH

Another pair of God's moral characteristics is mercy and wrath. While some mistakenly believe these are incompatible, they, in fact, form a unity within the character of God.

There is, however, a legitimate question raised as to whether mercy and wrath are attributes of God or activities that flow from other attributes. Even if they are acts, not attributes, there are, nonetheless, deep-seated attributes (such as goodness and justice) from which these actions proceed.

GOD'S MERCY

Regardless of whether mercy is itself an attribute or an activity of God, it is deeply rooted in His unchangeable nature. As such, it reveals something extremely important about God's character.

THE DEFINITION OF MERCY IN GENERAL

There are several Hebrew words that are associated with God's mercy. ***Kapporeth*** (from ***kopher***) means "ransom," "propitiatory," or "the mercy seat," where the blood of atonement was offered to God. ***Racham*** means "to love," "to

have compassion," or "to show mercy." ***Chesed*** means "goodness," "kindness," "mercifulness," or "loving-kindness."

There are Greek words associated with mercy in the New Testament. ***Eleemon*** (from ***eleeo***) means "to show mercy," "to pity," "to have compassion," or "to be merciful." ***Eleemon*** depicts a merciful, sympathetic attitude, used of humans (Matt. 5:7) as well as of Christ (Heb. 2:17). ***Eleos*** is employed of one human toward another (Matt. 9:13; 12:7; Luke 10:37) as well as of God toward human beings (Luke 1:50, 58; Gal. 6:16; Rom. 15:9; Titus 3:5; Rom. 9:23; 11:31; Jude 1:2). ***Oiktirmos*** carries the idea of "compassion" or "pity," whether of God (James 5:11) or of people (Luke 6:36).

The word ***mercy*** is used of human beings in saving a life (Gen. 19:19); in prospering a journey (Gen. 24:27); in delivering from prison (Gen. 39:21); in not destroying lives (Jude 1:20); in receiving the favor of the king (Ezra 7:28; 9:9); and in answer to prayer to receive the favor of another person (Neh. 1:11). Of course, as will be seen, God's mercy is all of this and more (cf. Job 37:13; Ps. 4:1).

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S MERCY

Several characteristics are associated with God's mercy: It is unfailing, unchanging, everlasting, and manifest in great compassion.

God's Mercy Is Rooted in His Goodness and Love

"In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed" (Ex. 15:13). "[He is] maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished" (Ex. 34:7). "The LORD is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished.… In accordance with your great love, forgive the sin of these people, just as you have pardoned them from the time they left Egypt until now" (Num. 14:18–19). "Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good" (1 Chron. 16:34). "They raised their voices in praise to the LORD and sang: 'He is good' " (2 Chron. 5:13). "When all the Israelites saw the fire

coming down and the glory of the LORD above the temple, they knelt on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and they worshiped and gave thanks to the Lord, saying, ‘He is good’ ” (2 Chron. 7:3). “With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the LORD: ‘He is good; his love to Israel endures forever.’ And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the LORD” (Ezra 3:11).

God’s Mercy Is Great

“Your servant has found favor in your eyes, and you have shown great kindness to me in sparing my life” (Gen. 19:19). “In accordance with your great love, forgive the sin of these people, just as you have pardoned them from the time they left Egypt until now” (Num. 14:19). “Solomon answered, ‘You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart. You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day’ ” (1 Kings 3:6). “Remember me for this also, O my God, and show mercy to me according to your great love” (Neh. 13:22). “Solomon answered God, ‘You have shown great kindness to David my father and have made me king in his place’ ” (2 Chron. 1:8). “Then I commanded the Levites to purify themselves and go and guard the gates in order to keep the Sabbath day holy. Remember me for this also, O my God, and show mercy to me according to your great love” (Neh. 13:22).

God’s Mercy Is Everlasting

God is faithful forever in His covenant and mercy. “Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands” (Deut. 7:9). “But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you” (2 Sam. 7:15). “He gives his king great victories; he shows unfailing kindness to his anointed, to David and his descendants forever” (2 Sam. 22:51). “Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever” (1 Chron. 16:34). “With them were Heman and

Jeduthun and the rest of those chosen and designated by name to give thanks to the LORD, ‘for his love endures forever’ ” (1 Chron. 16:41). “They raised their voices in praise to the Lord and sang, ‘He is good; his love endures forever.’ Then the temple of the LORD was filled with a cloud” (2 Chron. 5:13). “The priests took their positions, as did the Levites with the LORD’S musical instruments, which King David had made for praising the LORD and which were used when he gave thanks, saying, ‘His love endures forever’ ” (2 Chron. 7:6). “After consulting the people, Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to the LORD and to praise him for the splendor of his holiness as they went out at the head of the army, saying, ‘Give thanks to the Lord, for his love endures forever’ ” (2 Chron. 20:21). “Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy” (Micah 7:18).

God’s Mercy Is Faithful

“In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed. In your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling” (Ex. 15:13). “Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands” (Deut. 7:9). “Praise be to the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not abandoned his kindness and faithfulness to my master” (Gen. 24:27). “May kindness and faithfulness be with you” (2 Sam. 15:20). “If you pay attention to these laws and are careful to follow them, then the LORD your God will keep his covenant of love with you, as he swore to your forefathers” (Deut. 7:12). “O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below—you who keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way” (1 Kings 8:23). “I will be his father, and he will be my son. I will never take my love away from him, as I took it away from your predecessor” (1 Chron. 17:13). “Then I said, ‘O LORD, God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and obey his commands’ ” (Neh. 1:5). “Now therefore, O our God, the great, mighty and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love, do not let all this hardship seem trifling in your eyes” (Neh. 9:32).

God’s Mercy Is Essential

God’s mercy is essential, because it is eternal (2 Sam. 22:51), unfailing (Ex. 15:13), unconditional (Deut. 7:9),[1] flows from His unchanging goodness (Deut. 7:9; Num. 14:18–19), does not need to be provoked like wrath (Deut. 9:7–8) but comes naturally (Jer. 44:8), is associated with His faithfulness (Gen. 24:27; cf. 2 Tim. 2:13), is exercised on all who want it, not only some (John 6:37), and, like other moral attributes, is rooted in God’s unchanging nature (e.g., truth [cf. Heb. 6:18], justice, and perfection). These properties are from His nature, not from an arbitrary will; indeed, God said, “I have done nothing … without cause” (Ezek. 14:23).

God’s Mercy Is Unfailing

“In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed. In your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling” (Ex. 15:13).

God’s Mercy Is Longsuffering

“The LORD is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation” (Num. 14:18).

God’s Mercy Is Received by the Repentant

“In accordance with your great love, forgive the sin of these people, just as you

have pardoned them from the time they left Egypt until now" (Num. 14:19). "None of those condemned things shall be found in your hands, so that the Lord will turn from his fierce anger; he will show you mercy, have compassion on you, and increase your numbers, as he promised on oath to your forefathers" (Deut. 13:17).

God's Mercy Was Manifest on the Mercy Seat

God's mercy was manifest on the "mercy seat" in the temple for the forgiveness of sins (cf. Ex. 25:1, 18–22; 26:34; 30:6; 31:7; 35:12; 37:6–9; 39:35; 40:20; Lev. 16:2, Lev. 16:13–15; Num. 7:89; 1 Chron. 28:11 NKJV). Mercy was released by Christ's atoning death for all humankind (1 John 2:2).

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S MERCY

Mercy flows from God's attribute of goodness (or love) as grounded in His infinity and immutability. Since God is unlimited and unchangeable, then, given that He is good, He must be infinitely and unchangeably good. Since mercy flows from God's goodness, and since God is infinite, it follows that God is infinitely and unchangeably merciful. It is of His very nature to show mercy; He cannot not be merciful. As God is a necessary Being, even so He must of necessity be merciful. Were He not merciful, He would not be ***essentially*** good or loving. God is not ***arbitrarily*** merciful (see Objection One on page below).

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S MERCY

In the history of the church, the twin attributes of mercy and wrath have found a varying but continual place.

The Early Church Fathers on God's Mercy

Clement of Rome

"Let us be kind to one another after the pattern of the tender mercy and benignity of our Creator" (***ECC***, 14 in Roberts and Donaldson, ***ANF***, I).

> Wherefore, let us yield obedience to His excellent and glorious will; and imploring His mercy and loving-kindness, while we forsake all fruitless labors, and strife, and envy, which leads to death, let us turn and have recourse to His compassions. (*ECC*, 9 in ibid.)

Justin Martyr

> From the beginning we have not heard, nor have our eyes seen a God besides Thee: and Thy works, the mercy which Thou shalt show to those who repent. He shall meet those who do righteousness, and they shall remember Thy ways. (*DJ*, 25 in ibid.)

Irenaeus

> It is indeed proper to God, and befitting His character, to show mercy and pity, and to bring salvation to His creatures, even though they be brought under danger of destruction. "For with Him," says the Scripture, "is propitiation" (*AH*, 5.36.10 in ibid.).

Clement of Alexandria

> But God being by nature rich in pity, in consequence of His own goodness, cares for us, though [we are] neither portions of Himself nor by nature His children. And this is the greatest proof of the goodness of God: that such being our relation to Him, and being by nature wholly estranged, He nevertheless cares for us. For the affection in animals to their progeny is natural, and the friendship of kindred minds is the result of intimacy. But the mercy of God is rich toward us, who are in no respect related to Him; I say either in our essence or nature, or in the peculiar energy of our essence, but only in our being the work of His will. (S, 2.16 in ibid., II)

Tertullian

> Thus far, then, justice is the very fullness of the Deity Himself, manifesting God as both a perfect father and a perfect master: a father in His mercy, a master in His discipline; a father in the mildness of His power, a master in its severity; a father who must be loved with dutiful affection, a master who must needs be feared; be loved, because He prefers mercy to sacrifice; be feared, because He dislikes sin; be loved, because He prefers the sinner's repentance to his death; be feared, because He dislikes the sinners who do not repent. Accordingly, the divine law enjoins duties in respect of both these attributes: *Thou shalt love God*, and, *Thou shalt fear God*. It proposed one for the obedient man, the other for the transgressor. (*FBAM*, 2.2.13 in ibid., 3)

The Medieval Fathers on God's Mercy

Focus on God's mercy did not await the Reformation. There were "pre-Reformers," like Augustine, who saw His mercy as absolutely indispensable for our salvation.

Augustine

> Though, nevertheless, they who are not citizens of the eternal city, which is called the city of God in the sacred Scriptures, are more useful to the earthly city when they possess even that virtue than if they had not even that. But there could be nothing more fortunate for human affairs than that, by the mercy of God, they who are endowed with true piety of life, if they have the skill for ruling people, should also have the power. (*CG*, 5.19 in Schaff, *NPNF*, 111)
>
> We, though in ourselves unworthy, are bold to expect, through the merit of Christ and the mercy of God the Father. Wherefore I pray that the grace of God by our Lord Jesus Christ may grant unto us this favor too, that we may yet see your face. (*LSA*, 30 in ibid., 1:1)
>
> My whole hope is only in Thy exceeding great mercy. Give what Thou commandest, and command what Thou wilt. Thou imposest contingency upon us; "Nevertheless, when I perceived," saith one, "that I could not otherwise obtain her, except God gave her me … that was a point of wisdom also: to know whose gift she was." For by contingency are we bound up and brought into one, whence we were scattered abroad into many. (*C*, 10:29 in ibid.)

Anselm

O God, how profound is Your goodness! It is apparent whence Your mercy comes, and yet it is not clearly seen. Whence the stream flows is obvious, and yet the source where it rises is not seen directly. For on the one hand it is from plenitude of goodness that You are gentle with those who sin against You; and on the other hand the reason why You are thus is hidden in the depths of Your goodness.

O mercy, from what abundant sweetness and sweet abundance do you flow forth for us! O boundless goodness of God, with what feeling should You be loved by sinners! For You save the just whom justice commends, but You free sinners whom justice condemns.

But how are You at once both merciful and impassible? For if You are impassible You do not have any compassion; and if You have no compassion Your heart is not sorrowful from compassion with the sorrowful, which is what being merciful is. But if You are not merciful, whence comes so much consolation for the sorrowful? How, then, are You merciful and not merciful, O Lord, unless it be that You are merciful in relation to us and not in relation to Yourself? In fact, You are [merciful] according to our way of looking at things and not according to Your way. For when You look upon us in our misery it is we who feel the effect of Your mercy, but You do not experience the feeling. Therefore, You are both merciful because You save the sorrowful and pardon sinners against You, and You are not merciful because You do not experience any feeling of compassion for misery. (*ACMW*, 91–92)

Thomas Aquinas

Mercy is especially to be attributed to God, as seen in its effect, but not as an affection of passion. In proof of which it must be considered that a person is said to be merciful, as being, so to speak, sorrowful at heart; being affected with sorrow at the misery of another as though it were his own. Hence it follows that he endeavors to dispel the misery of this other, as if it were his; and this is the effect of mercy. To sorrow, therefore, over the misery of others belongs not to God; but it does most properly belong to Him to dispel that misery, whatever be the defect we call by that name. Now defects are not removed, except by the perfection of some kind of goodness; and the primary source of goodness is God, as shown above. It must, however, be considered that to bestow perfections appertains not only to the divine goodness, but also to His justice, liberality, and mercy; yet under different aspects. The communicating of perfections, absolutely considered, appertains to goodness, as shown above.... Insofar as God does not bestow them for His own use, but only on account of His goodness, it belongs to liberality; insofar as perfections given to things by God expel defects, it belongs to mercy.

God acts mercifully, not indeed by going against His justice, but by doing

> something more than justice; thus a man who pays another two hundred pieces of money, though owing him only one hundred, does nothing against justice, but acts liberally or mercifully. The case is the same with one who pardons an offence committed against him, for in remitting it he may be said to bestow a gift. Hence the Apostle calls remission a forgiving: “Forgive one another, as Christ has forgiven you” (Eph. 4:32). Hence it is clear that mercy does not destroy justice, but in a sense is the fulness thereof. And thus it is said: “Mercy exalteth itself above judgment” (James 2:13). (*ST*, Ia.21:3, ad 2)

The Reformation Leaders on God’s Mercy

God’s unmerited mercy in saving poor, lost sinners is at the heart of the Reformation doctrine of grace. This is obvious from both Luther and Calvin.

Martin Luther

> God’s proper work is well-doing, while being angry is called “His strange work” (Is. 28:21); and, to be sure, we need to have Him do well more than punish.… When God does us good for one year or ten, no one recognizes the fact, no one thanks Him for it. Thus our nature can well endure a benefaction but is unwilling to endure punishment and grumbles from the moment it comes, although it deserves nothing but wrath. However, God overlooks this and shows us more kindness than wrath. (*WLS*, 544)

> This is the first work of God—that He is merciful to all who are ready to do without their own opinion, right, wisdom, and all spiritual goods, and willing to be poor in spirit, (ibid., 3:176)

John Calvin

> All the Apostles abound in exhortations, admonitions, and rebukes, for the purpose of training the man of God to every good work, and that without any mention of merit. Nay, rather their chief exhortations are founded on the fact that without any merit of ours, our salvation depends entirely on the mercy of God. Thus Paul, who during a whole Epistle had maintained that there was no hope of life

for us save in the righteousness of Christ, when he comes to exhortation, beseeches us by the mercy which God has bestowed upon us. (*ICR*, 3:16:3)

To conclude, in one word; as often as we call God the Creator of heaven and earth, let us remember that the distribution of all the things which he created are in his hand and power, but that we are his sons, whom be has undertaken to nourish and bring up in allegiance to him, that we may expect the substance of all good from him alone, and have full hope that he will never suffer us to be in want of things necessary to salvation, so as to leave us dependent on some other source; that in everything we desire we may address our prayers to him, and in every benefit we receive acknowledge his hand and give him thanks; that thus allured by his great goodness and beneficence, we may study with our whole heart to love and serve him. (ibid., 1.14.22)

The Post-Reformation Theologians on God's Mercy

Jonathan Edwards

God is pleased to show mercy to his enemies, according to his own sovereign pleasure. Though he is infinitely above all, and stands in no need of creatures; yet he is graciously pleased to take a merciful notice of poor worms of the dust. (*WJE*, 2:110, 2.114)

Francis Turretin

Mercy attends upon the grace of God. For as the latter exercises itself about man as a sinner (granting the pardon of his sin) so the former is exercised about man as miserable (relieving his misery). This is properly ascribed to God not as signifying grief arising from the misery of another (as it is in men), but as indicating a prompt and disposed will to succor the miserable without any anguish or perturbation of mind.

It does not spring from any external cause which usually excites this effect in men (as the tie of blood, of friendship, the company of misery, imbecility of age, sex, etc.). Rather it springs from his goodness alone (as he loves to communicate himself to the creature and as he does not refrain from succoring the miserable). (*IET*, 1.243)

William G. T. Shedd

> Mercy is a second variety of the Divine Goodness. It is the benevolent compassion of God towards man as a sinner. This attribute, though logically implied in the idea of God as a being possessed of all conceivable perfections, is free and sovereign in its exercise. Consequently, it requires a special revelation in order to establish the fact that it will be exercised. (*DT*, 389)

Charles Hodge

> Goodness, in the scriptural sense of the term, includes benevolence, love, mercy, and grace. By benevolence is meant the disposition to promote happiness; all sensitive creatures are its objects. Love includes complacency, desire, and delight, and has rational beings for its objects. Mercy is kindness exercised towards the miserable, and includes pity, compassion, forbearance, and gentleness, which the Scriptures so abundantly ascribe to God. (*ST*, 471)

OBJECTIONS TO GOD'S MERCY

Several difficulties are associated with God's mercy. Perhaps the most important one is whether mercy is rooted in God's nature or in His arbitrary will.

Objection One—Based on God's Free Will

According to this objection, mercy cannot be of God's essence, since it flows from God's will. God can be and is merciful only on the ones He chooses to be, but not on others. Exodus 33:19 declares, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." Romans 9:18 adds: "He hardens whom he wants to harden." This seems to say that mercy is a matter of God's arbitrary choice, not of necessity. If so, God cannot be essentially merciful.

Response to Objection One

First, even if mercy is an act, not an attribute of God; nonetheless, it is an act of His will that is in accordance with His unchangeable nature. It is not an arbitrary act of will. As shown above, it is an essential characteristic of God.
Second, nothing in Scripture contradicts this; even the illustrations used in Romans 9 do not prove the contrary, for God did not arbitrarily harden Pharaoh—He attempted to get Pharaoh to repent. Further, Pharaoh first hardened His own heart (Ex. 7:14; 8:15, 32). When God did later harden Pharaoh's heart, it was because Pharaoh would not respond to Him. (Again, the same sun that melts wax also hardens clay—the difference is not in the sun, but in the receptivity of the agents receiving its rays.) Likewise, even in Romans 9, God waited patiently for His creatures to respond to His loving overtures (Rom. 9:22). Thus, they became "vessels of wrath" by rejecting His mercy, not because He did not want them to be recipients of it.
Third, when the Scripture says, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated" (Rom. 9:13), it does not support the contention that God is arbitrary in His love for several reasons. First of all, He is not speaking of individuals, but of the nations of Jacob (Israel) and Edom (which came from Esau). For another thing, this was not said of Edom ***before*** it was born, but ***after*** it had lived and performed horrendously evil actions on God's chosen people. (It was cited from Malachi [1:2–3], not from Genesis.) Likewise, Romans is not speaking here of God's eternal choice of individuals for salvation, but of His temporal election of nations to fit His purposes. Also, "hate" is a Hebrew idiom for "love less" (cf. Gen. 29:30). It does not mean God did not love Esau and want him to repent (cf. Rom. 9:22; 2 Peter 3:9); it means He has less affection for those who hate His people and attempt to thwart His plan.
Fourth, and finally, the implications of considering mercy to be an arbitrary act of God are incredibly significant. If mercy is an arbitrary act of God, then voluntarism is correct (i.e., something is right simply because God wills it rather than that God wills it because it is right). If so, then limited atonement follows (i.e., God only loves some, not all, persons). This is a denial of God's omnibenevolence; the Bible is clear that God loves the whole world (cf. John 3:16; Rom. 5:18–19; 1 Tim. 2:4–6; 1 John 2:2). A more detailed discussion of this is found later (in Volume 3, chapter 12).

Objection Two—Based on Universalism

It is further objected that if mercy is essential, then universalism follows, for if Christ died for everyone, then everyone will be saved. The Bible rejects this teaching (see Matt. 25:41; 2 Thess. 1:7–9; Rev. 20:11–15).

Response to Objection Two

God's unlimited mercy only shows God ***desires*** to save all (not that He ***must*** or ***will*** save all). God cannot do what is impossible, and it is impossible to force a free choice (Matt. 23:37; cf. 2 Peter 3:9). God's saving mercy must be received freely; hence, only those who freely receive God's mercy will be saved.

Objection Three—Based on Deuteronomy 7:9

In this text God appears to be selective in those to whom He shows mercy. However, if He is all-merciful, then why does He not show mercy to all? Moses wrote, "Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations ***of those who love him and keep his commands***" (emphasis added).

Response to Objection Three

God loves everyone (John 3:16), and He sent His Son to pay for the sins of all (1 John 2:2). Indeed, He wishes all to repent and receive His mercy (2 Peter 3:9). However, each person must receive His mercy; anyone who repents will be a recipient of it. God will not withhold His mercy from anyone who wants it, but neither will He cram His love down the throats of those who do not want it (Matt. 23:37).

Objection Four—Based on the Need to Pray for Mercy

The Bible records instances of people praying for mercy; for example, the sinner in Luke 18:13 prayed, “God have mercy on me, a sinner.” If God is essentially merciful, then why should anyone have to beg for His mercy?

Response to Objection Four

Prayer is not a condition for God’s ***giving*** mercy, but rather a condition for our ***receiving*** the mercy He desires to freely give us. Prayer changes us and puts us in a position where God’s essential and unchanging mercy can flow upon us (e.g., prayer moves us out from under God’s unchanging wrath to under His unchanging love). Prayer is not a means of overcoming God’s reluctance, but a means by which God takes advantage of our willingness to receive His mercy.

Objection Five—Based on Matthew 20:15

In a parable Jesus told, God said, “Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things?” (NKJV). From this it would seem that His mercy need not be given to all.

Response to Objection Five

The passage deals with service, not salvation. The laborers all worked for the wages they had agreed upon, but salvation is free (Rom. 4:5; Eph. 2:8–9). Further, God does not have to give the same amount of His possessions and gifts to everyone, but His essentially all-loving nature ***does*** necessitate that He love all. This He does, as Isaiah put it: “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and

milk without money and without cost" (Isa. 55:1).

GOD'S WRATH

God is not only merciful to the repentant, but He is also wrathful upon the unrepentant. These actions are not incompatible, since they are exercised on different objects.

THE DEFINITION OF GOD'S WRATH

A number of Hebrew words are translated as "wrath." ***Charown*** (Ex. 15:7) means "burning anger," "fury." ***Aph*** (Ex. 22:24) means "ire," "wrath." ***Ebrah*** (Num. 11:33) depicts outbursts of passion, anger, or rage. ***Chemah*** (Ps. 59:13) literally means "heat" and, figuratively, "anger." ***Qetreph*** (2 Chron. 19:2) speaks of a rage.

The New Testament word for "wrath" is ***orge***. It carries the meaning of "strong desire," "violent passion," and "ire" (see Eph. 2:3; Col. 3:6; 1 Thess. 5:9; Rev. 6:16). As applied to God, wrath means His anger at and hatred of sin, His righteous indignation at all evil, and His jealous execution of judgment on unrighteousness. However, wrath, while rooted in God's essential nature as just, is not an attribute, but an act that flows from His unchanging righteousness.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S WRATH

Biblical descriptions of God's wrath include "Your wrath" (Ex. 15:7); "My wrath" (Ex. 22:24); "wrath of the Lamb" (Rev. 6:16); "day of God's wrath" (Job 20:28); "fierce" wrath (Ex. 32:12); "wrath of the LORD" (Num. 11:33); "wrath of the Almighty" (Job 21:20).

God's wrath gets "hot" (Ex. 22:24 NKJV); can "kindle" (Job 19:11 NKJV); can "flare" (Ps. 2:12); "burns" (Ex. 32:10); is "living and burning" (Ps. 58:9 NKJV); "consumes" (Ex. 32:10 NKJV); is "great" (2 Kings 22:13); can reach the point of "no remedy" (2 Chron. 36:16); has "fury" (Job 20:23 NKJV); can "swallow them up" (Ps. 21:9); can "rebuke" us (Ps. 38:1); "pours" out on evil men (Ezek. 21:31); can be "completed" (Dan. 11:36); can be "kept forever" (Amos 1:11 NKJV); and can come on unbelievers to the "uttermost" (1 Thess. 2:16 NKJV).

A “great day of” wrath is coming (Rev. 6:17); Babylon will drink of the “wine of the wrath of her fornication” (Rev. 14:8 NKJV); God will have “bowls” of wrath to pour out on the earth (Rev. 16:1); His wrath can loom over cities (2 Chron. 32:25 NKJV).

Further, God can be provoked to wrath over taking a census [to count human power rather than trust God’s] (1 Chron. 27:24); over rebellion (at Horeb and in the wilderness—Deut. 9:7–8, 22); because of complaints about His provision (Num. 11:18–20, 33–34); for helping the wicked (2 Chron. 19:2); for hating the Lord (2 Chron. 19:2); for a trespass against the Lord (2 Chron. 19:10); for great guilt (2 Chron. 28:13); for being stiff-necked (2 Chron. 30:8); for not keeping the word of the Lord (2 Chron. 34:21); for burning incense to other gods (2 Chron. 34:25); for mocking God’s messengers (2 Chron. 36:16); against those who forsake God (Ezra 8:22); for not doing God’s commands (Ezra 7:23); for having pagan wives (Ezra 10:14); for profaning the Sabbath (Neh. 13:18); and for not obeying the truth (Rom. 2:8).

Wrath is brought about by the law (Rom. 4:15), but we can be saved from it through Christ (Rom. 5:9; 1 Thess. 1:10). God being aroused to wrath (Num. 11:33; Job 32:5) is associated with His anger (Deut. 9:8; 29:23, 28); however, God can turn (or relent) from it (Ex. 32:12) if people humble themselves (2 Chron. 12:7, 12); pray (as David, Ps. 103); rejoice in the fall of our enemy (Prov. 24:17–18); and repent (Jonah 3). God cannot be turned away from wrath by riches (Prov. 11:4); silver, or gold (Zeph. 1:18). Wrath can be “stored up” by hypocrites (Job 36:13 NKJV); stored in “vessels” of the unrepentant (Rom. 9:22 NKJV); and can “take you away in one blow” (Job 36:18 NKJV).

God sometimes speaks in His wrath (Ps. 2:5); it can lie “heavy upon” us (Ps. 88:7); it can be “terrifying” (Ps. 90:7); it can be mediated (e.g., by Moses, Ps. 106:23). Wrath is the expectation of the wicked (Prov. 11:23); the earth will “tremble” at God’s wrath (Jer. 10:10). He has a “rod of His wrath” (Lam. 3:1). It “abides” on all unbelievers (John 3:36 NKJV) who are “objects of wrath” (Eph. 2:3). Believers have not been “appointed” to it (1 Thess. 5:9). God “swore” (took an oath) by it (Heb. 3:11 NKJV) against unbelief. At His second coming, Christ will tread the winepress of God’s wrath (Rev. 19:15).

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR GOD’S WRATH

God’s wrath is based in several of His attributes, including His holiness,

righteousness, and jealousy.

Wrath Flows From God's Holiness

Paul wrote, "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness" (Rom. 1:18). God is so holy that He cannot look upon sin with approval (Hab. 1:13). Thus, He cannot overlook sin forever—it must eventually be punished.

Wrath Flows From God's Righteousness

A kindred characteristic from which wrath flows is God's righteousness or justice. Romans states: "Because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed" (Rom. 2:5).

Wrath Flows From God's Jealousy

One of God's names is "Jealous" (see chapter 14); Moses wrote, "Do not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God" (Ex. 34:14). Ezekiel added, "Therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I will now bring Jacob back from captivity and will have compassion on all the people of Israel, and I will be zealous for my holy name" (Ezek. 39:25). It is because of His jealous zeal to protect His own supremacy that God executes wrath on evil. Deuteronomy 29:20 declares, "The Lord will never be willing to forgive him; his wrath and zeal will burn against that man."

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S WRATH

Until modern times, the universal consent of the great teachers of the church stressed both God's justice and love, as well as the corresponding acts of mercy and wrath that flow from these attributes.

The Early Church Fathers on God's Wrath

The patristic Fathers had no illusion of a lopsidedly loving God who would not punish sin. They spoke consistently of a balanced view that included mercy to the repentant as well as wrath to the wicked.

Origen

> Indeed, we speak of the wrath of God. However, we do not maintain that it indicates any passion on His part. Rather, it is something that is assumed in order to discipline by stern means those sinners who have committed many and grievous sins. For that which is called God's wrath and His anger is actually a means of discipline, (in Bercot, DECB, 21)

Novatian

> When we read of His anger and consider certain descriptions of His indignation … we are not to understand them to be attributed to Him in the same sense in which they are to humans. For although all these things can corrupt man, they cannot at all corrupt the Divine power. All those angers or hatreds of God, or whatever there is of this kind, are displayed for our healing…. They arose out of wisdom, not from vice, (ibid.)

Lactantius

> It is the fear of God alone that guards the mutual society of men. By this, life itself is sustained, protected, and governed. However, such fear is taken away if man is persuaded that God is without anger. For not only the common advantage, but also reason and truth itself, persuade us that He is moved and is indignant

when unjust actions are done.

There is a just and also an unjust anger.... The unjust anger ... is to be restrained in man—lest he should rush into some very great evil through rage. This type of anger cannot exist in God, for He cannot be injured.... There is also just anger. This anger is necessary in man for the correction of wickedness. Plainly, then, it is also necessary in God, who sets an example for man. Just as we should restrain those who are subject to our power, so also God should restrain the offenses of everyone.

We should understand that since God is eternal, His anger also remains to eternity. On the other hand, since He is endowed with the greatest excellence, He controls His anger. He is not ruled by it; rather, He regulates it according to His will.... For if His anger were completely inextinguishable, there would be no place after a sin for satisfaction or reconciliation, (ibid., 21–22)

The Medieval Fathers on God's Wrath

There was no change of view on God's wrath during the Middle Ages. Like their theological forebears, the medieval Fathers also viewed God consistently and eternally displeased with sin.

Augustine

I would exhort to give heed, if they be wise, and to observe how, without any such arts, the position of a shepherd was exchanged for the dignity of the kingly office by David, of whom Scripture has faithfully recorded both the sinful and the meritorious actions, in order that we might know both how to avoid offending God, and how, when He has been offended, His wrath may be appeased. (*LSA*, 139 in Schaff, *NPNF*, 1:1)

Take, for example, that saying of the apostle: "But, after thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; who will render to every man according to his deeds: to them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honor, and immortality, eternal life; but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil" (*OCD*, 3:11:17 in ibid., 1:2).

Therefore "God commendeth His love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified in His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him...." From the wrath certainly of God, which is nothing else but just retribution. For the wrath of God is not, as is that of man, a perturbation of the mind; but it is the wrath of Him to whom Holy

> Scripture says in another place, “But Thou, O Lord, mastering Thy power, judgest with calmness” (*AA*, 13:6 in ibid., 3).

Thomas Aquinas

> Original sin is hinted at in “and we were by nature children of wrath.” This sin of the first parent was not only passed on to the Gentiles but to the Jews also: “Wherefore as by one man sin entered into this world, and by sin death; and so death passed upon all men, in whom all have sinned” (Rom. 5:12). . . . Thus he says we were by nature, that is, from the earliest beginning of natu —not of nature as nature, since this is good and from God, but of nature as vitiated—children of an avenging wrath, aimed at punishment and hell, even as the rest, that is, the Gentiles. (*CE*, 89)

The Reformation Leaders on God’s Wrath

The backdrop of the Reformation emphasis on God’s grace in justification by faith is the wrath of God. Because God is just, He must punish sin; His grace through Christ’s payment of the penalty for our sin shines more brightly in view of this necessity.

Martin Luther

> God is called a “Fire” because He utterly destroys the godless and leaves them nothing; nor is there anything that can resist His wrath. He is called “jealous” because His disposition is such that He will not spare. Who, then, should not fear Him of whom it is known that He will not spare and that He has the ability implacably and unceasingly to take vengeance?
>
> Moses calls God “jealous,” one who will not drop the matter, who must stand by His Word. Both are here joined, the will and the power, strength and might, so that He both can and will punish. If people held this to be the truth, they would not despise His Commandments so shamefully. But no one believes Him to be like this until he experiences it.
>
> The wrath of God is real, not fictitious, not a jest. If it were false, then mercy would be fictitious; for as the wrath, so the mercy which forgives. . . . Christ most assuredly took upon Himself the wrath of God and bore it for us. So He did not take it upon Himself merely as an example, but He is in very truth the purchase

price expended for us.
God punishes in a twofold manner. In the first place, He does so in grace, as a benevolent Father; and the chastisement is temporal. In the second place, He punishes in wrath, as a strict Judge; and this punishment is eternal. (*WLS*, 1549, 53)

John Calvin

For were it not said in clear terms, that Divine wrath, and vengeance, and eternal death, lay upon us, we should be less sensible of our wretchedness without the mercy of God, and less disposed to value the blessing of deliverance. For example, let a person be told, Had God at the time you were a sinner hated you, and cast you off as you deserved, horrible destruction must have been your doom; but spontaneously and of free indulgence he retained you in his favour, not suffering you to be estranged from him, and in this way rescued you from danger—the person will indeed be affected, and made sensible in some degree how much he owes to the mercy of God. (*ICR*, 2.16.2)

Post-Reformation Theologians

Until recent times, the theologians following the Reformers have discussed God's wrath. The attribute faded only with the rise of modern unitarianism and liberalism.

Jacob Arminius

Hatred is an affection of separation in God; whose *primary* object is injustice or unrighteousness; and the *secondary*, the misery of the creature.... But since God properly loves himself and the good of justice, and by the same impulse holds iniquity in detestation; and since he secondarily loves the creature and his blessedness, and in that impulse hates the misery of the creature, that is, He wills it to be taken away from the creature; hence it comes to pass that He hates the creature who perseveres in unrighteousness, and He loves his misery. Hatred, however, is not collateral to Love, but necessarily flowing from it; since Love neither does nor can tend towards all those things which become objects to the understanding of God. It belongs to Him therefore in the first act, and must be placed in Him prior to any existence of a thing worthy of hatred; which existence being laid down, the act of hatred arises from it by a natural

necessity, not by liberty of the will. (*WJA*, 1.456)

Jonathan Edwards

God has set bounds to every man's wickedness; he suffers men to live, and go on in sin, till they have filled up their measure, and then cuts them off. Consider, you know not what wrath God may be about to execute upon wicked men in *this world*. Wrath may, in some sense, be coming upon them, in the present life, to the uttermost, for ought we know. (*WJE*, 2.122, 2.124)

Stephen Charnock

The greatest different interests are reconciled, justice in punishing, and mercy in pardoning. For man had broken the law, and plunged himself into a gulf of misery: the sword of vengeance was unsheathed by justice, for the punishment of the criminal; the bowels of compassion were stirred by mercy, for the rescue of the miserable. Justice severely beholds the sin, and mercy compassionately reflects upon the misery. Two different claims are entered by those concerned attributes: justice votes for destruction, and mercy votes for salvation. Justice would draw the sword, and drench it in the blood of the offender; mercy would stop the sword, and turn it from the breast of the sinner. Justice would edge it, and mercy would blunt it. The arguments are strong on both sides. (*EAG*, 1.554)

Charles Hodge

God's wrath flows from His holiness. The truth of this doctrine may also be inferred from the holiness of God. If He is infinitely pure, his nature must be opposed to all sin; and as his acts are determined by his nature, his disapprobation of sin must manifest itself in his acts. But the disfavour of God, the manifestation of his disapprobation, is death, as his favour is life. It cannot be that this essential opposition between holiness and sin should be dependent for its manifestation on the mere ab [extra] consideration that evil would result from sin being allowed to go unpunished. It might as well be said that we should feel no aversion to pain, unless aware that it weakened our constitution. We do not approve of holiness simply because it tends to produce happiness; neither do we disapprove of sin simply because it tends to produce misery. *It is inevitable, therefore, that the perfection of the infinitely holy God should manifest its opposition to sin, without waiting to judge the consequences of the expression of this divine repugnance*. (*ST*, 422, emphasis added)

William G. T. Shedd

> There is a kind of wrath in the human soul that resembles the wrath of God, and constitutes its true analogue. It is the wrath of the human conscience, which is wholly different from that of the human heart. This kind of anger is commanded in the injunction "Be ye angry and sin not" (Eph. 4:26). Were this species of moral displacency more often considered, and the Divine anger illustrated by it, there would be less of the common and unthinking opposition to the doctrine of the Divine wrath. (*DT*, 176)

J. I. Packer

> The wrath of God in Romans denotes God's resolute action in punishing sin. It is as much the expression of a personal, emotional attitude of the triune Jehovah as is his love to sinners; it is the active manifesting of his hatred of irreligion and moral evil.... God's wrath is his reaction to our sin, and "law brings wrath" [Rom. 4:15] because the law stirs up sin latent within us and causes transgression—the behavior that evokes wrath—to abound [5:20; 7:7–13]. As a reaction to sin, God's wrath is an expression of his justice. (*KG*, 154)

OBJECTIONS TO GOD'S WRATH

Objections against God's wrath generally follow from alleged inconsistency with other attributes, such as love or mercy, or else from the eternal nature of His wrath on the unrepentant.

Objection One—Based on an Alleged Inconsistency With Mercy

How can one and the same God exercise both wrath and mercy toward His creatures? These appear to be incompatible characteristics, since one is the opposite of the other. Hence, it would seem that God cannot be both.

Response to Objection One

Wrath and mercy are not incompatible, since they are exercised toward different objects; wrath is on the unrepentant, and mercy is on the repentant. As established previously, God is consistently and unchangeably angry with sin and consistently and unchangeably delighted with righteousness.

Objection Two—Based on an Alleged Overkill of Eternal Wrath

Temporal wrath is one thing; ***eternal*** wrath is another. The Bible declares: "This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power" (2 Thess. 1:7–9). Eternal wrath for temporal sin seems to be a classic case of overkill.

Response to Objection Two

It is to be noted, first of all, that this is not so much an objection against God's wrath as it is an objection against the doctrine of hell, which is discussed in detail later (see Volume 4, chapter 11). Further, any protest against God's wrath is equally an objection against His holiness and justice, from which it flows. But, as has already been shown, there is a strong biblical, theological, and historical basis for all of these (see chapters 13–14).
As for the justice of exercising wrath, it should be remarked that not to punish

sin would be unjust. And, since God is eternal, not to punish sin eternally would be an eternal injustice. The sin of the ultimately unrepentant is sin against the eternal God, and a sin against the Eternal is deserving of eternal punishment.

Objection Three—Based on an Alleged Inconsistency With Atonement

It is noted by some critics that Christ took the wrath of God for sinners, being made sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21)—He was the satisfaction for our sins (1 John 2:2). This being the case, it seems unnecessary for any person to suffer the consequences for his sins, since Christ has already done so (Rom. 5:15–19).

Response to Objection Three

This objection is based on a misunderstanding of what Christ did on the cross (see Volume 3, chapter 12). The salvation of everyone was not ***applied***; it was simply ***purchased***. All persons were ***made savable***, but not all persons were ***automatically saved***. The gift was made possible by the Savior, but it must be received by the sinner (Eph. 2:8–9; cf. John 1:12). In short, the salvation of all sinners from God's eternal wrath is possible, but only those who accept Christ's payment for their sins will actually be saved from it.

To put it another way, this objection presupposes universalism (that all will be saved), for which there is no sound biblical, theological, or historical basis (see Volume 3, chapter 13).

CONCLUSION

Mercy and wrath are a matched pair of God's moral characteristics; the former is exercised on the repentant, and the latter on the unrepentant. While some believe these are incompatible; again, they form a unity in the character of God. They are consistent, since they are exercised on two different objects.

As to whether these are attributes of God or activities that flow from other

attributes, it depends on how one defines them. In any case, if mercy and wrath are thought of as acts, then the unchangeable basis for them is in God's goodness and justice, respectively.

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

A RESPONSE TO GOD'S ATTRIBUTES

Although it is not within the purview of this work to provide a systematic discussion of practical theology, a few comments are appropriate here. God did not intend that His attributes be studied in absence of a response on the part of His creatures. Contemplating the Creator should change the creature; meditating on the Master should make a difference in the life of the servant.

GOD'S ATTRIBUTES AND OUR ACTIONS IN GENERAL

Numerous verses of Scripture contain the exhortation to respond in direct connection with the presentation of the attribute. Moses cited the Lord, saying, "I am the LORD who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy" (Lev. 11:45). Jesus said, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). John wrote, "Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he [God] is pure" (1 John 3:3).
Whole chapters of the Bible are dedicated to an attribute or attributes of God, followed by our expected response to it (them). Psalm 139 is a classic example, and it can be outlined as follows.

God’s Revelation of Himself (vv. 1–16)

God’s Omniscience (vv. 1–6)

O Lord,
you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord.
You hem me in—behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.

God’s Omnipresence (vv. 7–12)

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,” even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.

God’s Omnipotence (vv. 13–16)

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

Our Response to God’s Revelation of Himself (vv. 17–24)

The final two verses of David’s reply are “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way

in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (vv. 23–24). Clearly, the subject of the attributes of God was not purely academic with the psalmist (or any other biblical writer).

SPECIFIC ATTRIBUTES AND SPECIFIC ACTIONS

Not only should meditating on God's nature in general produce godliness in general, but contemplating specific attributes should bring specific actions.

Responding to God's Sovereignty

Since God is the sovereign Lord of the universe, we can live with the assurance that He is in control: "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go" (Josh. 1:9).
And we can be confident that He can bring good out of evil: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives" (Gen. 50:20).
Likewise, we should be grateful that He desires to use us. As Paul said, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service" (1 Tim. 1:12).
Finally, we should be thankful to be His instruments. Paul wrote, "We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us" (2 Cor. 4:7).

Responding to God's Infinity

In the light of God's unlimited nature, several responses are appropriate. First, we should be humbled as Solomon was when he said, "Will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much

less this temple I have built!" (1 Kings 8:27).
Further, we should have the awe of Isaiah when he wrote, "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple.… And they [the seraphim] were calling to one another: 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.' At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. 'Woe to me!' I cried. 'I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty' " (Isa. 6:1–5).
Finally, we should have the praise of Paul when he declared, "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!" (Rom. 11:33).

Responding to God's Immateriality

God is pure Spirit (John 4:24); as such, He demands a certain response. For one thing, we should avoid all idolatry. Exodus declares, "You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below" (Ex. 20:3–4). Paul told the Athenians that "the God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.… 'We are his offspring.' Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by man's design and skill" (Acts 17:24–29).
Implied in the above passages is another implication of God being pure Spirit, namely, that He should be worshiped in a spiritual way. Jesus said, God's "worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). This means that our worship should be from our spirits (which are immaterial like God) and in a spiritual manner. Paul warned of those who have "a form of godliness but [deny] its power" (2 Tim. 3:5). This does not intend to signify, of course, that we are forbidden to use ritual in worshiping God. Even the most simple service has some form, structure, or ritual to it. Rather it means that we should avoid outward ritual that has no inner reality. We should not confuse lace and grace.

Responding to God's Transcendence

A kindred characteristic of God is His transcendence above all His creation. This should give us ***a sense of awe***: "O LORD, our LORD, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens" (Ps. 8:1). Likewise, God's transcendence should prompt a ***sense of insignificance*** in us: "Great is the LORD, and most worthy of praise, in the city of our God, his holy mountain" (Ps. 48:1).

In addition, we should be led to a ***sense of sinfulness***, as we have seen that Isaiah was: "I saw the LORD seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple.… And they [the seraphim] were calling to one another: 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory'.… 'Woe to me!' I cried. 'I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty' " (Isa. 6:1–5).

Further, ***a sense of submission*** is an appropriate response. As Paul put it, "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:9–11).

Finally, ***a sense of reverence*** should emerge from contemplating God's exaltedness: "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being" (Rev. 4:11).

Responding to God's Omnipresence and Immanence

God's intimate presence in all of creation should elicit several responses from us. First of all, we should have an awareness of God's nearness, since He is nearer to us than any other being or thing can possibly be. Again, as David said (in Ps. 139:7–10): "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your

presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast."

Furthermore, we should have a sense of utter reliance, for our very moment-by-moment existence is dependent upon God. Paul wrote, "He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Col. 1:17). We depend on Him for our very reality, for "in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:27–28).

Finally, we can hide nothing from God. Hebrews declares, "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account" (Heb. 4:13).

Responding to God's Majesty

As King of Kings, God has regal majesty. Our response to this attribute is that God is highly praised for His greatness: "Great is the Lord, and most worthy of praise, in the city of our God, his holy mountain" (Ps. 48:1).

Further, God should be repeatedly blessed for His blessedness: "Praise the LORD, O my soul. O LORD my God, you are very great; you are clothed with splendor and majesty" (Ps. 104:1).

What is more, God should always be held in awe for His awesomeness: "O LORD, our LORD, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens" (Ps. 8:1).

Finally, the Lord should forever be given the highest honor for His honorableness: "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being" (Rev. 4:11).

Responding to God's Beauty

God's majesty gives us a sense of the Supreme; His beauty gives a sense of the Sublime. While our response is similar, there are some dimensions of His beauty

that call for special comment.
First of all, we should enjoy all beauty as a gift of God: “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows” (James 1:17). Everything that is beautiful somehow reflects His character.
Furthermore, we should anticipate the incredible and ultimate beauty of seeing God face-to-face. In this present life, God’s ineffable loveliness is veiled. As Paul said, “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known” (1 Cor. 13:9–12). Even Moses, the great mediator between Israel and God, could not see the Lord face-to-face (Ex. 33:22–23), for “no one has ever seen God” (John 1:18), but in heaven “they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads” (Rev. 22:4). This is called the Beatific (blessed) Vision (see Volume 4, chapter 10).

Responding to God’s Omnipotence

In response to God’s unlimited power, believers can have assurance in the present that God can solve our problems. As Abraham was asked by God, “Is anything too hard for the LORD?” (Gen. 18:14).
Also, we can be sure that God can (and will) keep His promises to us. He will keep conditional promises conditionally (1 John 1:9), and He will keep unconditional promises unconditionally, for He said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you” (Heb. 13:5).
Further, God’s omnipotence assures us that believers are eternally secure in their salvation (see Volume 3, chapter 11): “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38–39).
Finally, we can be certain about the future, for God has the power to fulfill prophecy. He declared, “I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come …. What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do” (Isa. 46:10–11). God has the complete ability to accomplish His purposes; He announced to Isaiah, “So is my word that goes out

from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Isa. 55:11).

Responding to God's Eternality

In response to God's eternality, we should again have confidence that God's purpose will stand: "I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please" (Isa. 46:10). Also, we can have assurance God's promises will be kept: "But you remain the same, and your years will never end. The children of your servants will live in your presence; their descendants will be established before you" (Ps. 102:27–28). Further, our hope in Christ is established: "We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek" (Heb. 6:19–20). Finally, we have the promise that Christ can help us now: "There have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them" (Heb. 7:23–25).

Responding to God's Immutability

Since God is unchangeable, we can trust His Word: "God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?" (Num. 23:19).
Also, we can trust God's promises completely: "In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them and they will be discarded. But you remain the same, and your years will never end" (Ps. 102:25–27).
Further, we can be sure of our salvation, because "if we are faithless, he will

remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself" (2 Tim. 2:13). What is more, God's immutability provides an anchor for our souls: "Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged" (Heb. 6:17–18). Finally, we have a stable foundation for service. Paul wrote, "Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Cor. 15:58).

Responding to God's Impassibility

Since God has no needs or changing passions, we should respond in humility, knowing that we cannot add anything to Him: "He is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else" (Acts 17:25). Rather, in thanksgiving, we should remember that He is the giver of "every good and perfect gift" (James 1:17). We can give back to Him only what He has given us. As David said, "But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand" (1 Chron. 29:14). So in confidence we know He never changes His feelings toward us. He remains eternally and unchangeably consistent in His love and compassion toward us (Jer. 31:3).

Responding to God's Omniscience

God is all-knowing, and as such we can be assured that He strongly supports our good actions: "For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him" (2 Chron. 16:9).
It encourages us to know that we have a limitless source of truth that leads us to obedience: "Your statutes are wonderful; therefore I obey them. The unfolding of

your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple" (Ps. 119:129–30). We must also be aware that God knows even our secret sins: "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account" (Heb. 4:13).

God's omniscience assures us that God will reward even unknown actions: "When you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.… But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you" (Matt. 6:3–6).

Further, we should be humble with our ideas: "***You asked***, 'Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. ***You said***, 'Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.' My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:3–6).

Responding to God as Living

Since the God of the Bible is the "living God" who created every living thing (Gen. 1:27), we should be thankful to Him for the gift of life. Again, James reminds us that "every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows" (James 1:17).

As the Source of life itself, God can provide all we need for life, both physically and spiritually (John 4:10; 6:51): "You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing" (Ps. 145:16). Jesus said to the woman at the well, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water" (John 4:10).

Because God created life from nonlife, He can also raise the dead. Hence, we can be assured of eventually overcoming death by His resurrection power, proclaiming: "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (1 Cor. 15:55).

Responding to God's Immortality

Since only God has intrinsic immortality (1 Tim. 6:16), and our immortality is a gift from Him (Rom. 2:7), we should have great admiration for the Source of immortal life. As Job put it, "The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised" (Job 1:21).
Further, we should recognize the contingency of life: "In Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28); "in Him all things hold together" (Col. 1:17). Finally, because of God's immortality and His promise to us of the same, we can anticipate our glorious resurrection. As Paul said, Christ, "by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body" (Phil. 3:21). Thus, "we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies" (Rom. 8:23) when "the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality" (1 Cor. 15:53).

Responding to God's Omnibenevolence

Since God is all-loving, we should be reminded that "we love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Likewise, "he who has been forgiven little loves little" (Luke 7:47). What is more, "Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again" (2 Cor. 5:14–15). Finally, as we have seen, God's unconditional love gives a deep sense of security, for "if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself" (2 Tim. 2:13).

Responding to God as Light

As light, God is the Source of all spiritual illumination. John said of Jesus that

He was “the true light that gives light to every man [who] was coming into the world” (John 1:9). Jesus said of Himself, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12). Also, “You are my lamp, O LORD; the LORD turns my darkness into light” (2 Sam. 22:29).

God is not only light Himself, but He gives light. Thus, Isaiah urged, “Come, O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord” (Isa. 2:5). The psalmist continued, “Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law” (Ps. 119:18). Thus, “The LORD is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear?” (Ps. 27:1).

Responding to God’s Unity

Because God is absolutely one, we should avoid all forms of polytheism, tritheism, and idolatry. Meditating on God’s unity brings oneness to believers. Paul urged, “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:3–6). To illustrate, the closer the spokes of a wheel get to the center, the closer they all get to one another. Likewise, concentrating on the nature of God brings unity to Christians.

Responding to God’s Wisdom

God is all-wise; because of His omnisapience, we should fear Him. To be wise we must respect wisdom, and God is Wisdom personified. Thus, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline” (Prov. 1:7).

Therefore, when we lack wisdom we should request it of God. James wrote, “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5).

Further, we should look to Christ for true wisdom, for “in [Christ] are hidden all

the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3). And, "It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30).
In fact, we need wisdom to know God. Consequently, Paul said, "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better" (Eph. 1:17).

Responding to God's Jealousy

As mentioned previously, jealousy seems to be a strange attribute of God, yet, once understood, it inspires an awesome response. God's jealousy indicates His holy zeal to protect His own supremacy that flows out in His wrath on idolatry and other sins. In view of this attribute, three responses are most appropriate.
First of all, we should worship God as supreme. He insists in the first commandment: "You shall have no other gods before me" (Ex. 20:3). Yahweh adds in Isaiah: "I am the LORD, and there is no other.… And there is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none but me.… Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear" (Isa. 45:18–23).
What is more, since God is jealous, we should rid ourselves of all idols. He declares, "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below" (Ex. 20:4).
Finally, we should seek our ultimate good in the Ultimate Good (God). Solomon tried everything "under the sun" for satisfaction, concluding that "all is vanity and vexation of spirit" (Eccl. 1–3 KJV). But while nothing under the sun can bring permanent and complete happiness, there is One above the sun, namely, the SON, who said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10). Indeed, David said to God, "You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand" (Ps. 16:11).

Responding to God's Moral Perfection

God is not only infinite, He is infinitely perfect. Thus, He demands of us: “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). Paul adds, “Finally, brothers, good-bye. Aim for perfection” (2 Cor. 13:11). If we aim at nothing, we will usually hit it. The sign under the sketch of a girl with an apple on her head and an arrow in her forehead reads, “To succeed, aim higher!”
Thus, while we cannot attain absolute perfection in this life, we should press toward it, as Paul said, “Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me” (Phil. 3:12).
Likewise, we should pray for perfection: “We are glad whenever we are weak but you are strong; and our prayer is for your perfection” (2 Cor. 13:9). When we aim at, seek, and pray for perfection, we can live in God’s perfect plan: “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Rom. 12:2).
Of course, we know that we cannot attain absolute perfection in this life, so we look forward to it in heaven: “When perfection comes, the imperfect disappears” (1 Cor. 13:10). As John said, “We know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2).

Responding to God’s Truthfulness

Since God is absolutely truthful, we can trust His promises (Ps. 89:35); we can be assured of our salvation (2 Tim. 2:13); and we are protected by His truth (Ps. 91:4 NKJV). We are also saved by His truth (Eph. 1:13) and sanctified by it as well (2 Thess. 2:13). We are liberated by His truth (John 8:32) and are established forever by it (Ps. 117:2).
Further, we should always utter the truth (Eph. 4:25). We should speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15); we should walk in His truth (Ps. 86:11); and we should serve Him in truth (1 Sam. 12:24 KJV). We should diligently study His truth (2 Tim. 2:15; John 17:17); we should worship Him in truth (John 4:24); and we should pray to be led in truth (Ps. 25:5).

Responding to God's Righteousness

God is absolutely just or righteous. As we meditate upon what this means, the Bible guides us in our response. We should be instructed in justice (or righteousness) through God's holy Word (2 Tim. 3:15–17). We should earnestly pursue it (2 Tim. 2:22) and thirst after it (Matt. 5:6). We should also be willing to suffer for it (1 Peter 3:14; 2 Tim. 3:12); submit to it (Rom. 10:3); be slaves of it (Rom. 6:18); and practice it (1 John 3:7). Jesus said, "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matt. 6:33).

Responding to God's Holiness

As awesome as God's holiness is (see Isaiah 6), we should try to emulate it.
First, we should be holy as God is holy. As cited previously, He said, "I am the Lord who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy" (Lev. 11:45).
Further, we should be pure as God is pure: "God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life" (1 Thess. 4:7). Paul added, "Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God" (2 Cor. 7:1).
In addition, we should stand in awe of God's holiness. Isaiah wrote, "They will acknowledge the holiness of the Holy One of Jacob, and will stand in awe of the God of Israel" (Isa. 29:23).
Finally, we should pursue holiness. Hebrews instructs, "Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord (Heb. 12:14). Few books inspire us to do this better than A. W. Tozer's ***The Knowledge of the Holy*** and ***The Pursuit of God***. For a general response to who God is, J. I. Packer's ***Knowing God*** is extremely helpful.

CONCLUSION

The response of godly men and women of old stands in stark contrast to the

shallow response of the typical Christian today. They stood “in awe” of the God of Israel (Isa. 29:23). Ezekiel fell on his face as he beheld visions of God’s glory (Ezek. 1:28). Paul was blinded by the light of Jesus (Acts 9) and had to be given a thorn in his flesh to remain humble after his exalted vision (2 Cor. 12). After seeing Jesus’ omnipotence at work, Peter “fell at Jesus’ knees and said, ‘Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!’ ” (Luke 5:8). Isaiah cried, “Woe to me! … I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty” (Isa. 6:5). God is an awesome God, and He should be responded to in awe. He is the King of the universe, and He should be approached with obeisance to His royalty. He is the Sovereign before whom “every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth” (Phil. 2:10). He is the great Creator around whose throne all unfallen angels and redeemed people gather and sing: “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being” (Rev. 4:11). And He is the loving Redeemer before whom John heard “every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: ‘To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!’ ” (Rev. 5:13).

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PART TWO

CREATION

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

ALTERNATIVE VIEWS ON CREATION

The theological setting for the Christian doctrine of creation is theistic. Theism can best be understood in contrast with the other two main views (pantheism and atheism—see Volume 1, chapter 2). Each holds a fundamentally different view of origins.

There are three primary alternatives on the nature of creation (see Geisler, ***KTC***, chapter 4). Materialists (many of whom are atheists) believe in creation out of matter (*ex materia*), while pantheists claim creation comes out of God (*ex Deo*), and theists hold to creation by God out of nothing (*ex nihilo*).

MATERIALISM: CREATION OUT OF MATTER

The materialistic view of creation contends that matter (or physical energy) is eternal: Matter always has been, and always will be. As the physicist claims, "Energy can neither be created nor destroyed." This is known as the first law of thermodynamics.[1]

There are two basic subdivisions in the "creation out of matter" view: those that involve a God (e.g., platonism), and those that do not (e.g., atheism).

Platonism: God Created Out of Preexisting Matter

Many ancient Greeks believed in creation by God out of some previously existing, eternal "lump of clay." That is, both God and the "stuff" of the material universe (cosmos) were always there. "Creation" is the eternal process by which God has been continually forming matter, giving shape to the contents of the universe.

Plato (c. 427–347 B.C.) held this view of creation out of matter (***T***, 27ff.). He called matter "the formless" (or "chaos"), while God was the Former (or ***Demiurgos***). Using an eternal world of forms (ideas), God gave shape or structure to the formless mass of stuff called matter. In brief, the Former (God), by means of the forms (ideas that flowed from the Form), formed the formless (matter) into the formed (cosmos). Or, using the Greek words, the ***Demiurgos***, by means of the ***eidos*** (ideas), which flowed from the ***agathos*** (Good), formed the ***chaos*** (formless) into a ***kosmos*** (material universe).

There are several elements of this platonic view of creation briefly explained here.

Matter Is Eternal

The basic stuff of the physical universe has always been here. There never was a time when all the elements of the cosmos did not exist. Everything has been forever.

"Creation" Means Formation, Not Origination

According to this view, "creation" does not mean bringing something into existence that previously did not exist; rather, it means formation of what has always existed. God allegedly does not originate matter; He simply organizes the matter that has always been there.

The "Creator" Is a Former, Not a Producer

In this platonic view, the word ***Creator*** does not mean "Originator of all that exists," but simply the "Builder." The building blocks were already there—God just put them together. Hence, God is only an architect of the material universe, not the Source of it.

God Is Not Sovereign Over All Things

A consequence of the platonic worldview is that God is not really in ultimate control of all things, for there is something eternal outside of Him: There is a given, something that even God must deal with. Matter is just there, and God cannot do anything about it. He can shape matter, but it places certain limitations on Him. Just as there are limits on what can be made out of paper (it is good for making kites, but not for space shuttles), so the very nature of matter is a handicap to the Creator's ability. In short, both the existence and nature of matter supposedly place limits on God.

Atheism: Matter Is Eternal

A second worldview within materialism is generally called atheism, although many agnostics hold it as well. An atheist says there is no God; an agnostic claims not to know whether there is a God. However, neither believes it is necessary to posit God in order to explain the universe: Matter is simply there and always has been in one form or another. In fact, for the atheist, the universe is ultimately ***all*** that exists—even mind came from matter. Those atheists who believe that humans have souls usually insist that the soul is dependent on the body as a shadow is on a tree (see Volume 3, chapter 2).

If questioned as to where the universe came from, the strict materialist may ask in reply: Where did God come from? They claim it makes no more sense to inquire about who made the universe than it does to ask who made God.

That creation came out of matter (*ex materia*) has been held by many thinkers down through the centuries, from the ancient atomists (who reduced all things to atoms) to modern materialists like Karl Marx [1818–1883] (see ***MER***, 298).

One contemporary spokesperson for this view was the famous astronomer Carl Sagan (1934–1996), who believed that "THE COSMOS IS ALL THAT IS OR EVER WAS OR EVER WILL BE" (***C***, 4). Humans are simply Stardust pondering stars. Rather than God creating people, people created God. As Karl Marx put it, mind did not create matter; matter created mind (op. cit., 231). Granting the eternal existence of matter and motion, everything else can be explained by purely natural evolution. Matter plus time, chance, and natural laws (such as natural selection) can explain everything. Even the complexities of human life can be rationalized through the purely natural laws of the physical universe. As we have seen, given enough time, monkeys at a typewriter can supposedly produce the works of Shakespeare. No intelligent Creator is necessary.

Summary of *Ex Materia* Creation

There are several important aspects to this nontheistic view, briefly summarized under the following four points.

Matter Is Eternal

Again, matter has always been—or, at least, as one atheist put it, "If matter came to be, it came into existence from nothing and by nothing" (Kenny, ***FW***, 147). The material universe is self sustaining and self generating. It is probably eternal, but if it came to be, then it came to be on its own without outside help. As Isaac Asimov speculated, there are equally good chances for either nothing to come from nothing or for something to come out of nothing. As luck would have it, something emerged (***BE***, 148). So either matter is eternal, or else it came from nothing, spontaneously, without a cause.

Traditional materialists (called atomists) believed that there were innumerable, indestructible, little hard pellets of reality, called atoms. With the splitting of the atom and the emergence of Einstein's $e=mc^2$ (energy=mass × the speed of light squared), materialists now speak of the indestructibility of energy. They appeal to the first law of thermodynamics, claiming, as we have seen, that "energy can neither be created nor destroyed." Energy does not pass out of existence; it

simply takes on new forms. Even at death, all the elements of our being are reabsorbed by the environment and reused by other things. The process allegedly goes on forever.

No Creator Is Necessary

Another premise of strict materialism is atheism or nontheism; that is, either there is no God or, at least, there is no need for a God. ***Humanist Manifesto II*** put it, "As non theists, we begin with humans not God, nature not deity" (Kurtz, ***HM II***, 16).

According to the nontheistic "creation out of matter" view, no cause is needed to bring matter into existence or to form matter already in existence. There is neither a Creator nor a Maker (Former) of the world. The world explains itself.

Humans Are Not Immortal

Another usual implication of this perspective is that there is no immortal, never dying "soul" or spiritual aspect to human beings. ***Humanist Manifesto I*** noted, "The traditional dualism of mind and body must be rejected." For, its writers believe, "Modern science discredits such historic concepts as the 'ghost in the machine' and the 'separable soul' " (ibid., 8, 16–17). The strict materialist does not believe in spirit or mind at all: There is no mind, only a brain. Thought is simply a chemical reaction in the brain. Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) defined matter as follows:

> The world (I mean not the earth only, that denominates the lovers of it "worldly men," but the *universe*, that is, the whole mass of all things that are) is corporeal, that is to say, body; and hath the dimensions of magnitude, namely, length, breadth, and depth: also every part of body is likewise body, and hath the like dimensions; and consequently every part of the universe is body, and that which is not body is no part of the universe: and because the universe is all, that which is no part of it is nothing, and consequently nowhere. (*L*, 269)

Less stringent materialists admit the existence of a soul but deny that it can exist independently of matter. For them, the soul is to the body what the image in the mirror is to the one looking at it. When the body dies, so does the soul; when matter disintegrates, the mind is also destroyed.

Humans Are Not Unique

Among those holding to creation out of matter, there are differences regarding the nature of human beings. Most accord a special status to humans as the highest point in the evolutionary process. However, virtually all agree that humans are not qualitatively different from animals. Humans differ only in degree, not in kind, from lower forms of life. Human beings are the highest and latest animal form on the evolutionary ladder, but they are not uniquely different. They simply have some more highly developed abilities than primates. Certainly, it is said, humans are not unique ***over*** the rest of the animal kingdom, even if they are the highest ***in*** it.

Pantheism: Creation Out of God

On the other end of the spectrum from materialism is pantheism. Materialists claim all is matter; pantheists believe all is mind or spirit. On the subject of creation, materialism believes in creation out of matter (*ex materia*), but pantheism believes in creation out of God (*ex Deo*). There are two basic categories into which pantheists fall: absolute and non absolute.

Absolute Pantheism

An absolute pantheist claims that only mind (or spirit) exists, not matter. What we call matter is only an illusion, like a dream or mirage: It appears to exist, but it really does not exist. There are two classical representatives of this view, Parmenides (born c. 515 B.C.) from the West (a Greek) and Shankara (c. eighth century) from the East (a Hindu).

Again (see Volume 1, chapter 2), Parmenides argued that all is one, because to assume that more than one thing exists is absurd (***Pin*** Kirk, ***PP***, 266–83). If there were two or more things, they would have to differ, but the only ways to differ are by something (being) or by nothing (nonbeing). However, it is impossible to differ by nothing, since to differ by nothing (or nonbeing) is just another way of saying there is no difference at all. And two things cannot differ by being because being (or existence) is the only thing they have in common—it is

impossible to differ by the very respect in which they are the same. Hence, Parmenides concluded that it is impossible to have two or more things. There can be only one being: All is one, and one is all. Thus, whatever else appears to be does not really exist.

Put in the context of creation, this simply means that God exists and the world does not; there is a Creator, but not really any creation. Or, at least, the only sense in which there can be said to be a creation is that it comes out of God the way a dream comes from a mind. The universe is only the nothing of which God thinks. God is the totality of all reality, and the non real about which He thinks and which appears to us, like zero, does not exist. It is literally nothing.

The famous Hindu philosopher Shankara (in Prabhavananda, ***SHI***, 55) described the relation of the world to God, illusion to reality, by the analogy of what appears to be a snake but on closer examination turns out actually to be a rope. When we look at the world, what is there is not reality (Brahman); rather, it is merely an illusion (***maya***).

Likewise, when a person looks at himself, what appears to be (body) is only an illusory manifestation of what really is (soul). And when one looks into his soul, he discovers that the depth of his soul (atman) is really the depth of the universe (Brahman): Atman (man) ***is*** Brahman (God). To think we are not God is part of the illusion or dream from which we must awaken. Sooner or later we must discover that all comes from God, and all is God. So goes the absolute pantheist's argument.

Non Absolute Pantheism [2]

Other pantheists hold a more flexible and elastic view of reality. While they believe all is one with God, they do not deny there is some multiplicity flowing (*ex Deo*) from the unity of God. They believe all is in the one as all radii are in the center of a circle, or as all drops merge into one infinite pond.

Representatives of this view include the neoplatonic Plotinus (A.D. 205–270), the modern philosopher Benedict Spinoza (1632–1677), and the contemporary Hindu thinker Radhakrishna.

According to this thinking, there are many things in the world, but they all spring from the essence of the One (God). The many are in the One, but the One is not

in the many; that is, all creatures are part of the Creator. They come from Him the way a flower unfolds from a seed or sparks come from a fire. Again, creatures are simply many drops that splash up from the infinite pond, only to eventually drop back in and blend with the All. All things come from God, are part of God, and merge back into God. Technically speaking, for the pantheist, there is no Creation, but only an emanation of all things from God. The universe was not made out of nothing (*ex nihilo*), nor out of something preexisting (*ex materia*)—it was made out of God (*ex Deo*).

Summary of the Pantheistic View of Origin

Several significant elements are contained in this pantheistic view of origins. They can be briefly outlined by four points.

There Is No Absolute Distinction Between Creator and Creation

Ultimately, Creator and creation are one. They may differ in perspective, as two sides of a saucer. Or, they may differ relationally, as Source does to sequent, as Cause to effect. Creator and creation may be no more different than the reflection in a lake is to the swan swimming on it. One is simply a mirror image of the other that is the real thing. Even for those who believe the world is real, Creator and creation are simply two sides of the same coin: There is no real difference between them.

There Is an Eternal Relation Between Creator and Creation

Pantheists believe that God caused the world, but they insist that He has been causing it forever. Just as rays would shine forever from an eternal sun or radii always emerge from the center of an eternal circle, even so God has been creating forever: The universe is as old as God. Just as in an eternal world one stone could be resting on another forever, so the world could be dependent on God forever. According to pantheism, the Cause has been creating from eternity.

The World Is of the Same "Stuff" As God

Pantheists believe God and the world are of the same substance: Both are comprised of God stuff. The creation is part of the Creator; it is one in nature with God. God is water. God is trees. As New Ager Marilyn Ferguson put it, when one watches milk being poured into cereal, he sees God being poured into God! (***AC***). Ultimately, there is only one substance, one "stuff in the universe, and it is divine. We are all made of it—we are all God.

Human Beings Are God

If all of creation is the emanation of God, then so is humankind. A pop theologian of New Age pantheism, Shirley MacLaine, believes that "you can use ***I am God***, or ***I am Christ***, or ***I am that I am***, as Christ did" (***DL***, 112). In her television special miniseries "Out on a Limb" (January 1987), she waved to the ocean and proclaimed, "I am God. I am God!" Lord Maitreya, believed by many to be the "Christ" of the New Age, declared through Benjamin Creme, his press agent, "My purpose is to show man that he need fear no more, that all of Light and Truth rests within his heart, that when this simple fact is known man will become God" (Creme, ***MMC***, 204).

THEISM: CREATION OUT OF NOTHING

In contrast to both materialism and pantheism, there is the Judeo Christian view of creation: out of nothing. According to this position, God is above and beyond the world, not merely in it, and certainly not of it. The Creator is related to creation more like a painter is to a painting. The painter is not the painting; rather he created the painting and is manifest in it. Likewise, God is not the world; instead, He created the world and manifests Himself in it (Ps. 19:1). This position is represented by orthodox Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. Its proponents include great Christian thinkers such as Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas, as well as Reformers such as Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin. Likewise, one of the best known twentieth century representatives of this view was C. S. Lewis.

Augustine's Contribution to Theism

Augustine (354–430), the medieval monk, struggled his way through the preceding positions. He was once caught in the clutches of skepticism, which held to creation out of matter without a God. Later he accepted a form of manichean dualism, which believed there was an eternal evil kingdom opposed to God. Prior to his conversion to Christianity, Augustine was influenced by Plotinus, who, as mentioned before, believed in creation out of God (*ex Deo*). But, eventually, Augustine accepted the biblical position of creation out of nothing. He concluded that creation comes ***from*** God but is not ***of*** God. " 'From Him' does not mean the same as 'of Him'.… For from Him are heaven and earth, because He made them; but not of Him because they are not of His substance" (***ONG***, 27). Only Christ, God's Son, is ***of*** 'Him. All of creation is from God. Peter Kreeft noted that for Christians, "The world is not God ***and not*** an illusion. In Eastern religions, the world is either God or an illusion, either part of God's mind or body, or ***maya***, a trick" (***BHH***, 92).

God Alone Is Eternal

For Augustine, "the eternal God" created the temporal world (***CG***, 11.4). God alone is eternal, for He did not create from eternity. Augustine rejected the view of those who were denying "a 'temporal' but admitting a 'creational' beginning, as though, in some hardly comprehensible way, the world was made, but made from all eternity" (ibid.).

If one asked what God did before He made the world, Augustine replied, "God was unoccupied, for the simple reason that there was no such thing as time before the universe was made" (ibid., 11.5), for "if they excogitate infinite periods of time before the world, in which they cannot see how God could have had nothing to do, they ought to conceive of infinite reaches of space beyond the visible universe" (ibid.). But this is absurd, because there is no space beyond the finite cosmos.

The World Had a Beginning

Augustine declared, “Sacred and infallible Scripture tells us that in the beginning God created heaven and earth in order.… Undoubtedly, then, the world was made not in time but together with time.” So there was no time before time, only eternity. God does not change, but the universe does. Time is a measurement of that change, for “the distinguishing mark between time and eternity is that the former does not exist without some movement and change, while in the latter there is no change at all.” Obviously, then, “there could have been no time had not a creature been made whose movement would effect some change.” But in God’s “eternity there is absolutely no change.” Hence, we cannot “say that He created the world after a space of time” (ibid., 11.6).

The World Was Created Out of Nothing (ex nihilo)

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). Augustine believed that “unless this meant that nothing had been made before, it would have been stated that whatever else God had made before was created at the beginning” (ibid.). And not only was nothing made before this, but what was made was created from nothing.

Creation cannot be out of God’s substance, because He is eternal in His essence, and creation is temporal. He has no beginning, whereas the world had a beginning. Further, “it [creation] is not out of Him, because it is not immutable, as He is.” Since the universe “was not made of anything else; it was undoubtedly made out of nothing—but by Himself (***OSIO***, 1.4).

Even Adam—body and soul—was created from nothing, for “though God formed man of the dust of the earth, yet the earth itself, and every earthly material, is absolutely created out of nothing.” Even “man’s soul, too, God created out of nothing, and joined to the body, when He made man” (***CG***, 14.11).

In brief, the world must have been made out of nothing because it had a beginning; it came to be. It did not always exist; God did. The world is finite, temporal, and changing, while God is none of these. Hence, the world cannot be made out of God’s substance or essence. It must, then, have come into existence out of nothing by God’s power. Augustine succinctly summarized the three basic questions about creation:

“Who made it? How? and Why?—the answers are: ‘God’; ‘by the Word’; and ‘because it is good’ ” (ibid., 11.23). So “what God created was made solely because of His goodness, not by reason of any necessity nor of any need to use

the thing for Himself (ibid., 11.24). Because each person is created by God's good will, he should acknowledge God's goodness. "If he does not worship God, he is wretched, because [he is] deprived of God." On the other hand, "if he worships God, he cannot wish to be worshipped in God's stead" (ibid., 10.3).

Thomas Aquinas's Contribution to a Theistic View of Creation

After Augustine, the greatest Christian thinker of the Middle Ages was the Dominican monk Thomas Aquinas (1224–1274). His systematic views of God and creation have become a standard for orthodox Christian thought since his time.

Only God Can Create

Aquinas contended that "not only is it not impossible that anything should be created by God, but it is necessary to say that all things were created by God" (***ST***, la. 45.2.), for "to create can be the proper action of God alone," and "to produce being absolutely, not merely as this or that being, belongs to the nature of creation. Hence it is manifest that creation is the proper act of God alone." God cannot use any secondary or instrumental cause when creating "because the secondary instrumental cause does not share in the action of the superior cause." For example, a saw does not by itself produce the form of a bench. This is the proper effect only of the principal cause, the carpenter. "So it is impossible for any creature to create, either by its own power, or instrumentally" (ibid., la. 45.5).

Creation Is Not Eternal

Like Augustine before him, Aquinas believed that "nothing except God can be eternal." However, Aquinas did not hold that there were any sound arguments proving that the universe had a beginning, even though he did accept it as the teaching of Scripture (ibid., la. 46.1). He affirmed clearly, "That the world did not always exist we hold by faith alone; it cannot be proved demonstratively"

(ibid., la. 46.2).
However, if the world did have a beginning, this is a strong indication of its Creator. “For the world leads more evidently to the knowledge of the divine creating power if it was not always, than if it had always being.… Everything which was not always manifestly has a cause” (ibid, la. 46.1).
God brought the world into existence by a free act of His will: “The first agent is a voluntary agent.” Even though He had the eternal will to produce some effect, yet He did not produce an eternal effect (ibid., la. 46.1 ad 6), for “from an eternal action of God an eternal effect does not follow; there follows only such an effect as God has willed, an effect, namely, who has being after non-being” (ibid., la. 46.2 ad 10).
Aquinas did not believe there was time before the world began. Non-being came “before” being only in a logical sense, not a chronological one. The Creator is “before all time” only by a priority of nature, not of time. “Things are said to be created in the beginning of time, not as if the beginning of time were a measure of creation, but because together with time the heavens and earth were created” (ibid., la. 46.3 ad 1). Therefore, time begins with creation; it was not a creation ***in*** time but a creation ***of*** time.

Creation Is Out of Nothing

Aquinas argued that creation must be out of nothing. By definition, “***Nothing*** is the same as ***non-being***.” However, “when anything is said to be made from nothing, the preposition ***from*** does not signify a material cause, but only an order” (ibid., la. 45.2). Likewise, we speak of midday coming from morning, meaning ***after*** morning but not literally ***out of it***.
To create from nothing is really a negative concept: “The sense is … it is not made from anything; just as if we were to say, He speaks of nothing, because he does not speak of anything” (ibid., la. 45.2 ad 3). The ancient dictum that “nothing comes from nothing” is not to be understood absolutely: It means that something cannot be ***caused*** by nothing, but not that something cannot come ***after*** nothing. That is, something can be created ***from*** nothing but not ***by*** nothing.

Several Important Elements of the Theistic View of Creation

Many significant truths are contained within a theistic view of creation. Four of them will be briefly discussed here.

There Is an Absolute Difference Between Creator and Creation

Christian theism holds that there is a fundamental and real difference between the Creator and His creation. The following contrasts will focus these differences.

Creator	Creation
Uncreated	Created
Infinite	Finite
Eternal	Temporal
Necessary	Contingent
Changeless	Changing

God and the world are radically different. One is the Maker, and the other is made. God is the Cause, and the world is the effect. God is unlimited, and the world is limited. The Creator is self-existing, but creation is entirely dependent on Him for its existence.

Some already familiar illustrations may help to further clarify the real distinction between Creator and creation. In pantheism, God is to the world what a sea is to the drops of water in it, or what a fire is to the sparks that come from it. However, in theism, God is to the world what a painter is to a painting or a playwright is to his play. That is to say, while the artist is in some sense manifest ***in*** his art, he is also ***beyond*** it. The painter is not the painting: He is beyond, over, and above it. Likewise, God is the Creator of the world who causes it to exist and who is revealed in it. God is not the world.

Creation Had a Beginning

Another crucial element of the theistic view of creation from nothing is that the universe (everything except God) had a beginning. Jesus spoke of His glory with the Father "before the world was" (John 17:5 NKJV). Time is not eternal; the space-time universe was brought into existence. The world did not always exist. The world did not begin ***in*** time—the world was the beginning of time. Time did not exist ***before*** creation and then at some moment in time God created the world. Again, it was not a creation ***in*** time, but a creation ***of*** time.

This does not mean that there was a time when the universe was not, for there was no time before time began. The only thing "prior" to time was eternity; that is, God exists forever, while the universe began to exist. Hence, God is prior to the temporal world ontologically (in reality), but not chronologically (in time). To say that creation had a beginning is to point out that it came into being out of nothing. First it did not exist, and then it did. It was not, and then it was. Of course, the Cause of its coming to be was God.

The "Nothing" Out of Which God Created Was Absolute Nothing

When the theist declares that God created "out of nothing," he does not mean that "nothing" was some kind of invisible, immaterial something that God used to make the material universe. ***Nothing means absolutely nothing***, that is, God alone existed and utterly nothing else. God created the universe, and then, and then alone, was there something else that existed.

If "nothing" were really a hidden or secret something, then creation would really be out of something else (*ex materia*). But theists demonstrate that creation came out of nothing (*ex nihilo*). In short, creation out of nothing truly means that God did not use something else when He created the universe. He brought it into being by His own power.

Creation Out of Nothing Is Not Creation By Nothing

Theism believes that the universe came to be from nothing, but only by Someone (God); it does not hold that nothing produced something. Indeed, a theist could sing with Julie Andrews in ***The Sound of Music***, "Nothing comes from nothing; nothing ever could." In fact, at the heart of the theist belief in the causal power

of God is a rejection of the premise that nothing can create something. Only something (or someone) can cause something. Nothing causes nothing.
So for theism, creation ***from*** nothing does not mean creation ***by*** nothing. It means, rather, that God created the universe without the aid of any preexisting matter or substance. He did it simply by His own infinite omnipotence. Someone who used absolutely nothing else caused the entire creation to come into being "by his powerful word" (Heb. 1:3; cf. Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26).

THE SOURCE, CONTENT, METHOD, TIME, AND PURPOSE OF CREATION

In addition to being distinguished by *ex nihilo* creation, the Christian doctrine of creation is characterized by several other features. These include the source, content, method, time, and purpose of creation.

The Source of Creation

The source of creation is a theistic God: He alone can create something from nothing (Augustine, ***CG***, 11.23). God is the "First Cause" (Augustine, ***LCG***, 23); He is the "Beginning" beyond which there is no beginning. He is eternal and uncaused. He is indivisible and unchangeable (Augustine, ***CG***, 11.10). He is infinitely wise and powerful. Further, God created voluntarily. As Aquinas observed, "It is not necessary that God should will anything except Himself (***ST***, la. 46.1).
Since the Christian God is a triunity of Father, Son, and Spirit (see chapter 12), all three persons are involved in Creation. According to Augustine, "To the Father is appropriated ***power*** which is especially shown in creation.… To the Son is appropriated ***wisdom*** through which an intellectual agent acts.… To the Holy Ghost is appropriated ***goodness***, to which belong both governance … and the giving of life" (ibid. 1:46:6). Creation is ascribed to all three members of the Godhead because in God His existence is "identical with his essence and common to all three persons, and is, therefore, an activity of the whole Trinity, not peculiar to one person" (ibid.).

Not only ***did*** God create, but only God ***can create***. “To create is, properly speaking, to cause or produce the being of things” (Aquinas, ***ST***, la. 45.6). Only God can cause something to come into being; humans cannot create. “An individual man cannot be the cause of human nature absolutely, because he would then be the cause of himself” (ibid, la. 45.5). In fact, “No created being can produce a being absolutely” (ibid.).

Since angels are created beings, it follows that they cannot create. This is so, since God alone is the primary cause and “no secondary cause can produce anything.… Hence it remains that nothing can create except God alone” (ibid., la. 65.3).

Secondary causes do not create; they only reduplicate (ibid., la. 45.6). A “secondary instrumental cause does not share in the action of the superior cause. … So it is impossible for any creature to create” (ibid, la. 45.5).

The Content of Creation

God created everything that exists: He created “the heaven and the earth” and “every living thing” (Gen. 1:1, 20–27 KJV). God created existence out of nonexistence; He made something out of nothing. For Augustine, the fact that God created all things “implies that before the creation of heaven and earth God had made nothing” (***CG***, 11.9). But if there was nothing before God created, then ultimately He created everything out of nothing: “There could not have existed any matter of anything whatever unless it came from God, the Author and Creator of all that has been formed or is to be formed” (Augustine, ***LCG***, 35). While all things are ***from*** God, they are not ***of*** God (Augustine, ***ONG***, 27). Creation “is not out of Him, because it is not immutable, as He is.” However, as we have seen, since “it was not made of anything else, it was undoubtedly made out of nothing—but by Himself” (Augustine, ***OSIO***, 1.4). Again, this does not mean that “nothing” is some sort of invisible stuff out of which God made the world. By “out of nothing” is meant “that it was not made from anything” (Aquinas, ***ST***, la. 46.2).

As Aquinas noted, the preposition “from” does not imply it came ***from*** something, but simply ***after*** nothing (ibid., 1:45:1). Consequently, creation from nothing is really creation ***after*** nothing, for “***nothing*** is the same ***as no being***” (ibid, la. 45.1). But creation ***from*** nothing is not creation ***by*** nothing. Only what

exists can cause, and only God can cause existence. God is Pure Existence ("I AM THAT I AM," Ex. 3:14 KJV), and He alone produces everything else that exists.

The Method of Creation

God is the Source of creation, and His Word is the means. As mentioned previously, there is no instrumental cause of creation, for between nothing (nonbeing) and something (being) there is no medium; whatever comes from nothing must do so immediately and abruptly. So "God produces being in act out of nothing … according to the greatness of His power" (Aquinas, ***ST***, la. 61.1). Since God has infinite power, He can do anything that is possible. It is not impossible for an infinite Creator to produce a finite creature. Thus, God, who ***is*** Existence, brought all else into existence. Everything came from nothing, but by Someone. It takes power to produce something, and what has all power can produce anything. An infinite Being has unlimited power (see chapter 5), and unlimited power is not limited in its ability to create limited powers (see chapter 7). God can create simply by "his powerful word" (Heb. 1:3).

God created not only by His power but also by His will. God is not bound by any obligation when He creates. Hence, "It is to be held with complete conviction that God brings creatures into existence of his own free will, and not as bound by natural necessity" (Aquinas, ***OPG***, 3.15).

The Time of Creation

God created "in the beginning." God is eternal, but the world is not. The universe came to be, but God always was (actually, is). Again, according to Aquinas, "That the world did not always exist we hold by faith alone; it cannot be proved demonstratively" (***ST***, la. 46.2). Others, like Bonaventure (c. 1217–1274), held that it can be proven by reason that the universe had a beginning. All orthodox Christians, however, acknowledge that the universe had a point of beginning—that it is temporal, not eternal.

Both time and space were created with the universe. There was no time before the world began, only eternity. God is prior to the universe in order, but not in time. “Things are said to be created in the beginning of time, not as if the beginning of time were a measure of creation, but because together with time the heavens and earth were created.” Likewise, space was created with the world, for “we hold that there was no place or space before the world was” (ibid., la. 46.3). Further, as cited before, Augustine said that “it is silly to imagine infinite space since there is no such thing as space beyond the cosmos” (***CG***, 11.5). Neither was there any physical motion before there was a physical universe: “Motion always existed from the moment that movable things began to exist” (Aquinas, ***ST***, la. 46.1). God did not have to move to create motion, nor did He need time to create time. Augustine asked, “Did the author of time need the help of time?” (***LCG***, 195).

What was God doing before He created? Augustine had two answers, one humorous and one serious. First, he jested that God was preparing hell for those who ask such questions! Second, he noted that there was no time before God created, for to speak of “doing” and “before” imply time. Therefore, the question is as meaningless as asking, What time is it for a timeless Being? There is no time before time began, only eternity. Thus, it is senseless to ask how the Eternal One occupied His time before He created time. For this same reason, it makes no sense to ask why God did not create the universe earlier; “earlier” implies that there were moments before moments began. This is as absurd as asking why God did not create the world there rather than here, since there was no here or there (space) before space was created. As Augustine points out, “If they excogitate infinite periods of time before the world … they ought to conceive of infinite reaches of space beyond the visible universe” (***CG***, 11.5). However, since God created both time and space with the universe, there is neither time nor space beyond the universe. God created neither in time nor in space; rather, He created the universe with both.

If God did not create in time, then did He not create from eternity? And if He created from eternity, then is not the world eternal? All the orthodox Fathers rejected this conclusion, but for different reasons. Aquinas believed eternal creation was theoretically possible, though not actually so (***ST***, la. 46.2.). This, he reasoned, is because viewed “from above,” God is eternal, and an effect is simultaneous to its cause of existence. Bonaventuare and others argued “from below” that an eternal universe is impossible because an infinite series of moments is unattainable. Both views agree that the universe is not eternal. The

problem, then, is this: How can God be an eternal Cause when the universe He caused is not eternal?

In response, it should be noted that the universe no more has to be eternal because God is eternal than it has to be infinite, since He is infinite. Nor does it have to be necessary because God is a necessary Being. The only thing a necessary Being must will necessarily is the necessity of His own Being. There is no necessity placed upon God to will the existence of contingent beings. Likewise, there is no reason an eternal Being must will anything else to be eternal. While all material things flow from God's eternal will, He wills that all these things exist temporarily.

Everything preexists in God in accordance with His will. But God willed eternally that created things would have a beginning. So, even though He willed them from eternity, nevertheless, they had a temporal beginning. For example, a doctor can decree at the outset that a patient take a medication later on at different intervals than at the beginning of the treatment. Likewise, God can will events from all eternity that will occur at later successive times.

The Purpose of Creation

If God created freely, then we can ask, Why did He create rather than not create? Again, Augustine's answer was "because it is good" (***CG***, 11.23). Aquinas concurred, saying, "God brings things into existence in order that his goodness may be communicated and manifested" (***ST***, la. 47.1). Not that God ***must*** share His goodness, but simply because He ***wants*** to do so. Commenting on the fact that God declared His creation was "very good" (Gen. 1:31), Augustine concluded, "Surely, this can only mean that there was no other reason for creating the world except that good creatures might be made by a good God" (***CG***, 11.3).

God is infinitely good; as such He desires to share His goodness. Creatures should recognize the goodness God has showered upon them and thank Him for it. In recognizing God's worth, they should attribute worth to Him. Thus worth-ship (worship) is the natural result of creation: Every rational creature should worship the Creator. The purpose for creating is so that the creature will worship God: "If he does not worship God, he is wretched" (Augustine, ***CG***, 10.3). Augustine confessed elsewhere, "Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our

hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee" (***C***, 1.1).
In brief, since a rational God created rational creatures, it is only rational that they should worship Him, for in acknowledging His good as the highest good, they find their highest good.

CONCLUSION

The Christian doctrine of creation is best understood in contrast with the other two main options. The following comparison will summarize and focus the differences.

Category	Theism	Materialism	Pantheism
Source of Creation	Creator beyond nature	No Creator	Creator within nature
Method of Creation	Out of nothing (*ex nihilo*)	Out of something (*ex materia*)	Out of God (*ex Deo*)
Duration of Creation	Temporal	Eternal	Eternal
Relation of Creator and Creature	Creator and creation (really different)	No real Creator	No real creation
God's Control	Unlimited	Limited or nonexistent	Limited

Properly speaking, materialism believes in natural ***generation***, pantheism believes in eternal ***emanation***, and only theism believes in supernatural ***creation***.

These are fundamentally different perspectives. All the other world-views (see Volume 1, chapter 2) hold positions on origin that fit into one or more of these three main categories.

Christianity holds that creation was ***out of nothing***. God brought the universe into existence (Gen. 1:1; John 1:2–3), and He sustains it in existence (Col. 1:16–17; Heb. 1:3). Thus, He is in sovereign control of it. God is infinite, necessary, and eternal; the creation is finite, contingent, and temporal. Hence, there is a real and radical difference between the uncreated Creator and the created creation. For theists, creation ***out of God*** is a contradiction in terms, for a creature would be a temporal eternal, a finite infinite, and a created uncreated being. Thus, creation out of nothing makes it nonsense for a human being to say, "I am God." It is impossible to have a contingent being that is necessary, or a finite that is infinite.

Further, it is in the context of creation that the Christian concept of service to God and worship of Him are best understood. By our very nature as creatures we owe all that we are and have to the good hands of our Creator. Failure to acknowledge this is the ultimate ungratefulness. Indeed, the divine epithet over the pagan world reads: "Although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him" (Rom. 1:21). By contrast, the blessed ones around God's throne sing praise to Him who by His will "created all things" (Rev. 4:11).

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CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE ORIGIN OF MATERIAL CREATION

Creation is a major doctrine of Scripture: It is the first to be stated (Gen. 1:1) and one of the last to be stressed (Rev. 4:11; 10:6; 21:5; 22:13). There are hundreds of references to Creation and the Creator in the Bible, covering the vast majority of books from Genesis to Revelation (see appendix 2). The physical creation includes not only inanimate objects but also all living things.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR CREATION

The word ***create*** (***bara***)[1] is used in connection with three great events in Genesis 1: the creation of matter (v. 1), living things (1:21), and human beings (1:27). These will be the focal point of our discussion.

THE CREATION OF MATTER (THE UNIVERSE)

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). With these majestic words, the Scriptures begin their description of the origin of all things,

and creation is the foundation for everything else that follows. This grand statement of the initial divine act is uniquely monotheistic. That this is a reference to creation from nothing (*ex nihilo*) is confirmed by recent discoveries in ancient Ebla (Syria). The Ebla tablets declare,

Lord of heaven and earth:
the earth was not, you created it,
the light of day was not, you created it,
the morning was not, you created it,
the morning light you had not [yet] made exist.
(Pettinato, ***AE***, 259 in Merrill, ***BS***)

The Origin of Matter

"God is spirit" (John 4:24); as such, He is the "invisible" God (1 Tim. 1:17). Indeed, "no one has ever seen God" (John 1:18). God is both invisible and immaterial (1 Tim. 6:16), and as Spirit He has no "flesh and bones" (Luke 24:39): He is incorporeal and purely spiritual. However, the universe that God created is both visible and material (Heb. 11:3)—it can be seen and handled, being both physical and tangible. It has both space (whereness) and time (whenness); it possesses both "here" and "now." Further, it has matter, which is extended throughout space and time. It has "parts" or particles with spaces between them.

The "stuff" or matter of the universe is described by modern science in terms of atoms of physical energy with component particles and charges. As experienced by humans, matter is sensible, tangible, and visible: It is the hard, objective data that comprises our environment. It is there; we must make our way around it or else knock our heads on it. Bodies are real, and the earth is tangible, as are the stars and planets. So affirms God's revelation.

All of this was created by God "in the beginning." And "through him all things were made" (John 1:3). God created "all things … visible and invisible" (Col. 1:16). He created the "heavens and earth." His creation includes the "land," the "seas" (Gen. 1:10), and all plants and animals (vv. 6–26). It includes also the human body that was made "from the dust of the ground" (Gen. 2:7). There is a real material universe, and it was created by God.

Matter Was Created From Nothing

Indeed, God brought all of matter into existence out of absolutely nothing (see chapter 18). The Bible says God simply spoke (cf. Gen. 1:1, 3, 6, etc.), and things came into existence by His power and word (Heb. 1:2; cf. 2 Cor. 4:6). “By the word of the LORD were the heavens made.… For he spoke, and it came to be” (Ps. 33:6, 9). “He is before all things” and “all things were created through him” (Col. 1:16–17 NKJV). It was through Him that “all things were made,” and “without him nothing was made that has been made” (John 1:3). The writer of Hebrews declared that “by faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible” (Heb. 11:3). The universe was created out of nothing. John the apostle proclaimed of God, “You created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being” (Rev. 4:11). In brief, the entire cosmos came into existence by God’s will at His command. When He spoke, it appeared out of absolutely nothing.

Matter Was Created by God, Not Out of God

The material universe was created by God out of nothing (*ex nihilo*), but not out of God (*ex Deo*): The cosmos is not made out of God-stuff. This is why it is a grievous sin to worship and serve the “creature rather than the Creator” (Rom. 1:25 NKJV). It is for this reason that idolatry is condemned so strongly in the Scriptures; God commanded: “You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below” (Ex. 20:4). If, on the other hand, the universe were God’s “body” or part of His substance,[2] there would be no reason we should not worship it. Yet the Bible makes it very clear that God is not to be identified with the physical universe. The universe comes from God, but it is not made of God. God is as different from the world as a potter is from clay (Rom. 9:20–21), or as the craftsman is from his handiwork (Ps. 19:1).

The material universe is not made out of God, but it is a reflection of God. It “declares” His glory, for “since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being

understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse" (Rom. 1:20). That is, God is present in creation both as its sustaining Cause (Heb. 1:3; Col. 1:16–17) and as it reflects His attributes (Rom. 1:20). Just as the energies of Shakespeare are revealed in his works, so the Creator is manifest in His handicraft. Just as the creative mind of Picasso is portrayed in his art, in like manner the Creator of the universe can be seen in His great masterpiece.

God, then, is the invisible Creator of the visible world, the immaterial Maker of all matter, and the incorporeal Producer of all corporeal (bodily) things (see chapter 6). But how can this be? How can God create matter when He is not material? In response to this question, several observations are relevant.

First, it is certainly no more a mystery for the theist to believe that Mind produced matter than it is for the atheist to believe that matter produced mind. In fact, it is easier to believe that infinite Mind made matter than that finite matter could produce a mind that can contemplate the infinite.

Second, it is no more difficult to understand how an immaterial Spirit (God) can be manifest in material things than it is to comprehend how our minds can reveal themselves in material things, such as literature, art, and technology. Just like the written page is a material manifestation of the immaterial thoughts of the author, even so the universe is a material creation of the immaterial Creator.

Third, and finally, in spite of its similarity to the Creator (Rom. 1:19–20), creation by its very nature must also be different from the Creator. God is infinite, and creation is finite. He is necessary, and creation is contingent. God is uncreated, but the world is created. It is not strange, then, that God is immaterial and the universe is material. After all, a painting is visible, but the artist's mind that created it is not. Indeed, since God cannot create another absolute Spirit, and since everything He creates must have limitations and potency, such as matter has, it is understandable that He made matter.

The Nature of Matter

All creation—whether bodies or spirits (angels), whether visible or invisible—by nature partakes of certain characteristics. Since the material universe is part of creation, it also participates in these properties.

Material Creation Is Contingent

The created world, including matter, is contingent. That is to say, even though the world exists, it could nevertheless not exist; it is, but it might not be. Indeed, God is holding it in existence "by his powerful word" (Heb. 1:3), for by Him "all things hold together" (Col. 1:17). Without God's continual, sustaining causality, all of creation would cease to be—instantly (see chapter 21).

The contingency of all creation is another way to express the biblical truth that God is not only the ***originating*** cause of the universe, but He is also its ***conserving*** cause. He caused it to come to be, and He also causes it to continue to be. The following chart expresses this more completely (see also chapter 3):

GOD'S CAUSALITY		
ORIGINATING CAUSALITY	**CONSERVING CAUSALITY**	
Cause of beginning	Cause of sustaining	
Cause of coming to be	Cause of continuing to be	
Cause of becoming	Cause of being	
Cause of coming together	Cause of holding together	
Cause of origin	Cause of operation	

Creation is contingent at all times—it is always dependent on its Creator. Once a creature, always a creature; the created can never become the Uncreated. Radical dependence on God for moment-by-moment existence is an essential characteristic of all created things, including the material universe as a whole.

Material Creation Is Finite (Limited)

Another essential property of creation is finitude. All created things are finite or limited, and only God is infinite or unlimited. It is impossible to have two infinite Beings, for infinite includes all, and there cannot be two Alls. As Paul

declared, “In him [the infinite God] we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). God is infinite, and all exists in Him. When He created finite beings there was not more Being; there were simply more who had it. For example, when a teacher instructs a class, there is not more knowledge; there are simply more who possess it.

There can only be one infinite Being (see chapter 5), and since there is only one infinite Being (God), then all other things—the whole of creation—must be finite. God alone is unlimited; everything else is limited. God is the unlimited Limiter of all limited things; He is the uncaused Cause of all that is caused.

The very fact that all created things are caused to exist reveals that they must be limited, for if they came to be, then they did not always exist; hence, their existence is not unlimited; it had a beginning. Furthermore, whatever is created undergoes change; only the uncreated God is unchanging. “I the LORD do not change” (Mal. 3:6). Of the heavens the Scriptures declare, “They will perish, but you [God] remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end” (Heb. 1:11–12).

Whatever changes is limited, for if it changes, then it does not remain exactly what it was. Thus, it is limited by what it becomes; it cannot be precisely what it once was, for in that case it has not changed. So all changing things are limited.

Further, the fact that created things change reveals that they have a potentiality for that change: The fact of change proves the possibility of change, and the actuality of change shows the potentiality for change. Thus, all created things have potentiality. However, all created things also have actuality, since they actually exist. Therefore, all created things have both actuality and potentiality.

As for potentiality, a creature has the potential to be what it is not. Thus, creatures are limited by their potentials: They cannot do more than their capacities allow them to do. Just as a gallon jug has only the capacity to hold a gallon of liquid, even so every finite being is limited by its created capacity.

God, on the other hand, is Pure Actuality. God is the “I AM” (Ex. 3:14)—there is no “can be” in God’s essence, for He is what He is. There is nothing He can be that He has not always been and always will be.

Material Creation Is Spatial and Temporal

In addition to being contingent and limited, material creation is also restricted to

space and time. Time is a measurement based on change; it measures according to "before" and "after" the change. Because He is an unchanging Being, God is not subject to such measurements. Since He is always the same, He cannot be the object of calculations based on what He once was. Because He has not changed, He still is what He always was. However, in a changing being, such as material things are, measurements can be made according to before and after the change. Time is such a measurement.

Time is a limited measurement; that is to say, it measures certain limited segments (Augustine, ***C***, chapter 11). Since material beings are in time (i.e., are temporal), they are limited to a "now" as opposed to a "then." This is why we are not now living the past: We lived the past ***then***, but the present we are living ***now***. We cannot live both a now and a then simultaneously in the same sense. We can live the past in memory, but not in actuality. Time is a measurement based on a real limitation that we have as material (bodily) beings. We live only now; every future moment becomes a "now" when we experience it.

Likewise, space is a limitation. Time is a limitation to a ***now***, and space is a limitation to a ***here***. Thus, as spatio-temporal beings, we are limited to the here and now. So are all material things—the limitations of space impose upon us the boundary conditions of "hereness" rather than "thereness." We cannot be both here and there at the same time and in the same sense. We can be ***there*** mentally (by remembering or dreaming), but we can only be ***here*** bodily. Such is the spatial limitation on all material things.

God, however, can be here, there, and everywhere at the same time, for He has no body that limits Him to being only here as opposed to there. God has no "hereness" that limits Him to one place at a time—He is not in space. God is omnipresent; that is, present everywhere in all of creation at the same time (see chapter 7). Again, this is possible because He is an infinite spirit. Having no body to limit Him, nor finite capacity to fence Him in, God's presence is barred from nowhere. As the psalmist proclaimed, "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there" (Ps. 139:7–8).

Material Creation Is Good

After nearly every day of Creation we read, "And God saw that it was good" (Gen. 1:3, 10, 12, 18, 21). After the final day it says, "God saw all that he had

made, and it was very good" (Gen. 1:31). Indeed, Paul declared, "Everything God created is good" (1 Tim. 4:4). Elsewhere he added, "I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that ***there*** is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean" (Rom. 14:14 NKJV). Like its Creator, all of creation was and still is good. This Judeo-Christian teaching that material, physical, bodily things are good is unique, standing in contrast to all other religions and philosophies. Gnostics (past and present) believe that matter is evil, while Plotinus (A.D. 205–270) held that it was nearly evil, the least good of all things. For him, matter had no good, but only the mere capacity for good (***E***, 1:8:7).

Plato (c. 427–347 B.C.) thought matter was a formless chaos, and identified the "good" with "form." More radical Eastern belief (e.g., Shankara Hinduism) holds that matter is an illusion (

maya

), and Christian Science also believes matter, like evil, is an error of mortal mind (Eddy, ***SHKS***, 480–584).

By contrast, both the Old and New Testaments teach that the material world is good. God's own conclusion, upon viewing His handiwork, was that "it was very good" (Gen. 1:31). The apostle Paul affirms the same (1 Tim. 4:4; Rom. 14:14).

THE CREATION OF LIVING THINGS

God not only created matter (Gen. 1:1), but He also created "every living thing that moves" (Gen. 1:21 NKJV). Many of these kinds of life are named in Genesis 1:21–25:

> So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living and moving thing with which the water teems, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth." And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day. And God said, "Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals, each according to its kind." And it was so. God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

The Origin of Life

All of life exists because God wills it to exist, for “he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else” (Acts 17:25). God “created … men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air” (Gen. 6:7). Moses tells us that out of the ground “the LORD God had formed … all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air” (Gen. 2:19). And John added, “Without him nothing was made that has been made” (John 1:3). Literally, all living things originated from God’s hand.

The Nature of Life

The biblical description of life includes its mobility, its unity, its diversity, its fecundity, its stability, and its dominion. It has one source, many manifestations, and continually reproduces after its kind.

The Unity of All Life

There are many indications in Scripture of the unity of all living things.
First, all life has one Creator. His stamp is upon all things.
Second, all life is interdependent. Higher forms were commanded to eat lower forms (Gen. 1:29; 9:3).
Third, humans were commanded to care for the environment (1:28), to cultivate the flora and to care for the fauna (Gen. 2:15). As humans cared for living things, they would provide food and clothes for themselves (Gen. 3:21).
Fourth, and finally, the Bible often refers to “all living things” as a group or whole (Gen. 1:21; 6:19; Acts 17:24). There is, then, a unity and interdependence of all life. It comes from one God; it manifests one creative hand, and each individual form fits into one organic whole.

The Diversity of All Life

God loves variety—He created all kinds of things. In biblical language, God created “vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with

seed in it" (Gen. 1:11). Then He said, "Let the water teem with living creatures" (v. 20). God also "created the great creatures of the sea and every living and moving thing with which the water teems … and every winged bird according to its kind" (v. 21). On top of this, He made all the "living creatures" of the land: "livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals" (v. 24). And finally, "God created man in his own image … male and female he created them" (v. 27).

This great diversity of life filled the earth and literally "teemed" in the sea. The landscape crawled with animals, the waters swarmed with fish, and birds flew across the heavens. Life was created in great abundance and diversity.

The Fecundity of All Life

God commanded life to multiply, and this it does naturally, for "the land produced vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds" (Gen. 1:11). This pleased God, for "God saw that it was good" (Gen. 1:12). Since human beings have free choice, God gave them strong desires to multiply and commanded them, saying, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth" (Gen. 1:28).

The Stability of All Life

God provided for the continuance of the life He created: Each was to produce "according to their various kinds" (Gen. 1:11). Thus "plants yielding seed and fruit trees" were made "bearing fruit in which is their seed." The same was true of animals of the sea and land, each reproducing "according to their kinds" (vv. 21, 25). Finally, humankind was told to reproduce according to their kind (v. 28; cf. 5:3). Thus, God provided for the continuance of each kind He had made. Life is basically the same from generation to generation, each reproducing its own: fish producing fish, birds hatching birds, cows calving calves, and humans giving birth to humans. This has been the pattern from the very beginning and continues to the present. Life in all of its many kinds is continuous and stable.

Humankind's Dominion Over All Life

Not only did God create all life, He crowned it with ***human*** life and made us king over all the earth. God told Adam and Eve to "subdue it. Rule over the fish

of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground" (Gen. 1:28). The psalmist added of humankind, "You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor" (Ps. 8:5). It is important to note that what was granted was dominion, not destruction. God owns the world (Ps. 124:8), and humans are to care for it for Him (Gen. 2).

THE CREATION OF HUMANKIND

Therefore, humankind is the pinnacle of God's earthly creation. Although humans were "made a little lower than the angels" (Heb. 2:9), nonetheless they are higher than the animals. They were made male and female in "his [God's] own image" (Gen. 1:27).

The Origin of Humankind

In the words of Scripture, "the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being" (Gen. 2:7). Then God "took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man" (vv. 21–22). Our Lord referred to this event, declaring "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female' " (Matt. 19:4). Indeed, Jesus said that the creation of man and woman was the basis for lifelong marriage between husband and wife (vv. 5–6).

The creation of man and woman is mentioned as the grounds for other Christian teachings. Paul, for example, said, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man.… For Adam was formed first, then Eve" (1 Tim. 2:13). Elsewhere, he proclaimed that "the head of the woman is man," for "man did not come from woman, but woman from man" (1 Cor. 11:3, 8). Thus, the order of authority both in the home and church is based on the fact and order of creation as recorded in Genesis 1–2.

When speaking of original sin, the Scriptures refer to "Adam" (Rom. 5:12, 14) as an historical person, just as "Moses" was (v. 14). Paul also refers to the first

man in 1 Corinthians 15 when comparing “Adam” to “Christ” (v. 22). Indeed, Luke places Adam as the first name in the literal, actual ancestry of Jesus (Luke 3:38), and it adds that Adam is “of God.” So does the historical record in 1 Chronicles name Adam as the first human being (1 Chron. 1:1).
Everywhere Scripture assumes or declares that the origin of humankind is the creation of Adam and then Eve, as recorded in Genesis 1–2. God “created” them (Gen. 1:27), forming the man from “the dust of the ground” (Gen. 2:7) and shaping the woman from Adam’s rib (vv. 21–22). “God … created him; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27).

The Nature of Humankind

The nature of human beings includes their dignity, their unity of soul and body, and their community as a group of individuals. All came from a common source, and all possess a common human nature. Paul declared, “From one man he [God] made every nation of men” (Acts 17:26).

Human Dignity

Humankind is a special creation of God. Again, of man, the psalmist said, “You [God] made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor” (Ps. 8:5). Humans are uniquely made in God’s “image” and likeness (Gen. 1:27), which is said of no other creatures. Only humans are in the image of God, and this image includes “male and female,” extending to Adam’s children, for “when God created man, he made him in the likeness of God” (Gen. 5:1). Even after the Fall, “Adam … had a son in his own likeness, in his own image” (v. 3).

Human Sanctity

Human life is sacred because it is godlike; hence, there is a prohibition against intentionally taking another innocent human life: “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made

man" (Gen. 9:6). Murder is, as it were, killing God in effigy. Indeed, even cursing another human is forbidden, for "with the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness" (James 3:9). Life is sacred and godlike, and thus it should be protected both after birth and before, from the moment of conception (Ps. 51:5; 139:13–16; Ex. 21:22–23).

Passages on the image of God are found throughout the Bible. They include the following: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27). "When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God" (Gen. 5:1). "You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor" (Ps. 8:5). "This only have I found: God made mankind upright" (Eccl. 7:29). "He is the image and glory of God" (1 Cor. 11:7). "Put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator" (Col. 3:10). "[We] have been made in God's likeness" (James 3:9). This image of God includes both moral and intellectual characteristics. Several things implied in the concept of "image and likeness" can be enumerated here.

Image includes intellectual likeness to God. God is an intelligent Being; indeed, He is all-knowing (Ps. 139:1–6). Although humans are finite, nevertheless, they are like God in that they have intelligence (cf. Job 35:11). Paul speaks of being "renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator" (Col. 3:10). Jude declares that humans are above "unreasoning animals" (Jude 10).

Image includes moral likeness to God. God is holy (Isa. 6:1–3); He is love (1 John 4:16); and He has many other moral attributes as well (see part 1). Since humans were created like God, it is expected that they would share these moral characteristics. Therefore, God commands us, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). The Lord said to Israel, "Be holy, because I am holy" (Lev. 11:45).

Implied in the intellectual and moral likeness to God are some other elements. Not only do humans ***resemble*** God, but they are to ***reproduce*** for Him (Gen. 1:28) and to ***represent*** Him as well. Humans are God's regents on earth; thus, as mentioned, it is wrong to kill or curse them (Gen. 9:6; James 3:9), because in doing so one attacks God. Further, unlike angels (cf. Matt. 22:30), human beings can reproduce (Gen. 1:28). Also, human beings are to ***reign*** for God. He said to Adam and Eve, "Fill the earth" (ibid.).

Finally, God created human beings to be morally ***responsible*** to God, for "the LORD God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the

garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die' " (Gen. 2:16–17). All of these aspects are part of what it means to be in God's image.

Image includes volitional likeness to God. Moral responsibility implies the ability to respond, if not on our own, at least by God's grace. Essential to morality is volitionality; like God, humans have free choice (see Volume 3, chapter 3). Indeed, God gave Adam an option, saying, "You are free" (Gen. 2:16), and then held him accountable for this freedom. Likewise, all who have sinned since Adam are held accountable for their sins (Ezek. 18:18–20; Rom. 14:12).

Image includes the body. It is common for Christian theologians to limit the image of God to the soul. However, this is contrary to Scripture:

(1) Mind and body are a unity (see Volume 3, chapter 2).
(2) Matter is good and reflects God's glory (Gen. 1:31; Ps. 19:1; 1 Tim. 4:4).
(3) Both male and female (which entails bodies) are in God's image (Gen. 1:27).
(4) Killing a body is wrong because it is included in God's image (Gen. 9:6).
(5) Christ in incarnate bodily form is called the "image of God" (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3; 1 John 1:1).
(6) Resurrection of the body reveals that it is part of the whole person made in God's image.

Contrary to the opinions of critics, this does not imply that God has a body (John 4:24), since it does not follow logically that because we are like God, God is like us in all respects. Angels are pure spirits (Heb. 1:14) and are like God, but God is not like them in totality. For example, they are finite and created, but God is neither.

Human Unity

Each individual human being is a unity of soul and body, having a spiritual dimension and a physical dimension. Each partakes of the immaterial as well as

the material, the angelic as well as the animal. As such, humans are unique: each is a psychosomatic unity, a blend of mind and matter.

This unity of body and soul was evident from the very beginning, for "the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground [body] and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life [spirit], and the man became a living being" (Gen. 2:7). At death, "The dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it" (Eccl. 12:7).

Soul and body are so closely united in human beings that their union is used as a figure of what is virtually indissolvable (Heb. 4:12). Paul speaks of "spirit, soul, and body" forming an individual "wholly" (1 Thess. 5:23); that is, these three aspects constitute one person.

However, within this basic unity there is a tri-dimensionality, because a human being is self-conscious, world-conscious, and God-conscious. He can look inward, outward, and upward. But he is, nonetheless, ***one*** person, with one individual human nature (Berkouwer, ***MIG***, chapter 7).

Within the unity of human nature, there is also a basic duality. The unity of soul and body is not an identity of the two (see Volume 3); the union is not an indissolvable one. At death "we are … away from the body and at home with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8). Paul says elsewhere that it is better "to depart [from the body] and be with Christ" (Phil. 1:23). Indeed, such is stated of the blessed ones whose bodies were "slain" but whose "souls" are conscious in heaven (Rev. 6:9). Jesus replied to one thief who died on the cross, "Today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43).

The separation of soul and body is only temporary: They await their reunion at the resurrection, when they will be brought back together permanently (1 Thess. 4:13–17). The intermediate state between death and resurrection is both temporal and incomplete. Paul describes this state as being "unclothed" (2 Cor. 5:1–4), one that awaits the return to its natural union of body and soul.

Human Community

"No man is an island." From the very beginning God made a community of "male and female" and told them to multiply their kind into a larger community (Gen. 1:27–28). Indeed, before Eve was made, Adam discovered that "it is not good for the man to be alone" (Gen. 2:18). Adam sought a helper, but none was "found" among the animals (v. 20), so God made one from Adam's side to be by

his side. God made woman from his flesh so that the two should be “one flesh” (v. 24). God created woman from man to be his equal—not from his head to rule over him, or from his feet to be a slave to him, but from his side to be a companion for him.

The solidarity of all humanity is a fact not only of their original creation but also of their continued existence. Paul declared this when he said, “From one man he [God] made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth” (Acts 17:26). There are many ethnic groups, but there is only one race—the human race. Not only are all human beings one in Adam’s creation, but we were also one in Adam’s fall, for “just as sin entered the world through one man … in this way death came to all men, because all sinned [in Adam]” (Rom. 5:12). That is to say, the whole human race was present in Adam when he sinned, so it fell with him. Thus, all humans inherit this original sin, so that without salvation we are “by nature objects of [God’s] wrath” (Eph. 2:3).

The unity of the human race is also evident in the means of its propagation. Multiplication comes only from a union of male and female (Gen. 1:28; 2:24), and from this union come children who are in the “likeness” of their parents (Gen. 5:3). The whole race is genetically connected; indeed, there are not many different kinds of humans—all humans are of the same kind. They are essentially the same and only accidentally different.[3] We all have one ancestral father and mother (Adam and Eve) and, hence, we are all part of one large “family” (Eph. 3:15).

Finally, not only is it true that “none of us lives to himself” but also that “none of us dies to himself” (Rom. 14:7). Whether we live or die, “we belong to the Lord” (v. 8); no one is completely independent. Woman was created from man, and yet “man is born of woman” (1 Cor. 11:12). There are no self-made men; every man has a mother. The whole human race is interdependent: We are a community of beings with a common Creator, a common connection, and a common commission—to glorify and enjoy God.

THE EVIL OF RACISM

An important consequence of the foregoing discussion on the dignity, community, and solidarity of the human race is that it is a powerful argument against racism. The idea that there is a superior race, of whatever color, is

contrary to the most fundamental teaching of Scripture. As established previously, there is only one race—the human race—and we are all part of it. There are many ethnic groups, but, again, only one race—the Adamic race, which includes ***all*** of us.

The Baseless Arguments for Racism

Several arguments advanced for racism have misused Scripture to support them. Of these the following call for comment.

The Mark on Cain

Some have suggested that the mark on Cain was that which designated him as a race into which others were not to marry (Gen. 4:15). However, there is no such reason given anywhere in Scripture for this. It was actually a mark of protection for him, for the text says "the Lord put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him" (Gen. 4:15). It had nothing to do with color or ethnic groups that had not even developed yet (cf. Gen. 11).

The Command Not to Intermarry With Other Nations

Several times in the Old Testament, God forbade intermarriage or condemned His people for intermarrying with those of other nations. For instance, foreign wives were part of Solomon's demise (1 Kings 11:1–3), and Ezra demanded that the Israelites divorce those they had married from among the heathen (Ezra 10:10–11, 17–19). However, in each case the reason was moral, not racial. Ezra called the alien spouses "pagan" (vv. 17–18 NKJV) , and when Solomon was condemned for his foreign brides, the reason was clearly stated: "You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods" (1 Kings 11:2). Finally, that God sanctioned marriage with people of varying ethnic groups is clear from his blessing upon Rahab and Ruth, both of whom were brought into the bloodline of the Messiah by intermarriage with Jews, and both of whom were women of faith (cf. Joshua 2:9–11; Ruth 1:16–17; Heb. 11:31).

God Desired Nations to Be Separate

It is argued that God desired nations to be distinct, for Acts 17:26 declares: "He determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live." If God has so determined their identity, then it is suggested that to pass those boundaries in intermarriage is wrong. However, this kind of argument is misdirected for several reasons.

First, the statement is descriptive, not prescriptive. It is not a prohibition against migration. He told them to fill the earth (1:28).

Second, the statement is general, not specific, being about nations, not individuals. If it were about individuals, then Ruth and Rahab would have been excluded too, yet they ***were*** included in the bloodline of the Messiah (cf. Matt. 1).

Third, the text itself speaks against racism, declaring that "from one man [God] made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth" (Acts 17:26). Again, there are not many races, there is only one—the human race.

The Curse on Canaan

Perhaps the most misused passage of all is Genesis 9, where God denounced Noah's descendants through Canaan, the son of Ham, saying, "Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers" (Gen. 9:25). However, this kind of interpretation overlooks several important facts, in addition to those listed below in favor of ethnic intermarriage.

First, there is nothing in this text about a curse on black or African people.

Second, the curse has nothing to do with the color of one's skin.

Third, the descendants of Canaan were the Canaanites of the Promised Land who were cursed by God and destroyed by the Israelites in the book of Joshua. It has nothing to do with those who come from or live in Africa.

The Basis for Ethnic Intermarriage

There are several strong arguments from Scripture that God approves of ethnic intermarriage.
First, as noted above, all ethnic groups are from the same race—the human race.
Second, the New Testament specifically repeats that we are all "from one blood" (Acts 17:26 NKJV).
Third, there are biblically approved cases of ethnic intermarriage (such as Ruth's and Rahab's).
Fourth, when Moses married an Ethiopian woman and was criticized for doing so, God intervened and judged those who disapproved (Num. 12:1–15).
Fifth, and finally, the scriptural commands applicable to marriage are to marry "in the Lord" (1 Cor. 7:39 NKJV), someone with whom one is not "unequally yoked together" (meaning, not an unbeliever—2 Cor. 6:14 NKJV).

THE PURPOSE OF HUMANKIND

The purpose of creation is twofold: to honor the Creator and to enjoy His creation. This design is evident from the very beginning of creation and from the very nature of the creature. Paul exhorted the Corinthian believers to "honor God with your body" (1 Cor. 6:20). He said, "Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). He urged the Colossians, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men" (Col. 3:23).
In fact, all creatures, angelic and human, join in the eternal praise around God's throne, singing, "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things" (Rev. 4:11). "In his temple all cry, 'Glory!' " (Ps. 29:9). Only "fools" (Ps. 14:1) exchange "the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles" (Rom. 1:22–23). They "worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised" (v. 25).

To Glorify God, the Creator

The first purpose of the creature is to glorify his Creator. God said, "I created for my glory" (Isa. 43:7). This purpose follows from the nature of the Creator as well as the creature.

The Creator Did Not Have to Create Us

Creation did not come by compulsion; God was not forced to create us. The Scriptures say plainly, “By your [God’s] will they were created and have their being” (Rev. 4:11). ***God did not need to create—an infinite, perfect Being needs nothing***. God was not lonely, for as a triunity of persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—God had absolutely perfect fellowship within Himself. He did not have to seek any companionship elsewhere. Why, then, did God create? Not because He ***had to***, but because He ***wanted to***. Indeed, all things are done “according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ” (Eph. 1:9) who “works all things according to the counsel of His will” (v. 11 NKJV).

If God did not have to create us, then our existence is not necessary. Indeed, we might not have been, and we exist only because He wants us to be. Therefore, we owe our very existence to Him. Our very nature as freely created beings demands our allegiance to our Creator.

Our Life Is Dependent Upon God

Not only did we ***come to be*** because of God’s will, but we also ***continue to be by*** His will. He literally “sustain[s] all things by his powerful word” (Heb. 1:3), because “in him all things hold together” (Col. 1:17). If God were to decide that we should no longer exist, we would go into oblivion that very moment.

God sustains all things in existence, including humankind (see chapter 21). “For in him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). God has given ample evidence of His sustenance of all creation; as St. Paul said to the heathen at Lystra, “He [God] has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy” (Acts 14:17). James acknowledged, “Every good and perfect gift is from above” (James 1:17). We came into the world naked, and we return naked (Job 1:21), and if God did not provide clothes for us, we would live naked as well (1 Tim. 6:7–8). However, God not only feeds the raven and clothes the lily, but He also provides for all our needs (Matt. 6:28–34).

Without the air and food He provides, we could not live. It behooves us, therefore, not to bite the Hand that is feeding us. Rather, as thankful creatures,

we should confess with the psalmist, “I sing for joy at the works of your hands” (Ps. 92:4). As grateful creatures, we should glorify “the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen” (Rom. 1:25). This is the very reason for our existence.

To Enjoy God’s Creation

The second purpose of the creature is to enjoy creation. God is not a cosmic killjoy; He is not a heavenly Scrooge. God desires His creatures to be content. The psalmist said that the Lord “satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed” (Ps. 103:5). As just noted, Paul told unbelievers that God “provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy” (Acts 14:17). In fact, Paul speaks of “God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment” (1 Tim. 6:17). “No good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless” (Ps. 84:11). That is a promise for this life. And in the life to come? The psalmist said it best: “You will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand” (Ps. 16:11).

God desires that His creatures be happy as well as holy. He wants to provide them with satisfaction as well as sanctification. It is His very purpose for us that we enjoy every gift He graciously gives, for “a man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment?” (Eccl. 2:24–25). In short, God desires that we be happy now and forever. He desires that (1) we exalt Him as Creator, and that (2) we enjoy His creation.

SUMMARY OF THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR CREATION

Creation is the first and one of the most basic teachings of Scripture. God created the material universe (Gen. 1:1), every living thing (1:20–25), and human beings in His image and likeness (1:27). The original creation was out of nothing (*ex nihilo*). Material creation by its nature is contingent, finite, limited in space and time, and good.

God created life in all its diversity and gave it an enduring unity and stability to

reproduce after its kind. Human beings are a distinct creation: The human race possesses dignity, unity, and community. God also created spirits called angels (see chapter 20) whose purpose is to serve God and His children. (Some angels rebelled against God and became known as demons. The leader of this rebellion is called the devil or Satan.) The purpose of all rational creatures is to glorify God and enjoy His creation.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS OF MATERIAL CREATION

The doctrine of creation is firmly rooted in the theology of the historic Christian church. This is true from the very earliest times.

The Early Church Fathers on Creation

Justin Martyr

> Homer, too, having discovered from the ancient and divine history which says, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return," calls the lifeless body of Hector dumb clay.... And again, somewhere else, he introduces Menelaus, thus addressing those who were not accepting Hector's challenge to single combat with becoming alacrity, "To earth and water may you all return," resolving them in his violent rage into their original and pristine formation from earth. These things Homer and Plato, having learned in Egypt from the ancient histories, wrote in their own words. (*JHAG*, 286)

Irenaeus

> It is proper, then, that I should begin with the first and most important head, that is, God the Creator, who made the heaven and the earth, and all things that are

therein (whom these men blasphemously style the fruit of a defect), and to demonstrate that there is nothing either above Him or after Him; nor that, influenced by any one, but of His own free will, He created all things, since He is the only God, the only Lord, the only Creator, the only Father, alone containing all things, and Himself commanding all things into existence. (*AH*, 2.1.1 in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, 1)

He added,

For it must be either that there is one Being who contains all things, and formed in His own territory all those things which have been created, according to His own will; or, again, that there are numerous unlimited creators and gods, who begin from each other, and end in each other on every side; and it will then be necessary to allow that all the rest are contained from without by someone who is greater. (*AH*, 2.1.5 in ibid., 1)

Further,

He [God] created and made all things by His Word, while He neither required angels to assist Him in the production of those things which are made, nor of any power greatly inferior to Himself.… But He Himself in Himself, after a fashion which we can neither describe nor conceive, predestinating all things, formed them as He pleased, bestowing harmony on all things, and assigning them their own place, and the beginning of their creation. (*AH*, 2.1.4 in ibid., 1)

Irenaeus continued,

He formed all things that were made by His Word that never wearies. [For] His own Word is both suitable and sufficient for the formation of all things, even as John, the disciple of the Lord, declares regarding Him: “All things were made by Him, and without Him was nothing made.” Now, among the “all things” our world must be embraced. (*AH*, 2.1.4–5 in ibid., 1)

He went on,

Let them cease, therefore, to affirm that the world was made by any other; for as soon as God formed a conception in His mind, that was also done which He had thus mentally conceived. (*AH*, 2.3.2 in ibid.)

In conclusion,

It is not seemly, however, to say of Him who is God over all, since He is free and independent, that He was a slave to necessity, or that anything takes place with His permission, yet against His desire; otherwise they will make necessity greater and more kingly than God, since that which has the most power is superior to all [others]. (*AH*, 2.5.4 in ibid.)

Tertullian

Although Hermogenes finds it amongst his colorable pretenses (for it was not in

> his power to discover it in the Scriptures of God), it is enough for us, both that it is certain that all things were made by God, and that there is no certainty that they were made by Matter. And even if Matter had previously existed, we must believe that it had been really made by God, since we maintained (no less) when we held the rule of faith to be, that nothing except God was uncreated. Up to this point there is no room for controversy, until Matter is brought to the test of the Scriptures, and fails to make good its case. The conclusion of the whole is this: I find that there was nothing made, except out of nothing; because that which I find was made of the grass, and the fruit, and the cattle, and the form of man himself; so from the waters were produced the animals which swim and fly. The original fabrics out of which such creatures were produced I may call their materials, but then even these were created by God. (*AH*, 2.3.33 in ibid., III)
>
> You have, no doubt, amongst your philosophers men who maintain that this world is without a beginning or a maker. It is, however, much more true, that nearly all the heresies allow it an origin and a maker, and ascribe its creation to our God. Firmly believe, therefore, that He produced it wholly out of nothing, and then you have found the knowledge of God, by believing that He possesses such mighty power. (*RF*, 2.6.11 in ibid.)

The Medieval Church Fathers on Creation

Continuing into the Middle Ages, all orthodox teachers continued to believe what the early Apostles' Creed declared, namely, that God is "Creator of heaven and earth." Indeed, many went into great detail as to what this meant and how it happened.

Augustine

Concerning creation, as we have seen, Augustine said three questions may be asked: "Who made it? How? and Why?—the answers are: 'God'; 'by the word'; and 'because it is good' " (***CG***, 11.23). He elaborated as follows:

Who created? God is of course the "First Cause" (***LCG***, 23). He is the "Beginning" beyond which there is no beginning. He is eternal and uncaused. He is indivisible and unchangable (CG, 11.10). He is infinitely wise and powerful. Further, God created voluntarily. God created "the heavens and the earth" and "every living thing" (Gen. 1:1, 21). This "implies that before the creation of heaven and earth God had made nothing" (ibid., 11.9). Thus, "There could not have existed any matter of anything whatever unless it came from God, the

Author and Creator of all that has been formed or is to be formed" (***LCG***, 35). While all things are from God, they are not of God (***ONG***, 27). Creation "is not out of Him, because it is not immutable, as He is." But since "it was not made of anything else, it was undoubtedly made out of nothing—but by Himself" (***OSIO***, 1.4). So "it is silly to imagine infinite space since there is no such thing as space beyond the cosmos" (***CG***, 11.5).

How Did God Create? As to the time God created, Augustine asked, "Did the author of time need the help of time?" (***LCG***, 195). There is no time before time began, only eternity, for "if they excogitate infinite periods of time before the world … they ought to conceive of infinite reaches of space beyond the visible universe" (***CG***, 11.5). There was no time before God created: He created time from eternity. Time had a beginning, but God's decree to create did not; it was eternal.

Commenting on the length of "days" in Genesis 1, Augustine wrote,

> We see, indeed, that our ordinary days have no evening but by the setting, and no morning but by the rising, of the sun; but the first three days of all were passed without sun, since it is reported to have been made on the fourth day. And first of all, indeed, light was made by the word of God, and God, we read, separated it from the darkness, and called the light Day, and the darkness Night; but what kind of light that was, and by what periodic movement it made evening and morning, is beyond the reach of our senses, (ibid., 208)

Further,

> When it is said that God rested on the seventh day from all His works, and hallowed it, we are not to conceive of this in a childish fashion, as if work were a toil to God, who "spake and it was done," spake by the spiritual and eternal, not audible and transitory word. But God's rest signifies the rest of those who rest in God, as the joy of a house means the joy of those in the house who rejoice, though not the house, but something else, causes the joy. (ibid., 209)

Why did God create? If God created freely, then we can ask why He created rather than not create. Once again, Augustine's answer was "because it is good" (ibid., 11.23). Commenting on the fact that God declared His creation was "very good" (Gen. 1:31), Augustine concluded, "Surely, this can only mean that there was no other reason for creating the world except that good creatures might be made by a good God" (***CG***, 11.3).

Anselm

Who created? In answer to this question, Anselm wrote,

> WHAT art thou, then, Lord God, than whom nothing greater can be conceived? But what art thou, except that which, as the highest of all beings, alone exists through itself, and creates all other things from nothing? For, whatever is not this is less than a thing which can be conceived of. But this cannot be conceived of thee? (*P*, 5)
>
> Hence, seeing that whatever is exists through the supreme Being, nor can aught else exist through this Being, except by its creation, or by its existence as material, it follows, necessarily, that nothing besides it exists, except by its creation. And, since nothing else is or has been, except that supreme Being and the beings created by it, it could create nothing at all through any other instrument or aid than itself. (*M*, 7)

From what did God create? Anselm replied,

> All that it has created, it has doubtless created either from something, as from material, or from nothing.... Since, then, it is most patent that the essence of all beings, except the supreme Essence, was created by that supreme Essence, and derives existence from no material, doubtless nothing can be more clear than that this supreme Essence nevertheless produced from nothing, alone and through itself, the world of material things, so numerous a multitude, formed in such beauty, varied in such order, so fitly diversified, (ibid.)
>
> We can understand, without inconsistency, the statement that the creative Being created all things from nothing, or that all were created through it from nothing; that is, those things which before were nothing, are now something. For, indeed, from the very word that we use, saying that it *created* them or that they were *created*, we understand that when this Being created them, it created something, and that when they were created, they were created only as something, (ibid., 8)

However,

> It is clear that the beings that were created were nothing before their creation, to this extent, that they were not what they now are, nor was there anything whence they should be created, yet they were not nothing, so far as the

> Creator's thought is concerned, through which, and according to which, they were created, (ibid., 9)
>
> Just as an artisan first conceives in his mind what he afterwards actually executes in accordance with his mental concept, yet I see that this analogy is very incomplete. For the supreme Substance took absolutely nothing from any other source, whence it might either frame a model in itself, or make its creatures what they are. (ibid., 11)
>
> Since it cannot but be that those things which have been created live through another, and that by which they have been created lives through itself, necessarily, just as nothing has been created except through the creative, present Being, so nothing lives except through its preserving presence, (ibid., 13)

Why did God create?

> It is, therefore, most obvious that the rational creature was created for this purpose, that it might love the supreme Being above all other goods, as this Being is itself the supreme good; nay, that it might love nothing except it, unless because of it; since that Being is good through itself, and nothing else is good except through it. But the rational being cannot love this Being, unless it has devoted itself to remembering and conceiving of it. It is clear, then, that the rational creature ought to devote its whole ability and will to remembering, and conceiving of, and loving, the supreme good, for which end it recognizes that it has its very existence, (ibid., 68)

Thomas Aquinas

As established previously, Aquinas's view on Creation can be stated in terms of his answers to the basic questions.

Who created? God did, but He did it freely, for, again, "it is not necessary that God should will anything except Himself" (***ST***, la. 46.1).

> To the Father is appropriated power which is especially shown in creation.... To the Son is appropriated wisdom through which an intellectual agent acts.... To the Holy Ghost is appropriated goodness, to which belong both governance ... and the giving of life, (ibid., la. 46.6)

Not only did God create, but only God can create, for "to create is, properly speaking, to cause or produce the being of things" (ibid., la. 45.6). God alone can

cause something to come into being: “An individual man cannot be the cause of human nature absolutely, because he would then be the cause of himself” (ibid., la. 45.5). In fact, “no created being can produce a being absolutely” (ibid.). This is so, since God alone is the primary cause, and “no secondary cause can produce anything.… Hence it remains that nothing can create except God alone” (ibid., la. 65.3).

Secondary causes do not create; they only reduplicate (ibid., la. 45.6). A “secondary instrumental cause does not share in the action of the superior cause. … So it is impossible for any creature to create” (ibid, la. 45.5).

How did God create? By His Word. As stated, there is no instrumental cause of creation, because between nothing and something there is no medium. So “God produces being in act out of nothing … according to the greatness of His power” (ibid., la. 61.1). Hence, “it is to be held with complete conviction that God brings creatures into existence of his own free will, and not as bound by natural necessity” (***OPG***, 3.15).

From what did God create? Aquinas replied,

> I answer that it must be said that every being in any way existing is from God. For whatever is found in anything by participation, must be caused in it by that to which it belongs essentially, as iron becomes ignited by fire. Therefore all beings apart from God are not their own being, but are beings by participation. Therefore it must be that all things which are diversified by the diverse participation of being, so as to be more or less perfect, are caused by one First Being, Who possesses being most perfectly. (*ST*, la.44.1)

To resummarize, God created out of nothing, but “nothing” is not some sort of invisible stuff out of which God made the world. By “out of nothing” is meant “that it was not made from anything” (ibid., la.46.2). The preposition “from” does not imply it came from something but simply ***after*** nothing (ibid, la.45.1). Therefore, creation from nothing is really creation after nothing, for “nothing is the same as no being” (ibid.).

When did God create? As we have seen repeatedly, God created “in the beginning.” God is eternal, but the world is not. The universe came to be, but God always was (really, is).

Again, Aquinas believed eternal creation was theoretically possible (***ST***, la.46.2), though not actually so. This, he reasoned, is because viewed “from above,” God is eternal, and an effect is simultaneous to its cause of existence. As mentioned before, Bonaventure and others argued “from below” that an eternal universe is

impossible because an infinite series of moments is unattainable (Bonaventure, ***S***, 1.1.1.2.1–6). Both views agree that the universe is not eternal.

> It is not therefore necessary for God to will that the world should always exist; but the world exists forasmuch as God wills it to exist, since the being of the world depends on the will of God, as on its cause. It is not therefore necessary for the world to be always; and hence it cannot be proved by demonstration. (Aquinas, *ST*, Ia.46.1)

Further,

> The words of Genesis, “In the beginning God created heaven and earth,” are expounded in a threefold sense in order to exclude three errors. For some said that the world always was, and that time had no beginning; and to exclude this the words “In the beginning” are expounded—viz., “of time.” And some said that there are two principles of creation, one of good things and the other of evil things, against which “in the beginning” is expounded—“in the Son.” For as the efficient principle is appropriated to the Father by reason of power, so the exemplar principle is appropriated to the Son by reason of wisdom, in order that, as it is said (
>
> Ps. 104:24
>
>), “In wisdom you made them all,” it may be understood that God made all thing in the beginning—that is, in the Son; according to the word of the Apostle (
>
> Col. 1:16
>
>), “by him”—viz., the Son—“all things were created.” But others said that corporeal things were created by God through the medium of spiritual creation; and to exclude this it is expounded thus: “In the beginning”—i.e., before all things—“God created heaven and earth.” For [these] things are stated to be created together—viz., the empyrean heaven, corporeal matter, by which is meant the earth, time, and the angelic nature, (ibid., Ia.46.3)

Why did God create? “God brings things into existence in order that his goodness may be communicated and manifested” (ibid., 1.47.1). Not that God must share His goodness, but simply that He wants to do so. Thus, God created both to manifest His goodness and to share it with His creatures.
After what pattern did God create?

> I answer that God is the first exemplar cause of all things. In proof whereof we must consider that if for the production of anything an exemplar is necessary, it is in order that the effect may receive a determinate form. For an artificer produces a determinate form in matter by reason of the exemplar before him, whether it is the exemplar beheld externally, or the exemplar interiorly conceived in the mind, (ibid., Ia.44.3)

The Reformation Leaders on Creation

Martin Luther

> In the beginning, God made Adam out of a piece of clay, and Eve out of Adam's rib: he blessed them, and said: "Be fruitful and increase"—words that will stand and remain powerful to the world's end.… These and other things which he daily creates, the ungodly blind world see not, nor acknowledge for God's wonders, but think all is done by chance and haphazard, whereas, the godly, wheresoever they cast their eyes, beholding heaven and earth, the air and water, see and acknowledge all for God's wonders; and, full of astonishment and delight, laud the Creator, knowing that God is well pleased therewith. (*TT*, 64)

John Calvin

> God was pleased that a history of the creation should exist—a history on which the faith of the Church might lean without seeking any other God than Him whom Moses sets forth as the Creator and Architect of the world.… This knowledge is of the highest use not only as an antidote to the monstrous fables which anciently prevailed both in Egypt and the other regions of the world, but also as a means of giving a clearer manifestation of the eternity of God as contrasted with the birth of creation, and thereby inspiring us with higher admiration. (*ICR*, 1.14.1)

The Post-Reformation Theologians on Creation

Jacob Arminius

"Creation is an external act of God, by which he produced all things out of nothing, for himself, by his Word and Spirit" (***WJA***, 11.54). "The primary efficient cause is God the Father, by his Word and Spirit. The impelling cause, which we have indicated in the definition by the particle 'for,' is the goodness of

God" (ibid.).
Further, "time and place are not separate creatures, but are created with things themselves, or, rather, that they exist together at the creation of things" (ibid., 57). And,

> Man is a creature of God; consisting of a body and a soul, rational, good, and created after the divine image "according to his body," created from pre-existing matter, that is, earth mixed and besprinkled with aqueous and ethereal moisture, [as well as] "according to his soul," created out of nothing, by the breathing of breath into his nostrils, (ibid., 62)

Jonathan Edwards

> A main difference between the intelligent and moral parts, and the rest of the world, lies in this, that the former are capable of knowing their Creator, and the end for which he made them, and capable of article complying with his design in their creation, and promoting it while other creatures cannot promote the design of their creation, only passively and eventually. (*WJE*, 2.2.8)

Charles Hodge

Charles Hodge, onetime president of Princeton University, was a great defender of the orthodox faith, including the doctrine of Creation. In His book ***What Is Darwinism?*** he answers flatly, "Darwinism is atheism." He explains that neither Darwin nor all his followers were atheists, but the theory of Darwinism is tantamount to atheism because in excluding design from nature it thereby excludes the need for a Designer.

> The God of the Bible is an extramundane God, existing out of, and before the world, absolutely independent of it; its creator, preserver, and governor. So the doctrine of creation is a necessary consequence of Theism. If we deny that the world owes its existence to the will of God, then Atheism, Hylozoism, or Pantheism would seem to be the logical consequence. (*ST*, 1.561–62)
>
> Apart from the pantheistic doctrine which makes the universe the existence form, or, as Goethe calls it … (the living garment) of God, the most prevalent views on this subject are, First, those theories which exclude mind from the causative origin of the world; Secondly, those which admit of mind, but only as connected with matter; and Thirdly, the Scriptural doctrine which assumes the existence of an infinite extra-mundane mind to whose power and will the existence of all things out of God is to be referred, (ibid., 1.550)

Hodge on Creation Ex Nihilo

> While it has ever been the doctrine of the Church that God created the universe out of nothing by the word of his power, which creation was instantaneous and immediate, *i.e.*, without the intervention of any second causes; yet it has generally been admitted that this is to be understood only of the original call of matter into existence. Theologians have, therefore, distinguished between a first and second, or immediate and mediate creation. The one was instantaneous, the other gradual; the one precludes the idea of any preexisting substance, and of cooperation, the other admits and implies both.… It thus appears that forming out of preexisting material comes within the Scriptural idea of creating. We all recognize God as the author of our being, as our Creator, as well as our Preserver.… And the Bible constantly speaks of God as causing the grass to grow, and as being the real author or maker of all that the earth, air, or water produces. There is, therefore, according to the Scriptures, not only an immediate, instantaneous creation
>
> *ex nihilo*
>
> by the simple word of God, but a mediate, progressive creation; the power of God working in union with second causes, (ibid., 1.556–1.557)

Hodge on the "Days" of Genesis

> The foundation of the world is an epoch. Then time began. What was before the foundation of the world is eternal. The world, therefore, is not eternal, and if not eternal it must have had a beginning, and if all things had a beginning, then there must have been a creation
>
> *ex nihilo*
>
> …. The [Genesis] account recognizes in creation two great eras of three days each, an Inorganic and an Organic. Each of these eras open with the appearance of light; the first, light cosmical; the second, light from the sun for the special uses of the earth.… Each era ends in "a day" of two great works—the two shown to be distinct by being severally pronounced "good." On the third day, that closing the Inorganic Era, there was first the dividing of the land from the waters, and afterwards the creation of vegetation, or the institution of a kingdom of life—a work widely diverse from all that preceded it in the era. So on the sixth day, terminating the Organic Era, there was first the creation of mammals, and then a second far greater work, totally new in its grandest element, the creation of Man. (ibid., 1.572)

Hodge on No Conflict Between Genesis and the Facts of Science

As the Bible is of God, it is certain that there can be no conflict between the teachings of the Scriptures and the facts of science. It is not with Facts, but with theories, believers have to contend. Many such theories have, from time to time, been presented, apparently or really inconsistent with the Bible. But these theories have either proved to be false, or to harmonize with the Word of God, properly interpreted. The Church has been forced more than once to alter her interpretation of the Bible to accommodate the discoveries of science. But this has been done without doing any violence to the Scriptures or in any degree impairing their authority. [For] the Bible, and the Bible alone of all ancient books, was in full accord with these stupendous revelations of science. And so if it should be proved that the creation was a process continued through countless ages, and that the Bible alone of all the books of antiquity recognized that fact, then, as Professor Dana says, the idea of its being [only] of human origin would become “utterly incomprehensible” (ibid., 1.573–74).

Karl Barth

The divine creation in itself and as such did not and does not take place for its own sake. Creation is the freely willed and executed positing of a reality distinct from God. The question thus arises: What was and is the will of God in doing this? We may reply that He does not will to be alone in His glory; that He desires something else beside Him. (*CD*, 3.1.95)

He wills and posits the creature neither out of caprice nor necessity, but because He has loved it from eternity, because He wills to demonstrate His love for it, and because He wills, not to limit His glory by its existence and being, but to reveal and manifest it in His own coexistence with it. As the Creator He wills really to exist for His creature, (ibid.)

The creature does not exist casually. It does not merely exist, [it] exists meaningfully. In its existence it realizes a purpose and order. It has not come into being by chance but by necessity, therefore not as an accident but as a sign and witness of this necessity. This is already implied in the fact that it is a creature and therefore the work of the Creator, of God. (ibid., 3.1.229)

THE CURRENT DEBATE ON CREATION AND EVOLUTION

Since the time of Charles Darwin (1809–1882), a debate has raged ***within*** Christianity on whether or not total evolution is compatible with the historic biblical and theological teaching on origins. Two ***basic*** camps have emerged: theistic evolution and creationism. ***Within the second faction*** (creationists) ,

there are two major groups: old-earth creationists and young-earth creationists. (The former are often called progressive creationists, and the latter, fiat creationists.) Currently, in America, the young-earth creationists are led by the Institute for Creation Research (ICR), based on the work of Henry Morris. Progressive (old-earth) creationism is championed by Hugh Ross and his "Reasons to Believe" organization; another proponent of this view is Robert Newman at Biblical Seminary in Hatfield, Pennsylvania.

Young-Earth Creationism

The primary difference between young-and old-earth creationists is the speculated amount of time between God's creative acts (see appendix 4). Young-earthers (fiat creationists) insist that it was all accomplished in 144 hours—six successive twenty-four-hour days—while old-earth (progressive) creationists allow for millions (or even billions) of years. This is usually done by

(1) placing the long periods of time before Genesis 1:1 (making it a recent and local Creation);
(2) placing the long periods of time between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 (called "gap" views);
(3) making the "days" of Genesis 1 long periods of time;
(4) allowing long periods of time between literal twenty-four-hour days in Genesis 1 (called "alternate day-age" views); or
(5) making the "days" of Genesis to be days of revelation of God to the writer, not days of Creation (called "revelatory day" views).

There are several variations within these perspectives, making a total of more than a dozen different views held by evangelical theologians on the matter (see appendix 4).

Old-Earth Creationism

Old-earth (progressive) creationists are not to be confused with theistic evolutionists. Old-earth creationists do not accept macroevolution (see the third area of agreement below) as a method by which God produced the originally created kinds of Genesis 1. Old-earth creationism was strong among nineteenth-century creationists, though the view dates from at least the fourth century (in Augustine). Again, prominent contemporary defenders include Hugh Ross and Robert Newman (see bibliography).

Theistic Evolution

Broadly speaking, theistic evolution is the belief that God used evolution as His means of producing the various forms of physical life on this planet, including human life. All theistic evolutionists believe that God performed at least one supernatural act—the act of creating the physical universe from nothing. However, this may more properly be called ***deistic*** evolution, since there are no miracles involved after the first act of Creation (see Volume 1, chapters 2–3). Most theistic evolutionists hold to at least two acts of Creation: (1) the creation of matter out of nothing, and (2) the creation of first life. After that, allegedly, every other living thing, including human beings, emerged by natural processes that God had ordained from the beginning. Some theistic evolutionists do insist that (3) God directly created the first soul in the long-evolved primate to make it truly human and in His image.

Roman Catholicism embraces theistic evolution, and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955) is a notable example, although his concept of God is more panentheistic (see Volume 1, chapter 2). Among evangelical scientists, Howard Van Til (see ***PC*** and ***FD***) is a champion of theistic evolution, as are many members of the American Scientific Association (see ***JASA***). There is a movement among some contemporary scientists to combine theistic evolution with the anthropic principle, positing that the Creator fine-tuned the entire universe from the moment of the big bang so that everying, including all life forms, eventually emerged by natural processes from that point (see Barrow and Tipler, ***AP***).

Areas of Agreement Between Young- and Old-Earth Creationists

Young- and old-earth creationists have much in common, at least among those who are evangelical. This includes several basic things.

Direct Supernatural Creation of All Forms of Life

Both young-and old-earthers believe that God supernaturally, directly, and immediately produced every kind of animal and human as separate and genetically distinct forms of life (Ross, ***FG***). Both hold that every kind produced by God was directly created *de nova* (brand-new) and did not come about by God's using natural processes over a long period of time or tinkering with previous types of life in order to make higher forms (evolution).

Opposition to Naturalism

Both groups are also agreed in their opposition to naturalism, which they see as the philosophical presupposition of evolution. They correctly observe that without a naturalistic bias, evolution loses its credibility. Ruling out the possibility of supernatural intervention in the world begs the whole question in favor of evolution even before one begins.

Opposition to Macroevolution

Likewise, both are united in their opposition to ***macroevolution***, either theistic or nontheistic; that is, they reject the theory of common ancestry. They both deny that all forms of life descended by completely natural processes without supernatural intervention from the outside. They deny that all living things are like a tree connected to a common trunk and root; rather, they affirm the separate ancestry of all the basic forms of life, a picture more like a forest of different trees. ***Microevolution***, where small changes occur within the basic kinds of

created things, is acknowledged, but no macro (large scale) evolution occurs between different kinds. For example, both old and young earth creationists agree that all dogs are related to an original canine pair—part of the same tree. However, they deny that dogs, cats, cows, and other created kinds are related like branches from one original tree.

The Historicity of the Genesis Account

Further, both young and old earthers who are evangelical hold to the historicity of the Genesis account: They believe that Adam and Eve were literal people, the progenitors of the entire human race. While some may allow for poetic form and figure of speech in the narrative, all agree that it conveys historical and literal truth about origins. This is made clear by the New Testament references to Adam and Eve, their creation and fall, as literal (cf. Luke 3:38; Rom. 5:12; 1 Tim. 2:13–14).

Areas of Difference Between Young- and Old-Earth Creationists

Of course, there are some differences between the two basic evangelical views on Creation. The primary ones include the following.

The Age of the Earth

A crucial variance between the two views, naturally, is the age of the earth (see Newman and Eckelmann, ***GOOE***). Young earthers insist that both the Bible and science support a universe that is only thousands of years of age, while old earthers allow for billions of years. Young earthers connect their view to a literal interpretation of Genesis (and Ex. 20:11), but old earthers claim the same basic hermeneutic, which they believe can include millions, if not billions, of years since Creation. They too cite scientific evidence in their favor (see appendix 4). At a minimum, it would be wise if both sides could agree on the following:

(1) The age of the earth is not a test for orthodoxy.

(2) Neither view is proven with scientific finality, since there are unproven (if not unprovable) presuppositions associated with each.

(3) The fact of Creation (vs. evolution) is more important than the time of Creation.

(4) Their common enemy (naturalistic evolution) is a more significant focus than their intramural differences.

The Nature of the Flood

Most young-earth creationists are also flood geologists; that is, they believe that the apparent age of the earth represented in the sedimentary geological formations do not represent millions of years, but only one year of activity by a worldwide flood. A few comments are appropriate here:

(1) Again, flood geology should not be used as a test of orthodoxy, as there are other ways to explain the data that are consistent with an evangelical interpretation of the Bible.

(2) Flood geology should be explored as a scientific theory in its own right, as well as for its possible explanatory value of the biblical data.

(3) One can be a young earther and still reject flood geology, as some do. Hence, the two are not inseparably tied.

(4) Those who reject a universal flood (along with flood geology) do have a more difficult time explaining all the biblical data. If the flood ***was*** only local, then

(a) why were two of each kind of animal taken into the ark?

(b) why is the language of Genesis so specifically and intensely universal (cf. 7:19–23)?

(c) why are flood deposits universal?

(d) why are flood stories universal?

(e) why does Peter say the whole earth was under water? (2 Peter 3:5–7)

(f) hy does the Bible say only eight people were saved (2 Peter 2:5) if there were others who escaped also?

(g) why were all the mountains covered? (Gen. 7:19)

The Intelligent Design Movement

A third group of creationists has emerged; its adherents attempt to avoid the internal debate between fiat and progressive creationists. The intelligent design movement was founded and championed by UC-Berkeley professor Phillip Johnson (see his ***DT*** And ***RB***); other major leaders include Baylor professor William Dembski (see his ***MC***) and Lehigh professor Michael Behe (see his ***DBB***). By concentrating on the issue of intelligent design versus purely naturalistic evolution (and instead of focusing on issues such as the age of the earth and the extent of the flood), the intelligent-design movement hopes to accomplish the following:

(1) Form a unifying "wedge" that can break the bulwark of naturalistic evolution around the academic community.
(2) Strike at the Achilles heel of evolution by revealing its naturalistic philosophical commitment and thereby destroy its plausibility and privileged position in the academic community.
(3) Provide a scientific alternative to naturalistic macroevolution that is free of the trappings of biblical and religious language.
(4) Provide an umbrella under which young-and old-earth creationists can work against naturalistic evolution.

CONCLUSION

The doctrine of Creation is a cornerstone of the Christian faith. The essentials of this teaching have universal consent among orthodox theologians. They include the following:

(1) There is a theistic God.
(2) Creation of the universe was *ex nihilo* (out of nothing).
(3) Every living thing was created by God.
(4) Adam and Eve were a direct and special creation of God.
(5) The Genesis account of creation is historical, not mythological.

While there is lively debate about the time of Creation, all evangelicals agree on the ***fact*** of Creation. There is also agreement on the source of Creation (a theistic God) and the purpose of Creation (to glorify God). The exact method of Creation is still a moot question; however, increasingly, the scientific evidence supports a supernatural Creation of the universe, the direct creation of first life (see Thaxton, ***MLO***), and the special creation of every basic life form. Hence, macroevolution, whether theistic or naturalistic, is unfounded both biblically and scientifically.

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CHAPTER TWENTY

THE CREATION OF SPIRITUAL CREATURES (ANGELS)

In addition to the physical world and humankind, God also created spiritual creatures called angels. The universe is material, while angels are immaterial; human beings have both matter (body) and spirit, while angels have only spirit. The hierarchy of beings ranges from God to angels to human beings to animals to inanimate matter. Angels are beneath God, and humans are a little lower than the angels (Heb. 2:7), while all creatures are below them (Ps. 8:4–5).

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR ANGELOLOGY

The study of angels is a major but often neglected division of theology. Angels play an important role in God's plan of redemption (Heb. 1:14; Matt. 18:10), and their origin, nature, function, and destiny are significant themes in Scripture.

The Origin of Angels

Although technically angels are only a certain kind of God's spiritual creatures

(namely, “messengers”), “angels” is the term commonly used of all spiritual creatures.

Angels are not eternal; they were created. The psalmist declared, “Praise him, all his angels, praise him, all his heavenly hosts. … For he commanded and they were created” (Ps. 148:2, 5). Paul added, “by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities” (Col. 1:16). Nehemiah said, “You alone are the Lord. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host” (Neh. 9:6). Genesis concludes that “the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished” (Gen. 2:1). Thus, angels were probably created when the Scriptures say, “God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). They were definitely created before the earth was, for they sang when its cornerstone was laid (Job 38:6–7).

The Names of Angels

God’s spiritual creatures are given different titles in the Bible; some are even given proper names. Angels are called “living creatures” (Rev. 4:6); “angels” (“messengers”—Dan. 4:13); “angels of God” (John 1:51); “elect angels” (1 Tim. 5:21); “holy angels” (Rev. 14:10); “powerful angels” (2Thess.1:7); “chief princes” (Dan. 10:13); “ministers” (Ps. 104:4 NKJV); “sons of God” (Job 1:6; 2:1 NKJV); “Sons of the mighty” (Ps. 89:6 NKJV; cf. 29:1); “mighty ones” (Ps. 26:9; 103:20); “gods” (*elohim*—Ps. 8:5); “holy ones” (Dan. 8:13; Zech. 14:5; Job 15:15); “stars” (Job 38:7; Rev. 12:4); “host” (of heaven—Gen. 2:1 NKJV; Neh. 9:6; Luke 2:13); and “chariots” (Ps. 68:17; Zech. 6:1–5). Many scholars also believe that the “elders” in Revelation 4:4 are angelic beings.

Again, some angels are given names in the Bible. There is ***Michael***, whose name means “Who is like God?” He is called “one of the chief princes” (Dan. 10:13), the “archangel” (Jude 9) who “protects your people [Israel]” (Dan. 12:1; 10:21), leader of the heavenly army (Rev. 12:7), and “possibly of cherub class” (Dan. 10:13; cf. Ezek. 10:1–13). He disputed with Satan (Jude 9) and will lead in the final victory over the devil after the thousand-year reign of Christ (Rev. 12:7). Then there is ***Gabriel***, whose name means “Devoted to God.” He “stand[s] in the

presence of God" (Luke 1:19). He makes special announcements for God, like the one to Zechariah (Luke 1:11–13). He appeared to Mary (Luke 1:26–33), and he is a revealer of God's kingdom purposes (Dan. 9:21–22; 8:16).

Finally, there is ***Lucifer*** (Isa. 14:12 NKJV), called "son of the morning," who fell and became the devil. He has many names in his fallen state; the most common are listed in Revelation 12:9: "The great ***dragon*** was hurled down—that ancient ***serpent*** called the ***devil***, or ***Satan***, who leads the whole world astray" (emphasis added, see Volume 3).

Presumably, all angels have names. God knows all the stars by number (Isa. 40:26), and these are merely inanimate objects. They too with angels, are called the "host" of heaven (Gen. 2:1; cf. Neh. 9:6; Ps. 103:21). So God likely has a name for each angel. Certainly He knows each one individually, since He is all knowing or omniscient (see chapter 8).

The Nature of Angels

Like God (see chapter 6), angels are immaterial, being pure spirits. Thus, they have an invisible nature, though some have taken on physical forms and appeared to human beings (cf. Gen. 18). Colossians 1:16 declares, "For by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him." Hebrews 1:14 calls them "ministering spirits," and in Luke 24:39 (NKJV) Jesus said, "A spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have." As such, many angels can be present in one place, as was the case of the demon possessed man who had a legion of spirits in his body. Luke 8:30 records: "Jesus asked him, 'What is your name?'

" 'Legion,' he replied, because many demons had gone into him." Further, it is only by a miracle that angels can be seen by mortals. In 2 Kings 6:17, "Elisha prayed, 'O LORD, open his eyes so he may see.' Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha."

Angels Are Genderless

Since they are without gender, angels do not engage in marriage. Matthew wrote, “At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like angels in heaven” (Matt. 22:30). Luke added, “Those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God’s children, since they are children of the resurrection” (Luke 20:35–36).[1]

Angels Never Die

Since they have no body, angels are not subject to decay and death: They are immortal. As noted before, Luke wrote, “Those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels” (Luke 20:35–36). In Matthew 25:41, we read Jesus’ words, “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’ ”

Angels Have Free Will

Paul spoke of Satan, who chose to rebel against God, saying, “[Do not place] a recent convert [in a position of spiritual leadership], or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil” (1 Tim. 3:6). Jude added, “Angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home—these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day” (Jude 6). Peter noted that “God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment” (2 Peter 2:4).

Angels Have Great Intelligence

Second Samuel 14:20 observed: “My lord has wisdom like that of an angel of God—he knows everything that happens in the land.”
“The angel [at Jesus’ empty tomb] said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid, for I

know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified,' "thus revealing that they knew where He was (Matt. 28:5). Jesus implied that angels have great knowledge when He said, "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Mark 13:32). Other angels biblically displayed tremendous knowledge (cf. Luke 1:13; Rev. 10:5–6; 17:1).

Angels Have Great Power

The messengers sent to Sodom performed a miracle: "The [angels] reached out and pulled Lot back into the house and shut the door. Then they struck the men who were at the door of the house, young and old, with blindness so that they could not find the door" (Gen. 19:10–11). They are called "mighty ones" (Ps. 103:20) and "powerful angels" (2 Thess. 1:7). The ones at Jesus' tomb were able to roll back the heavy stone (Matt. 28:2–3). At the end of the age, God "will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other" (Matt. 24:31). Speaking of false teachers, Peter says, "Angels, although they are stronger and more powerful, do not bring slanderous accusations against such beings in the presence of the Lord" (2 Peter 2:11).

Angels Are Persons

Having the three essential characteristics of intellect, will, and emotion, angels are persons. Since the first two have just been discussed, it remains to show that they have feelings. This is evident in their worship, for "they were calling to one another: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory' " (Isa. 6:3; cf. Rev. 4:8–9). Further, they experience joy, for "there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:10).

Angels Are Beautiful

As reflections of God's nature and glory, angels are lovely beings; Isaiah's vision of them in the temple is certainly one of ineffable beauty. He said, "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and

the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying" (Isa. 6:1–2). Likewise, Ezekiel's vision of the "living beings" was one of incredible beauty. He said, "As I looked at the living creatures, I saw a wheel on the ground beside each creature with its four faces. This was the appearance and structure of the wheels: They sparkled like chrysolite, and all four looked alike" (Ezek. 1:15–16; cf. 22, 28).

When referring to the Prince of Tyre as a "cherub," Ezekiel said, "You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone adorned you: ruby, topaz and emerald, chrysolite, onyx and jasper, sapphire, turquoise and beryl. Your settings and mountings were made of gold; on the day you were created they were prepared. You were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you. You were on the holy mount of God; you walked among the fiery stones" (Ezekiel 28:13–14).

Daniel had a similar aesthetic experience when an angel appeared to him (Dan. 10:5–6). Matthew said of the angel at Jesus' tomb, "His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow" (Matt. 28:3). Even fallen angels retain their beauty—"no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14)—which enhances their ability to deceive.

The Purpose of Angels

Like all of God's rational creatures, angels were created for His glory. They sing (Job 38:7; Rev. 4:11); and they praise God (Ps. 148:2). Indeed, some angels continually sing "holy, holy, holy" in His presence (Isa. 6:3). Like other creatures, angels were "created by him [Christ] and ***for*** him" (Col. 1:16, emphasis added).

To Glorify God

Angels were created to glorify God: "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being" (Rev. 4:11). "Praise him, all his angels, praise Him, all his heavenly hosts!" (Ps. 148:2).

To Serve God

"For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him" (Col. 1:16). "One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them.… On another day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them to present himself before him" (Job 1:6; 2:1).

To Reflect God's Attributes

Angels also reflect God's glorious attributes. Again, Isaiah 6:3 records: "They were calling to one another: 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory' "; Ezekiel 1:5, 28 says, "In the fire was what looked like four living creatures. In appearance their form was that of a man.… This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. When I saw it, I fell facedown, and I heard the voice of one speaking."

To Learn God's Wisdom and Grace

Ephesians 3:10 (NASB) declares that the mystery of Christ was revealed "in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly ***places***." First Peter 1:12 adds: "It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things."

To Minister to God's Elect

The general purpose of God's spiritual messengers is recorded in Hebrews 1:14: "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?" This is where the concept of "guardian angels" comes in. Matthew

18:10 says, “See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.” Angels come regularly as “sons of God” to present themselves before the Lord (Job 1:6; 2:1 NKJV; cf. Ps. 91:11). They are constantly seen throughout the Bible running errands for God (Gen. 18:2ff.; Dan. 10:1ff.; Matt. 1:20–24; Luke 1:11ff.). They eventually escort believers into the presence of the Holy One (Luke 16:22). But, most fundamentally, angels are God’s servants, and all their service is for His glory. Meanwhile, some angels are assigned to fight evil angels in a cosmic spiritual warfare (Dan. 10:13–21; 12:1; cf. Eph. 6:12).

The Number of Angels

Since they do not procreate, there has been a fixed number of angels from the beginning: “In the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like angels in heaven” (Matt. 22:30). The number of angels is vast, being described in various places as “hosts” (Ps. 46:7 NKJV); “a great company of the heavenly hosts” (Luke 2:13); “many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand” (Rev. 5:11; cf. Heb. 12:22); and “myriads” (Deut. 33:2). In short, for us, they are innumerable.

The Position of Angels

As stated previously, in the hierarchy of beings, angels rank under God and above human beings: “Who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him” (1 Peter 3:22). “What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor” (Ps. 8:4–5; cf. Heb. 2:7),[2]

Archangel

There is a rank among both good and evil angels (demons). Among the good angels, at the top is the archangel (Michael): “At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered” (Dan. 12:1). “The Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first” (1 Thess. 4:16). “The archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said, ‘The Lord rebuke you!’ ” (Jude 9). “There was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back” (Rev. 12:7). “Soon I will return to fight against the prince of Persia, and when I go, the prince of Greece will come” (Dan. 10:20).

Chief Princes

Under Michael there are “other chief princes.” Daniel wrote, “I will tell you what is written in the Book of Truth. (No one supports me against them except Michael, your prince)” (Dan. 10:21; cf. Dan. 10:13).

Cherubim

These glorious creatures are proclaimers and protectors of God’s glory. Genesis 3:24 says: “After [God] drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword … to guard the way to the tree of life.” Psalm 80:1 records: “Hear us, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock; you who sit enthroned between the cherubim, shine forth.” “The Lord reigns, let the nations tremble; he sits enthroned between the cherubim, let the earth shake” (Ps. 99:1). Ezekiel wrote, “The glory of the God of Israel went up from above the cherubim, where it had been, and moved to the threshold of the temple. Then the Lord called to the man clothed in linen who had the writing kit at his side” (Ezek. 9:3). “I looked, and I saw the likeness of a throne of sapphire above the expanse that was over the heads of the cherubim” (Ezek. 10:1; cf. 1:28). The writer of Hebrews adds, “Above the ark were the cherubim of the Glory, overshadowing the atonement cover. But we cannot

discuss these things in detail now" (Heb. 9:5).

Living Creatures

Among God's spiritual entourage are spirit beings called "living creatures," whose functions appear to be to worship God and direct His judgments. Revelation 4:7–8 says:

> The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come" (cf.

Rev. 6–7

,

14

,

19

).

These "creatures" are similar to cherubim, but they have six wings, not four, and one face, rather than four, as in Ezekiel 1:6.

Seraphim ("Burning Ones")

Seraphim are proclaimers of God's holiness. As cited before, Isaiah 6:2–3 declares: "Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.' "

Angels

The most common designation of God's spiritual creatures is "angel," meaning "messenger." "Angel" is used some 273 times in the Bible; these beings are the ones sent on errands to earth. They include the "ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation" (Heb. 1:14).

Evil angels (demons) also have rank. Satan heads them up (Rev. 12:4), and under

him are “princes” over various countries (Dan. 10:13), “rulers,” “authorities,”[3] “powers,” “dominions,” and finally “spirits” or evil angels known as demons (see Rom. 8:38; Eph. 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Col. 1:16; 1 Peter 3:22; Jude 8–9).[4]

The Abode of Angels

The general sphere of angels is in heaven: “Micaiah continued, ‘Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne with all the host of heaven standing around him on his right and on his left’ ” (1 Kings 22:19). “See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven” (Matt. 18:10). “At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven” (Matt. 22:30). “In the same way, I tell you there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Luke 15:10). “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!” (Gal. 1:8).

The sphere of activity of angels is focused in the second heaven, though some are active in the third heaven[5] by the Throne of God (2 Cor. 12:2, 4). “I looked, and I saw a windstorm coming out of the north—an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light. The center of the fire looked like glowing metal” (Ezek. 1:4). “Before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back” (Rev. 4:6). “Since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens [the first and second heavens], Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess” (Heb. 4:14). “The morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy” (Job 38:7).

Evil angels abide in the second heaven too. Daniel 10:13 says: “The prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there.” In Ephesians 2:2 (NKJV), Paul reminds his readers, “You once walked according to the course of

this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience."

Angels, good and evil, do God's bidding in heaven. Good angels are found around His throne. Ezekiel wrote, "In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month on the fifth day, while I was among the exiles by the Kebar River, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God" (Ezek. 1:1). In his visions he saw "living creatures," and

> Under their wings on their four sides they had the hands of a man. All four of them had faces and wings, and their wings touched one another. Each one went straight ahead; they did not turn as they moved. Their faces looked like this: Each of the four had the face of a man, and on the right side each had the face of a lion, and on the left the face of an ox; each also had the face of an eagle. (Ezek. 1:8–10)

Likewise, John records in Revelation:

> In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. (Rev. 4:6–7)

In the next chapter he said, "I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?' " (Rev. 5:2). Again, he penned, "I watched as the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals. Then I heard one of the four living creatures say in a voice like thunder, 'Come!' " (Rev. 6:1). In the gospel of Luke, "The angel answered, T am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and tell you this good news' " (Luke 1:19).

Again, even evil angels are called before God's throne. Job 1:6 records: "One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them" (cf. 2:1). Hebrews 1:14 adds, "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?"

Special Abilities of Angels[6]

Angels can do superhuman things. This may be due to their nature as spirits, their not having spatio-temporal limits, and/or that they can move in and out of

the space-time dimension.

Whatever the case, they have the following abilities.

To Traverse Great Distances in a Short Time

Daniel records (in 10:2, 12) how "At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks.… Then [the angel] continued, 'Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them.' " Thus, he would have had to traverse the universe in mere days, having been delayed at that.

To Perform Miracles

As we have seen, Genesis 19:11 relates that the "two angels" (Gen. 19:1) that came to Sodom "struck the men who were at the door of the house, young and old, with blindness so that they could not find the door" (cf. Rev. 16:14).

To Materialize (Assume Bodily Form)

The two angels in Sodom had bodily form; they even ate food that Abraham set before them, for "he insisted so strongly that they did go with him and entered his house. He prepared a meal for them, baking bread without yeast, and they ate" (Gen. 19:3). This is also true of the same angels when they appeared to Abraham in the previous chapter (Gen. 18:2, 8), for Abraham "brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them. While they ate, he stood near them under a tree."

It would appear that only some, not all, angels have this ability. This may be inferred from the fact that some angels only appear in visions (not materializations) and that some evil angels (demons) seek embodiment in other physical beings, apparently not having any way to materialize.

To Communicate

Although as spirits they have no bodies, angels can communicate with God. Again, Job 1:6 and 2:1 declare: “One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them.… On another day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them to present himself before him.”

Angels can also communicate with one another. Revelation 7:1–3 affirms:

> After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: “Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.”

To Occupy No Space

As spirits, angels occupy no space, though they can relate to beings in space. This is especially evident in fallen angels (demons), who sometimes possess human beings. As stated before, one person out of whom Jesus cast demons had a “legion” of them (Luke 8:27–34). If we employ the number of a Roman military legion at that time, this would mean some six thousand demons, all of which indwelt one and the same finite creature. Obviously, having many in one space was not a problem for them.

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR ANGELOLOGY

Summarizing the thought of the “angelic doctor,”[7] the comparison of angels to God and humans is instructive. The following chart illustrates the contrasts:

	GOD	ANGELS	HUMANS
Mode of Being	Uncreated	Created	Created
Limits	Infinite	Finite	Finite
Nature	Spirit	Spirit	Spirit-Body

Simplicity	Absolute simplicity	Relative simplicity	No simplicity (A-Complex)
Duration	Eternal (uncreated eternity)	Aeviternal (created eternity)	Temporal (created temporality)
Change	None	None in essence, only in will	Changeable in nature and will
Relation to Change	Cannot be joined to change	Not changing, but can be joined to change	Can be joined to change by nature
Measurability	Only by His own absolute simplicity	By degrees of unity and perfection	By plurality in matter (i.e., in space and time)
Space	Time above it and cannot be in it	Above it, but can be in it	In it by nature
Actuality	Pure Actuality	Completed actuality	Progressively completed actuality
Potentiality	None	None uncompleted	Uncompleted potentials
Nature/Will	Neither can change	Only will can change	Both can change
Classification (Species)	Beyond all classes	Each a class of one	All in one class (a race)
	Source of		

Redemption	redemption	Irredeemable	Redeemable
Free Will	Unchangeable before and after the choice	Changeable before but not after choice	Changeable before and after choice

Several important points emerge from such a comparison and also from the study of angels. These can be summarized as follows.

Angels Are Above Humans

As established previously, angels are lower than God, but higher than human beings. Hebrews speaks about humans being “made a little lower than the angels” (2:9). Angels are pure spirits (Luke 24:37–39; Heb. 1:14), while humans are a unity of spirit and matter, soul and body. Angels are greater in knowledge (Matt. 24:36) and power (Gen. 19:11) than human beings.

Angels Are Pure Spirits

Like God, and unlike humans, angels are pure spirits (Luke 24:37–39; Heb. 1:14); they have no matter in their beings. Indeed, they have no divisibility, being simple created beings. Being pure spirit beings, the only way they can be seen by mortal human beings is by a miracle in one of two ways. Either God must perform a miracle so that mortal man can see the spirit world (as in 1 Kings 22:19–23), or else He must perform a miracle so that an essentially spirit being can materialize and be seen with mortal eyes (Gen. 18–19).

Angels Are Aeviternal

Angels are not temporal beings, nor are they essentially eternal like God; rather, they are aeviternal—that is, they are by nature not in time, but they can relate to it. By nature, they are not eternal as God is, but they can relate to Him. They are what humans will be when they are beatified (Matt. 18:10; Luke 20:35–36) (see Volume 4, chapter 9).

Angels Are Immortal

Having no bodies or parts, angels cannot die or be torn apart. Of course, God holds them in existence like every other creature (Col. 1:16–17); however, as simple spirits they are not subject to death, which is the separation of body and spirit (James 2:26). Luke 20:36 declares: “They can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God’s children, since they are children of the resurrection.”

Each Angel Is a Species (Kind)

Apparently, each angel is a species of its own. Thus, they cannot reproduce within their kind, as human beings can do; they are simple created beings and have no way to divide and/or multiply (Matt. 22:30). Each is one of a kind, even though there are groups or classes of them, such as cherubim and seraphim.

Angels Do Not Change in Nature

Also, angels apparently have a fixed nature from the moment of their creation; angels do not change—unlike human beings, they do not grow up or grow old. They have no age, nor do they undergo any other kind of change in their nature. They have no accidents (characteristics not essential to them); hence, they

cannot change accidentally. The only change they can undergo is creation or annihilation by God, since, like all creatures, they exist only because God holds them in existence (Col. 1:17).

Angels Are Irredeemable

Since angels cannot change, they are fixed in their nature; hence, once an angel sins, he is doomed forever (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6). Indeed, the Bible says explicitly that Christ did not die to redeem angels, "for surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants" (Heb. 2:16). Those angels who sinned are never called upon to repent, nor can they be. The Cross is never presented as a means of their salvation, but only of their condemnation, for Jesus, "having disarmed the powers and authorities … made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross" (Col. 2:15).

Like all of God's rational and moral creatures, angels were given a choice. And, like humans at death (Heb. 9:27), once they have made their final choice, it is forever too late. Since they cannot change by nature, once angels make their decision, it is final and they know it (Matt. 8:29).

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR ANGELOLOGY

The belief in angels was taken for granted by the great Fathers of the church and not infrequently mentioned. However, few of them gave any systematic treatment of these spirit beings until the "angelic doctor," Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), so named because of his highly sophisticated angelology.

The Early Church Fathers on Angels

Polycarp

"O Lord God Almighty, the Father of thy beloved and blessed Son Jesus Christ,

by whom we have received the knowledge of Thee, the God of angels and powers, and of every creature" (***ECMP***, 14 in Roberts and Donaldson, ***ANF***, I).

Irenaeus

> Those, moreover, who say that the world was formed by angels, or by any other maker of it, contrary to the will of Him who is the Supreme Father, err first of all in this very point, that they maintain that angels formed such and so mighty a creation, contrary to the will of the Most High God. This would imply that angels were more powerful than God. (*AH*, 2.2.1 in ibid.)
>
> With justice, therefore, according to an analogous process of reasoning, the Father of all will be declared the Former of this world, and not the angels, nor any other [so-called] former of the world, other than He who was its Author, and had formerly been the cause of the preparation for a creation of this kind. (*AH*, 2.2.3 in ibid.)
>
> It is not seemly, however, to say of Him who is God over all, since He is free and independent, that He was a slave to necessity, or that anything takes place with His permission, yet against His desire; otherwise they will make necessity greater and more kingly than God, since that which has the most power is superior to all [others]. (*AH*, 2.5A in ibid.)
>
> If, however, [the things referred to were done] not against His will, but with His concurrence and knowledge, as some [of these men] think, the angels, or the Former of the world [whoever that may have been], will no longer be the causes of that formation, but the will of God. For if He is the Former of the world, He too made the angels, or at least was the cause of their creation; and He will be regarded as having made the world who prepared the causes of its formation. (*AH*, 2.2.3 in ibid.)

"Therefore the Father will excel in wisdom all human and angelic wisdom, because He is Lord, and Judge, and the Just One, and Ruler over all" (***AH***, 3.25.3 in ibid.).

> But He Himself in Himself, after a fashion which we can neither describe nor conceive, predestinating all things, formed them as He pleased, bestowing harmony on all things, and assigning them their own place, and the beginning of their creation. In this way He conferred on spiritual things a spiritual and invisible nature" (*AH*, 2.2.4 in ibid.).

Theophilus

> When God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness," He first

> intimates the dignity of man. For God having made all things by His Word, and having reckoned them all mere by works, reckons the creation of man to be the only work worthy of His own hands. (*TA*, 2.18 in ibid., II)

The Medieval Fathers on Angels

The doctrine of angels developed considerably during the Middle Ages and reached its apex in Thomas Aquinas.

Augustine

Augustine on the Creation of Angels

> Here [in Ps. 148:5] the angels are most expressly and by divine authority said to have been made God, for of them among the other heavenly things it is said, He commanded, and they were created. Who, then, will be bold enough to suggest that the angels were made after the six days [of] creation? (*CG*, 11.9)

"The angels therefore existed before the stars; and the stars were made the fourth day" (ibid.).

> When God said, let there be light, and there was light [on Day One], if we are justified in understanding in this light the creation of the angels, then certainly they were created partakers of the eternal light which is the unchangeable Wisdom of God. (ibid.)

Augustine on the Rank of Angels

> But of such consequence in rational natures is the weight, so to speak, of will and of love, that though in the order of nature angels rank above men, yet, by the scale of justice, good men are of greater value than bad angels, (ibid., 11.16)

Augustine on the Fall of Angels

Since these things are so, those spirits whom we call angels were never at any time or in any way darkness, but, as soon as they were made, were made light; yet they were not so created in order that they might exist and live in any way whatever, but were enlightened that they might live wisely and blessedly. Some of them, having turned away from this light, have not won this wise and blessed life, which is certainly eternal, and accompanied with the sure confidence of its eternity; but they have still the life of reason, though darkened with folly, and this they cannot lose even if they would, (ibid., 11)

If it seems hard to believe that, when the angels were created, some were created in ignorance either of their perseverance or their fall, while others were most certainly assured of the eternity of their felicity; if it is hard to believe that they were not all from the beginning on an equal footing, until these who are now evil did of their own will fall away from the light of goodness, certainly it is much harder to believe that the holy angels are now uncertain of their eternal blessedness, and do not know regarding themselves as much as we have been able to gather regarding them from the Holy Scriptures, (ibid., 11.16)

That the contrary propensities in good and bad angels have arisen, not from a difference in their nature and origin, since God, the good Author and Creator of all essences, created them both, but from a difference in their wills and desires, it is impossible to doubt. While some steadfastly continued in that which was the common good of all, namely, in God Himself, and in His eternity, truth, and love; others, being enamored rather of their own power, as if they could be their own good, lapsed to this private good of their own, from that higher and beatific good which was common to all, and, bartering the lofty dignity of eternity for the inflation of pride, the most assured verity for the slyness of vanity, uniting love for factious partisanship, they became proud, deceived, envious. (ibid., 12.1)

There is, then, no natural efficient cause or, if I may be allowed the expression, no essential cause, of the evil will, since itself is the origin of evil in mutable spirits, by which the good of their nature is diminished and corrupted; and the will is made evil by nothing else than defection from God, a defection of which the cause, too, is certainly deficient. But as to the good will, if we should say that there is no efficient cause of it, we must beware of giving currency to the opinion that the good will of the good angels is not created, but is co-eternal with God. For if they themselves are created, how can we say that their good will was eternal? But if created, was it created along with themselves, or did they exist for a time without it? If along with themselves, then doubtless it was created by Him who created them, and, as soon as ever they were created, they attached themselves to Him who created them, with the love He created in them. And they are separated from the society of the rest, because they have continued in the same good will; while the others have fallen away to another will, which is an evil one, by the very fact of its being a falling away from the good. (ibid., 12.9)

Augustine on the Mind-to-Mind Communication of Angels

> What He says is accurately heard, not by the bodily but by the mental ear of His ministers and messengers, who are immortally blessed in the enjoyment of His unchangeable truth; and the directions which they in some ineffable way receive, they execute without delay or difficulty in the sensible and visible world. (ibid., 10.15)

Augustine on the Destiny of Angels

> Wherefore, although everything eternal is not therefore blessed (for hell-fire is eternal), yet if no life can be truly and perfectly blessed except it be eternal, the life of these angels was not blessed, for it was doomed to end, and therefore not eternal, whether they knew it or not. In the one case fear, in the other ignorance, prevented them from being blessed. And even if their ignorance was not so great as to breed in them a wholly false expectation, but left them wavering in uncertainty whether their good would be eternal or would some time terminate, this very doubt concerning so grand a destiny was incompatible with the plenitude of blessedness which we believe the holy angels enjoyed. (ibid.)
>
> Thus the true cause of the blessedness of the good angels is found to be this, that they cleave to Him who supremely is. And if we ask the cause of the misery of the bad, it occurs to us, and not unreasonably, that they are miserable because they have forsaken Him who supremely is, and have turned to themselves who have no such essence. And this vice, what else is it called than pride? For pride is the beginning of sin. (ibid., 12.6)

Thomas Aquinas (1224–1274)

Aquinas on the Creation of Angels

> The Canonical Scriptures tell us that the angels were created before men. Reason also suggests that they were not more recent than the physical universe, for it is unfitting that the more perfect should tag along after the less perfect. This is confirmed by scriptural authority: when all the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy. (*OSS*, 16)

Aquinas on the Nature of Angels

“They are intellectual natures, at the peak of creation” (***SCG***, 42). “And, further

still, the species of the angelic intellect, which are, as it were, the seminal types of corporeal forms, must be referred to God as the first cause" (***ST***, la.65.4).

> Mind is richer than matter. We can think of objects which cannot exist as material things; for example, mathematics treats of terms which cannot physically exist. Let us take this as a hint, when we assess the proper natures of both, that incorporeal substances, whose reality is intellectual, are more profuse than physical substances, and that the angels outnumber physical bodies. Thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. (*SCG*, 2.92)

Aquinas on the Rank of Angels

> Substance can exist without body. All possible types of being can be discovered in the universe, which otherwise would be deficient. Possible and actual are the same in everlasting duration. Thus substances can exist complete without matter: they rank below the first substance, which is God, and above human souls united to bodies. (*SCG*, 2.91)

Aquinas on the Fall of Angels

> An angel or any other rational creature, considered in his own nature, can sin.... Mortal sin occurs in two ways in the act of free choice. First, when something evil is chosen.... In another way, sin comes of free choice by electing something good in itself, but not according to the proper measure or rule [as angels did]. (*ST*, la.63.1)
>
> Now a spiritual nature cannot be affected by such pleasures as pertain to bodies, but only such as can be found in spiritual beings.... But there can be no sin when anyone is incited to a good of the spiritual order, unless in such affection the rule of the superior be not kept. Such is precisely the sin of pride—not to be subject to the superior where subjection is due. Consequently the first sin of the angel can be none other than pride. (ibid., la.63.2)

Aquinas on the Purpose of Angels

"Angels mean messengers and ministers. Their function it is to execute the plan of divine providence, even in earthly things: who maketh his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming fire" (ibid., 2.79).

> "He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways." [Thus],

> angels are appointed to guard us. God's universal providence works through secondary causes. All things are cared for, but especially rational beings, for they, born to possess divine goodness, operate from will, a principle higher than instinct or unconscious impulse. The world of pure spirits stretches between the divine nature and the world of human beings; because divine wisdom has ordained that the higher should look after the lower, angels execute the divine plan for human salvation: they are our guardians, who free us when hindered and help to bring us home. (*CSPL*, 10.1.1)

Aquinas on the Knowledge of Angels

> Angels are called intellectual because of their immediate and complete insight into all objects within their natural field. Human souls are called rational because their knowledge is acquired by a process of reasoning. Unlike the angels, they do not apprehend at once the full evidence of an object presented to them; they are convinced by formal argument, not by intuition. (*ST*, Ia.18.3)
>
> We approach truth through logic, by adding a predicate to a subject. A pure spirit, however, sees immediately the truth in a subject, and by simple insight knows what we have to arrive at through affirmative or negative judgments. (*OE*, 6)

The Reformation Leaders on Angels

As with most major doctrines, the Reformers inherited the medieval view of angels. Preoccupied as they were with more pressing theological issues, they did add somewhat to the doctrine of angelology.

Martin Luther

Luther said, "An angel is a spiritual creature created by God without a body, for the service of Christendom and of the church" (***TT***, 565). He added,

> The acknowledgment of angels is needful in the church. Therefore godly preachers should teach them logically. First, they should show what angels are, namely, spiritual creatures without bodies. Secondly, what manner of spirits they are, namely, good spirits and not evil; and here evil spirits must also be spoken of, not created evil by God, but made so by their rebellion against God, and their consequent fall; this hatred began in Paradise, and will continue and remain against Christ and his church to the world's end. Thirdly, they must speak touching their function, which, as the epistle to the Hebrews (chap.

1:14
) shows, is to present a mirror of humility to godly Christians, in that such pure a perfect creatures as the angels do minister unto us, poor and wretched people, in household and temporal policy, and in religion. They are our true and trusty servants, performing offices and works that one poor miserable mendicant would be ashamed to do for another. In this sort ought we to teach with care, method, and attention, touching the sweet and loving angels. (ibid., 566)

Further,

It were not good for us to know how earnestly the holy angels strive for us against the devil, or how hard a combat it is. If we could see for how many angels one devil makes work, we should be in despair. Therefore the Holy Scriptures refers to them in few words: “He hath given his angels charge over thee,” etc. Also, “The angel of the Lord encampeth round about those that fear him,” etc. Now, whosoever thou art, that fearest the Lord, be of good courage, take thou no care, neither be faint-hearted, nor make any doubt of the angels’ watching and protection; for most certainly they are about thee, and carry thee upon their hands. How or in what manner it is done, take thou no heed. God says it, therefore it is most sure and certain. (ibid., 568)

John Calvin

Calvin stated,

Angels being the ministers appointed to execute the commands of God, must, of course, be admitted to be his creatures, but to stir up questions concerning the time or order in which they were created … bespeaks more perverseness than industry. (*ICR*, 1.14.4)

He went on,

In Scripture, then, we uniformly read that angels are heavenly spirits, whose obedience and ministry God employs to execute all the purposes which he has decreed, and hence their name as being a kind of intermediate messengers to manifest his will to men. The names by which several of them are distinguished have reference to the same office. They are called hosts, because they surround their Prince as his court—adorn and display his majesty—like soldiers, have their eyes always turned to their leader’s standard, and are so ready and prompt to execute his orders, that the moment he gives the nod, they prepare for, or rather are actually at work. [
Dan. 7:10
] (*ICR*, 1.14, 5)

As to guardian angels, Calvin said,

> Whether or not each believer has a single angel assigned to him for his defence, I dare not positively affirm. When Daniel introduces the angel of the Persian and the angel of the Greeks, he undoubtedly intimates that certain angels are appointed as a kind of presidents over kingdoms and provinces. Again, when Christ says that the angels of children always behold the face of his Father, he insinuates that there are certain angels to whom their safety has been entrusted. But I know not if it can be inferred from this, that each believer has his own angel. (ibid., 1.14.7)

He continued,

> There is one passage which seems to intimate somewhat more clearly that each individual has a separate angel. When Peter, after his deliverance from prison, knocked at the door of the house where the brethren were assembled, being unable to think it could be himself, they said that it was his angel. This idea seems to have been suggested to them by a common belief that every believer has a single angel assigned to him. (ibid.)

Further,

> It is certain that spirits have no bodily shape, and yet Scripture, in accommodation to us, describes them under the form of winged Cherubim and Seraphim; not without cause, to assure us that when occasion requires, they will hasten to our aid with incredible swiftness, winging their way to us with the speed of lightning. Farther than this, in regard both to the ranks and numbers of angels, let us class them among those mysterious subjects, the full revelation of which is deferred to the last day, and accordingly refrain from inquiring too curiously, or talking presumptuously. (ibid., 1.14.8)

Calvin concluded, “Whatever, therefore, is said as to the ministry of angels, let us employ for the purpose of removing all distrust, and strengthening our confidence in God” (ibid., 1.14.12).

The Post-Reformation Theologians on Angels

The long tradition of teaching on angels was continued by the great theologians after the Reformation as well. Not until the rise of modern materialism, which excludes spiritual entities, was there a serious challenge to the biblical teachings on angels.

Jacob Arminius

> This entire universe is, according to the Scriptures, distributed in the best manner possible into three classes of objects: (1) Into creatures purely spiritual and invisible; of this class are the angels; (2) into creatures merely corporeal; and (3) into natures that are, in one part of them, corporeal and visible, and in another part, spiritual and invisible; men are of this last class. (*WJA*, II.56)
>
> We think this was the order observed in creation: Spiritual creatures, that is, the angels, were first created. Corporeal creatures were next created, according to the series of six days, not together and in a single moment. Lastly, man was created, consisting both of body and spirit; his body was, indeed, first formed; and afterwards his soul was inspired by creating, and created by inspiring; that as God commenced the creation in a spirit, so he might finish it on a spirit, being himself the immeasurable and eternal Spirit. (ibid., 56–57)

Not much has been added to angelology by modern and contemporary thought. Indeed, until relatively recent preoccupation with alleged angelic appearances in "near-death experiences,"[8] there has been a general neglect of the subject.

ANSWERING QUESTIONS ABOUT ANGELS

Question One—Regarding the Fall of Lucifer

The Bible declares that God made all things perfect (Gen. 1:31; 1 Tim. 4:4). This would include the angel Lucifer, who became known as Satan. In God and in His heaven, there was no sin (Hab. 1:13; James 1:13), yet Lucifer sinned and rebelled against God (1 Tim. 3:6), leading one-third of all the angels with him (Rev. 12:4). How could a perfect creature, made by a perfect God and placed in a perfect environment (heaven), commit a sin? Sin could not arise from God, nor

from Lucifer's environment, nor from his perfect nature. Whence, then, sin?

Response to Question One

Sin arose from Lucifer's free will. God made perfect creatures and gave them perfect natures and perfect freedom. But with freedom, though good in itself, comes the ability to sin. So, sin arose in the breast of an archangel in the presence of God.

Freedom is good, but it contains the possibility of evil. God made Lucifer perfectly good; Lucifer made evil. God gave him the ***fact*** of freedom (which is good); Lucifer performed the ***act*** of freedom to rebel against God (which is evil). God provided the good ***power*** of free will, but Lucifer performed the bad ***action*** of free will.

Question Two—Regarding the Irredeemability of Angels

One-third of the angels sinned and became demons. When Adam sinned, he and his followers were offered salvation (Gen. 3:15). What about angels—can they be saved?

Response to Question Two

The biblical answer as to the redeemability of angels seems to be a clear negative for the following reasons.

First, once again, the Scriptures say emphatically, "Surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants" (Heb. 2:16). That is to say, Christ assumed human nature (v. 14), not an angelic nature, to redeem human beings, not angels.

Second, the Cross of Christ, which is declared to be the source of human salvation, is proclaimed by contrast to be the source of the demons' condemnation. Paul wrote, "Having canceled the written code, with its

regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross" (Col. 2:14–15).
Third, the lost state of demons is always portrayed in the Bible as final and eternal. Peter wrote, "God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment" (2 Peter 2:4; cf. Jude 6). Even the demons appear to recognize their eternal doom, for as one said in the Gospels to Jesus, "Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?" (Matt. 8:29). Satan too, in Revelation, is said to know "that his time is short" (Rev. 12:12).
Fourth, and finally, Aquinas argued that since angels are unchangeable in their natural knowledge and in their nature, there is no way for them to be redeemed (as redemption involves a change of mind).

Question Three—Regarding the Justice of Angelic Condemnation

It seems unfair to some that humans were given an opportunity for redemption after they fell, while angels were not. Why did God not offer salvation for them as well?

Response to Question Three

In response to this question, several things are noteworthy.
First, angels, like human beings, have a choice in their destiny. They freely chose to rebel against God; they were not forced to do so. They were not doomed against their will.
Second, like human beings, angels were only doomed after their final choice—the only difference is that their first choice was also their final one. Humans too have a cut-off point, for "Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment" (Heb. 9:27).
Third, the very nature of angels makes their first choice also their last one, for they are created simple beings. Hence, once angels make a choice to serve or

rebel against God, it is permanent (one way or the other), just as once humans make their final choice (by death), it is forever (one way or the other).
Fourth, unlike human beings (Acts 17:30; 2 Peter 3:9), angels are never called on to repent.
In short, what is a lifetime for us is an instant for an angel. Once their mind is made up (by free choice), it is permanent. Since by nature angels cannot change, there is no possibility of redemption for them. God, knowing this, had no need to provide salvation for them; hence, the Cross pronounces their condemnation but does not provide their salvation.

CONCLUSION

In addition to the physical universe and human beings, God also created spiritual beings called angels. The physical universe is material; angels are immaterial, while human beings are composed of both matter and spirit. The hierarchy of beings ranges from God to angels to human beings to animals to inanimate matter. Angels are beneath God; man is a little lower than the angels (Heb. 2:7), and humans are the crown of all creatures below them (Ps. 8:4–5).
In addition to glorifying God, the purpose of good angels is to minister to God's elect (Heb. 1:14). Evil angels (called demons) followed Satan in his rebellion and are doomed with him to an eternal hell (Matt. 25:41). This is just, since they, like human beings, freely chose their own destiny, and their decision by its very nature is final.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

THE SUSTENANCE OF ALL CREATION

Creation is utterly dependent on God; this dependence applies to creation's present status as well as to its past start. The universe and everything in it began as God's creation, and it continues to be God's creation. God is the ***originating Cause*** as well as the ***sustaining Cause*** of everything that exists. The Scriptures are explicit on this.

It is true that the Bible usually reserves the word ***creation*** for the past event of origin. However, there is more to the doctrine of Creation than a study of origins reveals, for even though God has completed His work ***of*** Creation, nevertheless, He is not finished with His work ***in*** creation. That is to say, there is a difference between God's work in the ***origin*** of the world and His work in the ***operation*** of it.

That God is both Creator and Sustainer of the entire universe can be supported biblically, theologically, and historically.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR GOD AS CREATOR AND SUSTAINER OF CREATION

God as the Originating Cause of Creation

When used in this context, the Hebrew word for "creation" (***bara***) and its Greek counterpart (***ktisis***) are usually reserved for the original acts of Creation in the past; that is, they are generally employed of the origin or beginning of things. This can be illustrated by examining several key passages.

Old Testament Usage of the Word Create (Bara)

Genesis 1:1 (cf. 1:21–27) speaks of creation as a finished event: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." This is obviously not referring to the present functioning of the universe, but rather to its past formation.

Genesis 2:3 also points to the acts of creation by which the world began: "God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done." The fact that God rested and is still in that rest (Heb. 4:4–5) is proof that the word ***creation*** is used here of the past, singular, unrepeated events of origin. Likewise, the next verse (Gen. 2:4) places the Creation event in the past when it declares, "This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created."

Genesis 5:1–2 delineates Adam and Eve's creation as a past event "when God created man," saying, "He created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created, He called them 'man.' " '

In ***Genesis 6:7***, God spoke to Noah, crying out, "I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth." Even though the reference here seems to be to the whole human race alive in Noah's time, nonetheless, their ***creation as a race*** through Adam (Rom. 5:12) was a past event of origin. Of course, God is active in the propagation of the race from this point of origin (Gen. 1:28; 4:1, 25); however, the creation of Adam was a past event of beginning that has not been repeated since.

Deuteronomy 4:32 makes it plain that the Creation of humankind is a unique event of origin long ago. Moses said, "Ask now about the former days, long before your time, from the day God created man on the earth."

In ***Psalm 89:11–12***, the word ***creation*** is used of the original Creation of heaven and earth. The writer declared, "The heavens are yours, and yours also the earth; you founded the world and all that is in it. You created the north and the south." *Psalm 148:5* refers to the Creation of angels: "He commanded and they were created." Job tells us the angels were already there when God "laid the earth's foundation" (Job 38:4, 7). So the references to Creation take us back to the very beginning.

Isaiah 40:26 says that God "created" the stars as well as numbered and named them. In Isaiah 42:5 he also declares that God "created the heavens and … the earth and all that comes out of it." He also created Jacob and "everyone who is called by my [God's] name" (Isa. 43:1, 7). The heavens and earth were "created" by the Lord (Isa. 45:8, 12).

Malachi 2:10 also refers to the Creation of the human race, saying, "Did not one God create us?" Again, while the race has been propagated ***since*** Adam, the Bible makes it clear that it was created ***in*** Adam (Gen. 1:27; cf. Rom. 5:12); therefore, the Creation of humankind is viewed as an event of origin. Even Jesus referred to it as an event that occurred "at the beginning [when] the Creator 'made them male and female' " (Matt. 19:4).

New Testament Usage of the Word Create (ktisis)

Like the Old Testament, the New Testament consistently uses the word ***creation (ktisis)*** as a past event of origin, not as a present process. Mark 10:6 teaches, "At the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.' " This leaves no doubt that he is referring to Creation as a past and unrepeated singularity, not a regular process observable in the present.

Mark 13:19 employs the word ***creation*** in the same way, saying, "Those will be days of distress unequaled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now." This is an unmistakable reference to Creation as the point of beginning, not a process of continuing.

In ***Romans 1:20***, Paul declares, "***For since the creation of the world*** … [God's] eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what ***has been made***" (emphasis added). The italicized words reveal that his use of the word ***creation*** is about God's original work of making the world, not His continuous acts of caring for it.

In ***1 Corinthians 11:8–9***, Paul uses "creation" of the acts by which God ***made***

(in the past) “woman from man” and “for man.” Once again, the original creation of a literal Adam and Eve are in view here.

Ephesians 3:9 speaks of Creation as a past completed action, referring to the God “who created all things.” Paul adds in Colossians 1:16 (emphasis added) that “all things ***were*** created by him and for him [Christ].”

First Timothy 4:3 declares: “God created [all foods] to be received with thanksgiving.” Now, while foods are being produced in the present, the reference here is to the ***original*** creation of food. This is evident from the use of the aorist tense, indicating completed action. Also, the phrase “to be received” points to the original purpose of the creation of food.

Revelation uniformly refers to Creation as the past work of God by which things began. John noted Christ’s preeminence from the very “beginning of God’s creation” (Rev. 3:14; cf. Col. 1:15, 18). The heavenly host around God’s throne praise Him because by Him all things “were created” (Rev. 4:11). In addition, the angel swore by Him “who created the heavens and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it” (10:6; cf. 14:7).

In the vast majority of these references, there is no doubt that the word ***creation*** is reserved for the ***origination*** of the universe (including life and humankind), not for its continual ***operation*** since then. In the couple of passages where a process may be implied, it is not the creation of the physical universe in view, but rather the propagation of animal or human life. And even though the word ***creation*** is sometimes used in other contexts than the origin of the universe and living things (e.g., Isa. 45:7), nevertheless, there is a clear preponderance of usage saved for the original, un-repeated events of origin by which God brought matter, living things, and human beings into existence.

In addition to the rare use of the word ***creation*** in a continuous sense (see Ps. 104:30), there are, of course, many other words more commonly used of God’s continuous operation in and sustenance of the created universe.

God as the Operating Cause in Creation

Once the world was created, God did not cease to relate to it; in fact, He continually operates in it—He even sustains its very existence. God is the unmoved Mover (see part 1, chapter 3), but He is not an unmoving Mover. He is unmovable, but not immobile. He does not change, but He is the unchanging

Changer of the changing world. When a person moves on a cement floor, the floor does not move in relation to him; rather, he moves in relation to the floor. God, like the analogy of the floor, serves as the unchanging Foundation on which all things rest (and in respect to which all things move).

The Use of the Word Creation ***for God's Present Work***

Rarely does the Bible refer to God's work at present in the operation of the world as "creation," but there are a few exceptions. Psalm 104:30 declares: "When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth." Here the word ***create (bara)*** is used, not of the initial ***generation*** of life on earth, but of the continual ***regeneration*** of it. The context speaks of God making "grass grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate" (v. 14). He is a God who "makes springs pour water into the ravines" (v. 10) and who "bring[s] darkness, [and] it becomes night" (v. 20). He is a God who continually provides food for all living things (v. 27). In short, the repeated emphasis of this passage is on God's continual operation and preservation of His world, and the word ***creation*** is used to describe this continual activity within His creation. Amos 4:13 (NKJV) says that God "creates the wind … and makes the morning darkness." Here too it seems that the word ***creation*** is used of God's work ***in*** His creation, not simply of His original work ***of*** Creation. And, in point of fact, the word ***makes***, which is often used interchangeably with the word ***creates*** (cf. Gen. 1:26–27; 2:18), is used on several occasions to describe God's continual work in the world (cf. Ps. 104:3–4, 10).

God as the Sustaining Cause of Creation

There are numerous ways the Bible exhibits God as presently at work in His creation: He is "making," "doing," "causing," "upholding" the operations of nature in various ways. He sustains it (Heb. 1:3); holds it together (Col. 1:17); causes it to have being (Rev. 4:11); and produces life in it (Ps. 104:14). In short, God is not only the Originator but also the Operator of His world. He is not simply the original Cause but also the continual Cause of its existence. He is Creator and Preserver; there would be no world, past or present, were it not for

God.
God's dual work of creating and preserving the world are often presented in the same passage, even in the same verse. The following contrasts reveal both aspects of God's work.

God Created in the Past, and God Is Producing in the Present

Genesis 1:1 says: "God ***created*** the … earth" (citational emphasis added), and later He is at work through the land to "***produce*** vegetation" (v. 11). The first was an act of origin; the second was one of operation. Both are actions of God.

God Rested in the Past, and God Is Now at Work

Genesis 2:3 declares: "[God] ***rested***" from His original "work of creating," but Jesus affirmed that God "***is always at his work***" (John 5:17). The former describes the commencement of His work ***of*** creation; the latter depicts the continuance of His work ***in*** creation.

God Laid the Foundations of the Earth, and God Is Making the Earth Productive

Psalm 104:5 declares that God "***set*** the earth on its foundations," but a few verses later, God is seen as the one who is "***bringing forth*** food from the earth" (v. 14). The first is a work of God in originating; the second is His work of operating; He does both.

God Made the World, and God Keeps It in Being

In Acts 17:24, the Scriptures teach that God "***made*** the world." Later it says: "In him we live and move and ***have our being***" (Acts 17:28). God is both the past cause of its ***becoming*** and also the present cause of its ***being***.

God Created the World, and God Holds It Together

Colossians 1:16 expresses God's past work as one by which "all things ***were created***." The very next verse explains: "In him all things ***hold together***" (Col. 1:17). The former is God's act of causing it to come to be; the latter is God's act of causing it to continue to be.

God Made, and God Sustains

Psalm 95:3–5 proclaims: "The LORD is the great God, the great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. The sea is his, for he ***made*** it, and his hands formed the dryland." Likewise, Hebrews 1:2 declares: "Through whom [Christ] he [God the Father] ***made*** the universe." Yet, the very next verse reveals that Christ is also "***sustaining*** all things by his powerful word" (Heb. 1:3). Here again, the one refers to creating the world and the other to preserving it.

The Cosmos Was Created by God, and the Cosmos Has Its Being Through God

In one verse the apostle John contrasts God's works of Creation and preservation. He wrote, "By your will they ***were created*** and ***have*** their being" (Rev. 4:11). All things ***received*** being from God and also still ***have*** being from Him.

In summation, the doctrine of Creation is not limited to the discussion of its past origin; it also includes its present sustenance and operation. The Creator is necessary not only to make it but also to sustain it—He is both Producer and Preserver. No picture of Creation is complete that neglects God's role in both areas.

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR GOD AS CREATOR AND SUSTAINER OF CREATION

As we have seen, God's work in relation to the world's existence falls into two broad categories: creating and preserving. In each of these, there are three areas of contrast: the Actor (God), His acts, and the result of His actions. Let us begin with the acts of God in examining the theological basis for His Creation and

preservation.

God's Acts of Creating and Preserving

According to the Scriptures above, God's acts are necessary for the world's coming to be as well as for its continuing to be. He brought it from nothing in the past, and He also keeps it from returning to nothing in the present. In other words, God is both the beginning and the conserving Cause of all that exists. God was active both in life's production and reproduction. He was operative in the ***generating*** of the world, and ever since He has been operative in ***governing*** it.

The acts of God can be summarized in the following chart:

GOD'S ACTS OF		
Creating the World	**Preserving the World**	
Coming to be (bringing from nothing)	Continuing to be (keeping from nothing)	
Beginning	Conserving	
Producing	Reproducing	
Generating	Governing	
Making	Caring for	
Originating	Operating	

God as Actor: Primary and Secondary Causality

Focusing on God as Actor rather than on His actions reveals two of His distinctly different functions in relation to His creation. In one role He is the ***Originator*** of it, and in the other He is the chief ***Operator*** of it. He is both the

Source and the Sustainer of the universe; He is not only Creator but also the Conserver of all that is; God is at once Producer and Provider of all living things. These roles depict His direct involvement in His world at all times, from beginning to end.

God also has some indirect roles in creation. While He is the ***primary Cause*** of all things, He also works through ***secondary causes***. What we commonly refer to as the processes of nature are in reality God's indirect work through natural causes. In this capacity, God is the ***remote Cause***, while natural forces are the ***proximate causes*** of events; that is, God is the ***ultimate Cause***, but nature is the ***immediate cause*** of most happenings. God is the original Commander, but He works through a chain of command when acting through natural laws. The relation between God's two roles of Originator and Operator can be summarized as follows:

God as:	
Originator	**Operator**
Source	Sustainer
Creator	Conserver
Producer	Provider
God Working in Creation:	
Working as:	**Working through:**
Primary Cause	Secondary causes
Remote Cause	Proximate causes
Ultimate Cause	Immediate causes
Original Commander	Chain of command
Results of God's Action:	
Direct intervention	**Indirect action**
Immediate	Mediate
Discontinuous	Continuous
Unique event	Repetition of events

(singularity)	(regularities)
Unobserved	Observed

The Reason God Is Needed to Sustain the Universe

God's sustaining causality is derived from the very nature of creation itself. Once its created and contingent nature is understood, the need for God's continual sustaining activity is comprehended.

Creation Is Contingent

Creation by nature is contingent; only God is a necessary Being. As we have seen, a contingent being is one dependent on the necessary Being for its very existence, and once a contingent being, always a contingent being. No contingent being can become a necessary Being, for a necessary Being by its very nature cannot come to be or cease to be. If a necessary Being exists, it must exist necessarily.

However, if a contingent being is always contingent, then it is always dependent for its existence on a necessary Being; it can no more not be dependent for its existence at any time than it can cease being a contingent being. Dependent beings are not only dependent when they come to be; they are dependent whenever they are (exist). Hence, all of creation, being contingent (i.e., something that could not be), is dependent for its existence at all times.

Creation Is an Effect

To be a creature means to be an effect. The Creator is the Cause, and the creature is the effect. An effect is not free-floating—it needs a cause as long as it is an effect, because if it ever ceased being an effect, then it would be uncaused. Only God the Creator is uncaused; hence, creation as an effect of God must be in a state of being effected at every moment of its existence. In brief, existence only comes one instant at a time; therefore, if one is a creature, then he is dependent on a Cause at each moment of his being.

The Result of God's Actions in Creation

Not only does God continuously act in sustaining the existence of all things, He also is active in intervening in His creation. He is both the Sustainer ***of*** and the Operator ***in*** creation.

God acts in His world in two ways: by ***direct intervention*** (as in Creation), and by ***indirect action*** (as in preservation). The first is an ***immediate*** act of God, and the other is a ***mediate*** action.[1] The direct acts of God are instantaneous; the indirect ones involve a process. Also, God's acts of Creation were discontinuous with what went before: They were *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) or *de nova* (brand-new). For example, He produced something from nothing, life from nonlife, and the rational from the nonrational. These are discontinuities spanned by a direct action of God.

Further, God's acts of Creation brought about unique events of origin, whereas His acts of preservation involve a repetition of events. The one produced ***singularities***, and the other produces ***regularities***. The original Creation events are unobserved today, but God's operation of the world can be seen in the present. The result of God's actions can be contrasted like this:

RESULT OF GOD'S ACTION(S)	
Direct intervention	Indirect action
Immediate	Mediate
Instantaneous	A process
Discontinuous	Continuous
Unique event (singularity)	Repetition of events (regularities)
Unobserved	Observed

ORIGIN SCIENCE VS. OPERATION SCIENCE

The roots of modern science are firmly planted in the Christian view of Creation.

Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947) observed, “The faith in the possibility of science, generated antecedently to the development of modern scientific theory, is an unconscious derivative from medieval theology” (***SMW***, 11). M. B. Foster, writing about the origin of modern science, asked, “What is the source of the un-Greek elements which were imported into philosophy by the post-Reformation philosophers? … [And] what is the source of those un-Greek elements in the modern theory of nature?” The answer to the first question is the Christian revelation, and the answer to the second is the Christian doctrine of Creation (“CDC” in ***M***, 448).

Most of the early founders of modern science believed in Creation. Francis Bacon (1561–1626) pointed to the Creation mandate in Genesis 1:28 as his impetus for scientific research (***NO***, 1.129 ad 119). Indeed, Galileo (1564–1642), Copernicus (1473–1543), Kepler (1571–1630), Kelvin (1824–1907), Newton (1642–1727), and others all saw evidence in nature for Creation. After carefully studying the universe, Isaac Newton concluded:

> It is not to be conceived that mere mechanical causes could give birth to so many regular motions, since the comets range over all parts of the heavens in very eccentric orbits.... [Hence,] this most beautiful system of the sun, planets, and comets could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent and powerful Being. (“GS” in *MPNP*, 369)

From the very beginning of modern science, there was a belief in a Creator (primary Cause) who created the universe and then operated in it by natural laws (secondary causes—see Geisler and Anderson, ***OS***, chapter 2). The study of these regular ways God operates in His universe produced astounding results. More and more scientists were able to give natural explanations for things once believed to be the result of direct supernatural intervention (ibid., 3–4).

When Newton strayed from this course, Pierre-Simon Laplace (1749–1827) corrected his misbelief that God intervened to correct the elliptical orbits of planets. Laplace (and Immanuel Kant before him) offered a naturalistic explanation of the ***development*** of the solar system. James Hutton (1726–1797) and Charles Lyell (1797–1875) explained geological ***processes*** by natural causes apart from supernatural interference. Charles Darwin (1809–1882) later offered a natural explanation for the ***emergences*** of species (***OOS***). Gradually this widely accepted success in explaining the ***operation*** of the natural world overshadowed the question of its ultimate ***origin***; the search for secondary causes obscured the need for a primary cause (see Geisler and Anderson, ***OS***, chapter 6). Theism degenerated to deism and set the stage for atheism.

Departure from the Creator was not envisioned by the early modern scientists. In

their view, the primary Cause was needed both directly (for the ***origin*** of the universe and living things), and indirectly (for the ***operation*** of the world) through secondary causes. It was not their intention that secondary (natural) causes should be used to eliminate the need for a primary Cause (Creator), either in the realm of origin or the operation of the universe. Forgotten was the twofold need of a primary Cause (1) as the immediate Cause for the ***origin*** of the universe and living things, and (2) as the Sustainer of the secondary (mediate) causes of the ***operation*** of the universe.

The failure to make this distinction between the origin and the operation of the universe has led to much misunderstanding in the ongoing debate between creationists and evolutionists. The latter often claim that macroevolution is a well-established scientific fact and that Creation is not scientific. This, however, confuses two kinds of science: origin science and operation science. The only sense in which evolution can be called a "fact" is in the sense of ***micro***evolution, meaning, of course, small changes (within each species) that can be observed in the present. Microevolution is a part of operation science because it is about a continual process that can be observed in the present; that is, ***there is a regularly recurring pattern of events against which our views can be tested***. This is crucial to operation science.

Origin science is different. Unlike operation science, when dealing with origin events, there is no regularly recurring observable pattern of events against which to test our theories. Origins are not present regularities; they are past singularities; hence, they are not observable. In this way, origin science is more like a ***forensic*** science than an ***empirical*** science, for a forensic scientist did not see, for example, a murder he is investigating, nor can he have it repeated for observation. He simply uses the remaining bits of evidence as part of a ***speculative reconstruction*** of an unobserved past singularity.

Singularities and the Miraculous

Another important distinction emerges from the foregoing discussion: An origin event, such as the Creation of the universe, is the result of an immediate, abrupt, discontinuous action of a primary Cause (God)—it is an unrepeated singularity. The Creation of life is an intelligent intrusion or intervention into the inanimate world that is not in continuity with what went before it. A supernatural Creation

is direct and immediate (see Volume 1, chapter 3): It moves from nothing to something, or from the non-living to the living, or from the non-intelligent to the intelligent. ***It is a miracle***. Even Darwin believed, "Nature makes no jumps. But God does" (cited by Gruber, ***DM***).

Now, this same pattern for miraculous events of origin has been manifest in miraculous events since the time of origins. For example, the incarnation of Christ was a direct, abrupt, and discontinuous intervention of God in human history; it can be known in the same way that supernatural events of origin are known, for it too is an unrepeated, unobserved (by us), past singularity. We know it by examining the record of the past (mainly the New Testament), by which we can reconstruct the story (i.e., history) of what occurred. Thus, the identification of miraculous events since the time of origins follows the same general procedure of that used in origin science (see Geisler and Anderson, ***OS***, chapter 6).

God of the Gaps and Nature of the Gaps

The way God operates regularly in His world is the object of ***operation*** science, to which belong cosmology, geology, biology, and anthropology. The origins of these areas are the object of ***origin*** science. They have been called cosmogony, geogeny, biogeny, and anthrogeny.

With these distinctions in mind, we are equipped to avoid two unfortunate extremes. On the one hand, some have yielded to the temptation to explain certain anomalous ***operations*** of the universe as miracles. As alluded to previously, Sir Isaac Newton explained the ***regular*** elliptical orbit of the planets as a divine intervention. Eventually, however, Pierre-Simon Laplace provided a purely natural explanation for this phenomena (***SW***, 2.4.331). Many early Christians invoked divine intervention to explain geological processes, but later James Hutton and Charles Lyell were able to give satisfactory natural explanations for these phenomena. Before the time of Darwin, it was assumed by many creationists that all species were fixed by a direct supernatural act of God. Likewise, earthquakes, meteors, and volcanoes were all once explained as divine interruptions of nature. The mistake in each case was to assume that the naturally unexplained functioning of nature was naturally unexplainable. This error has been called the God of the Gaps. As it turned out, the gap was not really in the

operation of nature, but in the human understanding of it.
There is another equally harmful mistake that may be called the Nature of the Gaps error, not a folly of supernaturalists but of naturalists. Here the temptation is not to interject a supernatural cause into the ***regularities*** of the world (as in God of the Gaps), but rather to assume there is always a natural cause for ***singularities*** in the world. However, it is no more justifiable to presume there is always a natural cause for unexplained regularities in nature than it is to necessarily plead a direct supernatural cause for unexplained singularities. Indeed, a continuous regular process, by its very nature, can be assumed to have a natural cause—this is so even if we do not know what it is—and, thus, ***the God of the Gaps fallacy has no place in operation science***. On the other hand, if there is an abrupt, discontinuous singularity or origin, then it is wrong to presume it must have a natural cause. ***The Nature of the Gaps presumption has no place in origin science***.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR GOD AS CREATOR AND SUSTAINER OF CREATION

The doctrine of God's conserving causality was not wasted on the Fathers of the church. From earliest times they saw and wrote of its importance.

The Early Church Fathers on God as Creator and Sustainer

Clement of Alexandria

> The heavens, revolving under His government, are subject to Him in peace. Day and night run the course appointed by Him, in no wise hindering each other. The sun and moon, with the companies of the stars, roll on in harmony according to His command, within their prescribed limits, and without any deviation. The fruitful earth, according to His will, brings forth food in abundance, at the proper seasons, for man and beast and all the living beings upon it, never hesitating, nor changing any of the ordinances which He has fixed. The unsearchable places of abysses, and the indescribable arrangements of the lower world, are restrained by the same laws.... The ocean, [thought to be] impassible to man, and the worlds beyond it, are regulated by the same

enactments of the Lord. The seasons of spring, summer, autumn, and winter, peacefully give place to one another. The winds in their several quarters fulfill, at the proper time, their service without hindrance. The ever-flowing fountains, formed both for enjoyment and health, furnish without fail their breasts for the life of men. The very smallest of living beings meet together in peace and concord. (*ECC*, 1.20 in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, I)

Theophilus

In like manner, as any person, when he sees a ship on the sea rigged and in sail, and making for the harbor, will no doubt infer that there is a pilot in her who is steering her; so we must perceive that God is the governor [pilot] of the whole universe, though He be not visible to the eyes of the flesh, since He is incomprehensible.… For as the pomegranate, with the rind containing it, has within it many cells and compartments which are separated by tissues, and has also many seeds dwelling in it, so the whole creation is contained by the spirit of God, and the containing spirit is along with the creation contained by the hand of God. (*TA*, 1.5 in ibid., II)

Irenaeus

The God, therefore, who does benevolently cause His sun to rise upon all, and sends rain upon the just and unjust, shall judge those who, enjoying His equally distributed kindness, have led lives not corresponding to the dignity of His bounty; but who have spent their days in wantonness and luxury, in opposition to His benevolence, and have, moreover, even blasphemed Him who has conferred so great benefits upon them. (*AH*, 3.25.4 in ibid., I)

Again, the apostles taught the Gentiles that they should leave vain sticks and stones, which they imagined to be gods, and worship the true God, who had created and made all the human family, and, by means of His creation, did nourish, increase, strengthen, and preserve them in being; and that they might look for His Son Jesus Christ. (*AH*, 3.53 in ibid., I)

The Medieval Fathers on God as Creator and Sustainer

It is evident that God’s relation to the world was not conceived in deistic terms by the Christian thinkers of the Middle Ages; rather, they viewed God as the active Sustainer of all things.

Augustine

> For though the voices of the prophets were silent, the world itself, by its well-ordered changes and movements, and by the fair appearance of all visible things, bears a testimony of its own, both that it has been created, and also that it could not have been created save by God, whose greatness and beauty are unutterable and invisible. (CG, 11.4)

> What, therefore, we do not find in that which is our own best, we ought not to seek in Him who is far better than that best of ours; that so we may understand God, if we are able, and as much as we are able, as good without quality, great without quantity, *a creator though He lack nothing, ruling but from no position, sustaining all things without "having" them*, in His wholeness everywhere, yet without place, eternal without time, making things that are changeable, without change of Himself, and without passion. (OT, 1, 160–61)

Anselm

> Since it cannot but be that those things which have been created live through another, and that by which they have been created lives through itself, necessarily, just as nothing has been created except through the creative, present Being, so nothing lives except through its preserving presence. (*M*, XIII)

Further,

> In this way God is said to do many things that he does not, as when he is said to lead us into temptation when he does not prevent temptation that he could, and to cause what is not since he could make it be and does not. But if you consider the things which pass into non-being, you will see that it is not God who causes them not to be. For not only is there no essence he does not make, but nothing he does make could last if he did not preserve it, for when he stops preserving what he made, it is not the case that he turns what was a being into non-being, as if he caused non-being, but only that he stops causing it to be. And even when in anger, as it were, he destroys something by taking away its existence, the non-being is not from him; rather when God's creative and preserving causality is removed, the thing reverts to the non-being it had of itself before it was created and does not have from God. If you were to ask someone for the cloak you had lent when he was naked, he does not receive his nakedness from you, but by the fact that you take back what is yours, he reverts to the condition that was his before you clothed him. (*ACMW*, 195)

Thomas Aquinas

> Therefore, as the becoming of a thing cannot continue when the action of the agent, which causes the *becoming* of the effect, ceases, so neither can the *being* of a thing continue after the action of the agent, which is the cause of the effect not only in *becoming* but also in *being*, has ceased.
>
> *Reply Obj. 4*
>
> . The conservation of things by God is not by a new action, but by a continuation of that action whereby He gives being, which action is without either motion or time; so also the conservation of light in the air is by the continual influence of the sun. (*ST*, Ia.104.1)

The Reformation Leaders on God as Creator and Sustainer

The great Reformers build on the metaphysics of the medieval theologians; hence, they did not treat extensively and philosophically those attributes and activities of God. Nonetheless, it is evident that they accepted them.

Philip Melanchthon (1497–1560)

> Our Churches, with common consent, do teach that the decree of the Council of Nicaea concerning the Unity of the Divine Essence and concerning the Three Persons, is true and to be believed without any doubting; that is to say, there is one Divine Essence which is called and which is God: eternal, without body, without parts, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, the Maker and Preserver of all things, visible and invisible. (*AC*, Article I)

John Calvin

> It were cold and lifeless to represent God as a momentary Creator, who completed his work once for all, and then left it. Here, especially, we must dissent from the profane, and maintain that the presence of the divine power is conspicuous, not less in the perpetual condition of the world than in its first creation.… To this effect is the passage of the Apostle already quoted that by faith we

understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God (Heb. 11:3), because without proceeding to his Providence, we cannot understand the full force of what is meant by God being the Creator, how much soever we may seem to comprehend it with our mind, and confess it with our tongue. The carnal mind, when once it has perceived the power of God in the creation, stops there, and, at the farthest, thinks and ponders on nothing else than the wisdom, power, and goodness displayed by the Author of such a work (matters which rise spontaneously, and force themselves on the notice even of the unwilling), or on some general agency on which the power of motion depends, exercised in preserving and governing it.

In short, it [unbelief] imagines that all things are sufficiently sustained by the energy divinely infused into them at first. But faith must penetrate deeper. After learning that there is a Creator, it must forthwith infer that he is also a Governor and Preserver, and that, not by producing a kind of general motion in the machine of the globe as well as in each of its parts, but by a special providence sustaining, cherishing, superintending, all the things which he has made, to the very minutest, even to a sparrow.

To this we may refer our Saviour's words, that he and his Father have always been at work from the beginning (John 5:17); also the words of Paul, that "in him we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28); also the words of the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, who, when wishing prove the divinity of Christ, says that he upholdeth "all things by the word of his power" [Heb. 1:3] (*ICR*, 1.16.1, 4).

The Post-Reformation Theologians on God As Creator and Sustainer

Among the theological offspring of the Reformers, the belief in God's current causality of the universe was consistently reaffirmed.

Jonathan Edwards

[God] must also be of infinite knowledge; for if he made all things, and upholds and governs all things continually, it will follow that he knows and perfectly sees all things, great and small, in heaven and earth, continually at one view; which cannot be without infinite understanding. (*WJE*, 2, "Seven Sermons," 107)

Charles Hodge

> Creation and preservation differ, first, as the former is the calling into existence what before did not exist; and the latter is continuing, or causing to continue what already has a being; and secondly, in creation there is and can be no cooperation, but in preservation there is a *concursus* of the first, with second causes. (*ST*, 1, 578)

> The idea that God would create this vast universe teeming with life in all its forms, and exercise no control over it, to secure it from destruction or from working out nothing but evil, is utterly inconsistent with the nature of God. (ibid., 583)

> He upholds as He creates all things, by the word of His power. How He does this it is vain to inquire. So long as we cannot tell how we move our lips, or how mind can operate on matter, or in what way the soul is present and operative in the whole body, it requires little humility to suppress the craving curiosity to know how God sustains the universe with all its hosts in being and activity.

> It is best, therefore, to rest satisfied with the simple statement that preservation is that omnipotent energy of God by which all created things, animate and inanimate, are upheld in existence, with all the properties and powers with which He has endowed them, (ibid., 581)

Karl Barth

> In the same way that He willed and gave it to the creature to become and to be, so He wills and gives to the creature to be again and again, to continue to be. This is how He preserves it. And He preserves it as is fitting that He the Creator should persevere, and that the creature should be preserved by Him. He preserves it eternally. He does not allow His creation to perish. He keeps faith with the creature. And yet He does not preserve it illimitably, but within the limits which correspond to its creaturely existence. The fact that He preserves is not exclusive but inclusive. (*CD*, part 3, 61)

> Its actual preservation is no less the free act of God because in this case He acts indirectly and not directly. Hence it is not really the creature which sustains the creature. It is not the context of the whole which guarantees the continuance of the individual, nor is it the individual which guarantees the continuity of the whole. And there can be no question of the creature being able even vicariously to do in its own strength that which God wills it to do. It is God alone who does everything to His own free good-pleasure, (ibid., 65)

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

God's activity can be seen in making the world as well as in preserving it: He is both the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. God not only causes the universe to ***come to be***, He also causes it to ***continue to be***. He is both Maker and Upholder of all things. Indeed, two famous arguments are based respectively on these two teachings: The "horizontal" (kalam) cosmological argument is based on the fact that the universe had a Cause at the beginning (see Craig, ***KCA***), and the "vertical" cosmological argument is based on the fact that the universe is contingent and needs a Cause right now for its existence (see Geisler and Corduan, ***PR***, chapter 9).

Further, God is both the Originator and the Operator of His universe; in addition to the sustaining of the universe, God is continually active in operating it. The acts of origination are always immediate acts of God as the primary Cause; however, the operation of the universe God has ordained to be carried on through the instrumentality of secondary causes. These we call natural (***indirect***) causes because they are regular, observable, and predictable; they are the way God operates in His world ***regularly***.

The ***direct*** act of a primary Cause is different—it is the way God ***specially*** intervenes in His world. These are not regular, nor are they predictable, acts of God; hence, we call them supernatural. These events have the same characteristics, whether they are miraculous events of creation or incarnation (see Lewis, ***M***).

The distinguishing traits of natural events are continuity, regularity, and predictability; none of these is true of a miraculous origin event. Thus, it is wrong to assume that God directly intervenes in the continuous natural processes of the world (God of the Gaps). Likewise, it is equally wrong to presume that a discontinuous, singular, and unpredictable event of origin must have a natural event (Nature of the Gaps). God is involved in the world ***directly*** as a supernatural Cause for ***origins***, and ***indirectly*** through secondary causes in ***operation***.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

GOD'S TRANSCENDENCE OVER AND IMMANENCE IN CREATION

Transcendence and immanence—two characteristics of God—are a natural pair. God is both transcendent over and immanent in His creation; that is, God is both beyond the world and in the world. In the former, the theistic God is distinct from pantheism, and in the latter, He is distinguished from deism (see Volume 1, chapter 2). Deism affirms God's transcendence but denies His immanence, whereas pantheism asserts God's immanence but denies His transcendence.[1] Theism affirms that God is both transcendent and immanent.

THE TRANSCENDENCE OF GOD

The transcendence of God entails the assertions that He is above, beyond, other than, and more than the world. It stands in contrast, but not in contradiction, to His immanence, by which He is in the world.

Literally, transcendence means "to be above" or "beyond." Theologically, it refers to the fact that God is above and beyond all creation. Thus, transcendence is not an ***inherent*** trait of God, but a ***relational*** one. Inherently, God is infinite, but in relation to His universe He is transcendent.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S TRANSCENDENCE

The biblical foundation for God's transcendence begins in the very first verse and permeates the whole of Scripture: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). "Will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!" (1 Kings 8:27). "Can you probe the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than the heavens—what can you do?" (Job 11:7–8). "O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens" (Ps. 8:1). "Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth" (Ps. 57:5). "For you, O LORD, are the Most High over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods" (Ps. 97:9). "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple" (Isa. 6:1). "Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance?" (Isa. 40:12). " 'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the LORD. 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts' " (Isa. 55:8–9). "This is what the high and lofty One says—he who lives forever, whose name is holy" (Isa. 57:15). "This is what the LORD says: 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?' " (Isa. 66:1–2). [There is] "one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4:6). "He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Col. 1:17). In short, God is before, over, beyond, and above all things.

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S TRANSCENDENCE

In addition to the biblical basis for God's transcendence, there are strong

theological grounds. These are anchored in three other attributes or characteristics of God: His infinity, sovereignty, and majesty.

Transcendence Follows From God's Infinity

God's infinity has already been discussed (in chapter 5). If God is infinite and creation is finite, then God must transcend all creation, for the infinite is above and beyond the finite. Hence, God is above and beyond His creation.

Transcendence Follows From God's Sovereignty

God's transcendence can also be deduced from His sovereignty; the Bible teaches that God is in sovereign control of the universe (see chapter 23). The One who is in control of all creation must be beyond all creation, and the One who is beyond all creation is transcendent.

Transcendence Follows From God's Majesty

God's majesty is also a ground for His transcendence, for what has majesty is exalted beyond all else (see chapter 10), and what is exalted beyond all else is transcendent.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S TRANSCENDENCE

That God is above and beyond all things has been an essential teaching of the Christian church from the very beginning.

The Early Church Fathers on God's Transcendence

The earliest Fathers were emphatic about God's transcendence. Following their apostolic predecessors, the patristic teachers placed God above and beyond the created world.

Irenaeus

> To what distance above God do ye lift up your imaginations, O ye rashly elated men? Ye have heard "that the heavens are meted out in the palm of [His] hand"? Tell me the measure, and recount the endless multitude of cubits, explain to me the fullness, the breadth, the length, the height, the beginning and end of the measurement, things which the heart of man understands not, neither does it comprehend them. For the heavenly treasuries are indeed great: God cannot be measured in the heart, and incomprehensible is He in the mind; He who holds the earth in the hollow of His hand. (*AH*, 4.19.2 in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, I)

> It is proper, then, that I should begin with the first and most important head, that is, God the Creator, who made the heaven and the earth, and all things that are therein (whom these men blasphemously style the fruit of a defect), and to demonstrate that there is nothing either above Him or after Him; nor that, influenced by any one, but of His own free will, He created all things, since He is the only God, the only Lord, the only Creator, the only Father, alone containing all things, and Himself commanding all things *into* existence. (*AH*, 2.1.1 in ibid.)

> They also overthrow the faith of many, by drawing them away, under a pretense of [superior] knowledge, from Him who founded and adorned the universe; as if, forsooth, they had something more excellent and sublime to reveal, than that God who created the heaven and the earth, and all things that are therein. (*AH*, preface in ibid.)

> We shall not be wrong if we affirm the same thing also concerning the substance of matter, that God produced it. For we have learned from the Scriptures that God holds the supremacy over all things. (*AH*, 2:28:7 in ibid.)

Papias (fl. second century)

> He must reign till He hath put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For in the times of the kingdom the just man who is on the earth shall forget to die. But when He saith all things are put under Him, it is manifest that He is excepted which did put all things under Him. And when

all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subject unto Him that put all things under Him, that God may be all in all. (*FP*, 5 in ibid.)

Clement of Alexandria

This discourse respecting God is most difficult to handle. For since the first principle of everything is difficult to find out, the absolutely first and oldest principle, which is the cause of all other things being and having been, is difficult to exhibit. For how can that be expressed which is neither genus, nor difference, nor species, nor individual, nor number; nay more, is neither an event, nor that to which an event happens? No one can rightly express Him wholly. For on account of His greatness He is ranked as the All, and is the Father of the universe. (*S*, 5:12 in ibid., II)

Tertullian

This rule is required by the nature of the One-only God, who is One-only in no other way than as the sole God; and in no other way sole, than as having nothing else (co-existent) with Him. So also He will be first, because all things are after Him; and all things are after Him, because all things are by Him; and all things are by Him, because they are of nothing. (*AH*, 17 in ibid., III)

The Medieval Fathers on God's Transcendence

With one accord the giants of the Middle Ages affirmed God's absolute transcendence. This they did in several ways, often stressing God's transcendence via His being the Creator of all things.

Augustine

Will you say that these things are false, which, with a strong voice, Truth tells me in my inner ear, concerning the very eternity of the Creator, that His substance is in no wise changed by time, nor that His will is separate from His substance? Wherefore, He willeth not one thing now, another anon, but once and for ever He willeth all things that He willeth; not again and again, nor now this, now that; nor willeth afterwards what He willeth not before, nor willeth not what before He willed. Because such a will is mutable, and no mutable thing is

> eternal; but our God is eternal.... Moreover, all thought which is thus varied is mutable, and nothing mutable is eternal; but our God is eternal. These things I sum up and put together, and I find that my God, the eternal God, hath not made any creature by any new will, nor that His knowledge suffereth anything transitory. (*C*, 12.15)

Anselm

> Of all the things that can be said of something, could any be appropriate to the substance of so wonderful a nature as this? This is the question to ask as carefully as possible at this point. I would be surprised if we could find anything from among the nouns and verbs which we apply to things created from nothing that could worthily be said of the substance that created all. Nonetheless we must see where reason takes us.... Something said, therefore, of the supreme nature in respect of relation does not signify its substance. Hence, the mere fact that the supreme nature is greater than everything that it has created clearly does not specify its natural essence.
>
> The claim "nothing was before the supreme being" must be taken in the second way. It must not be taken to mean that there was a time when the supreme being did not, and when nothing did, exist. On the contrary, it means that before the supreme being it was not the case that there was something. And the same double meaning applies to the claim that nothing will exist after the supreme being. (*ACMW*, 26, 33)

Thomas Aquinas

"God is above all things by the excellence of His nature" (***ST***, la.8.1 ad 1).

The Reformation Leaders on God's Transcendence

There was no reformation about the nature of God. The Reformers took aim at ecclesiology (the study of the church) and soteriology (the study of salvation), but not theology proper (the study of God Himself).

Martin Luther

God is not to be excluded from, or limited to, any place. He is everywhere and nowhere. If it is asked whether He is everywhere only according to the exercise of His power (
potentialiter
) or according to His essence (
substantialiter
), I reply: He is in every creature in both ways; for while a creature works through its attribute (
per qualitatem
), God does not work through His attribute but through His essence (
essentialiter
). (*WLS*, 543–44)

John Calvin

Because our weakness cannot reach his height, any description which we receive of him must be lowered to our capacity in order to be intelligible. And the mode of lowering is to represent him not as he really is, but as we conceive of him. Though he is incapable of every feeling of perturbation, he declares that he is angry with the wicked. Wherefore, as when we hear that God is angry, we ought not to imagine that there is any emotion in him, but ought rather to consider the mode of speech accommodated to our sense. (*ICR*, 1.17.13)

Away, then, with all gross conceptions of God; for his greatness far exceeds all creatures, so that heaven, and earth, and sea, and all that they contain, however vast may be their extent, yet in comparison of him are nothing. (*C*, on Isa. 40:12
)

The Post-Reformation Theologians on God's Transcendence

The sons of the Reformation were true to their Fathers' view of God. They too stressed His absolute transcendence over His creation.

Jacob Arminius

As we ought to enunciate negatively the mode by which the Essence of God pre-eminently both is and is not spiritual, above the excellence of all Essences, even of those which are spiritual; so this may be done first and immediately in a single phrase, "He is … without beginning and without cause either external

or internal.” … For since there cannot be any advancement in *infinitum*, (for if there could, there would be no Essence, no Knowledge,) there must be one Essence, above and before which no other can exist: But such an Essence must that of God be; for, to whatsoever this Essence may be attributed, it will by that very act of ascription be God himself. (*WJA*, I.437)

Francis Turretin

God is said to be infinite in essence in three ways: (1) originally, because he is absolutely independent, who neither has nor can have anything prior or superior to himself; (2) formally, because he has an absolutely infinite (*apeiron*) essence; (3) virtually, because his activity has no finite sphere, nor does he need the concourse of any cause in acting, but does all things whatsoever he wills. (*IET*, 195)

Jonathan Edwards

It may be noted particularly, that though we are obliged to conceive of something in God as consequent and dependent on others, and so some things pertaining to the Divine Nature and Will as the foundation of others, and so before others in the order of nature: as we must conceive of the knowledge and holiness of God as prior, in the order of nature, to his happiness; the perfection of his understanding, as the foundation of his wise purposes and decrees; the holiness of his nature, as the cause and reason of his holy determinations. (*WJE*, 1.70)

Stephen Charnock

A creature’s praises of God are as much below the transcendent eminency of God, as the meanness of a creature’s being is below the eternal fullness of the Creator. (*EAG*, 2.109)

It is as impossible for a creature to be a Creator, as for a creature to have naturally an incommunicable property of the Creator. All things, whether angels or men, are made of nothing, and therefore, capable of defection; because a creature being made of nothing, cannot be good, or essentially good, but by participation from another. (ibid., II.230)

He is the sovereign Lord, as he is the almighty Creator. The relation of an entire Creator induceth the relation of an absolute Lord; he that gives being, motion, that is the sole cause of the being of a thing, which was before nothing, that

> hath nothing to concur with him, nothing to assist him, but by his sole power commands it to stand up into being, is the unquestionable Lord and proprietor of that thing that hath no dependence but upon him; and by this act of creation, which extended to all things, he became universal Sovereign over all things: and those that waive the excellency of his nature as the foundation of his government, easily acknowledge the sufficiency of it upon his actual creation. His dominion of jurisdiction results from creation, (ibid., 2.368)

William G. T. Shedd

> The Divine being is of an essence whose spirituality transcends that of all other spirits, human, angelic, or arch-angelic; even as his immortality transcends that of man or angel.... The transcendent nature of the Divine spirituality is seen in the fact of its being formless and unembodied. "No man hath seen God at any time,"
>
> John 1:18
>
> . "Ye saw no similitude,"
>
> Deut. 4:12
>
> . The Infinite Spirit cannot be so included in a form as not to exist outside of it. T finite spirit can be, and in all its grades is both embodied and limited by the body. (*DT*, 152)

OBJECTIONS TO GOD'S TRANSCENDENCE

A number of problems with God's attribute of transcendence come from various quarters. Each will be briefly stated with a response to it.

Objection One: Transcendence Makes God Unknowable

The first protest is a serious one for an evangelical, because if it is true, then we are left in skepticism about God.

The objection may be stated thus: A transcendent God is a wholly other God. If He were not wholly other, He would not be transcendent. If, however, God is wholly other, then we cannot know Him, for "wholly other" means that God is not like us at all, and not to be like His creation at all is to make all our talk about Him equivocal (see Volume 1, chapter 9). Equivocal God-talk is totally

different from the way God is; thus, transcendence makes God totally unknowable.

Response to Objection One

God can be, and is, transcendent without being "wholly other." There is indeed an infinite ***difference*** between the infinite God and finite creatures, but there is not a total lack of ***similarity***. There is a third alternative between "wholly other" (equivocal) and "wholly the same" (univocal), namely, there is a similarity (analogy). As was demonstrated earlier (in Volume 1, chapter 9), God must be similar to His creatures because He caused their existence; an effect must be similar to its efficient cause, since a cause cannot give what it hasn't got, and it can't produce what it does not possess. God is Being, and He gave being; He is Existence, and He gave existence to His creatures; He is Pure Actuality, and he made creation actual. Of course, there ***is*** a difference: Creatures have potentiality, and God does not. Without a difference there would be no transcendence.

Objection Two: Transcendence Puts God Out of Touch With Us

A God who is so far above and beyond the world, such as transcendence demands, is allegedly out of touch with our reality. He is so remote as not to be relatable; He is so distant as not to be able to be near; He is so far that He can't be close to us.

Response to Objection Two

Whatever validity this argument may have for other forms of theism, such as Islam or even deism, it has none for the Christian view of God's transcendence. There are two reasons for this: (1) God's immanence and (2) the Incarnation.

First, God is not simply transcendent; He is also immanent (see below). He is not only up there; He is in here. He is not simply beyond us, but He is also with us.
Second, whatever remoteness may be suggested of the Christian God is removed by the Incarnation, for in Christ, God became man and dwelled among us. Indeed, He assumed humanity and is one of us. He is not merely up there—He came down here. Hence, an objection that the God of Christianity is out of touch with reality is itself out of touch with reality: "We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin" (Heb. 4:15).

Objection Three: Transcendence Is Contradictory to Immanence

It would appear that the solution to the above objections creates another. Granting that God's immanence offsets the problems of His transcendence, it can then be objected, How can God possess contradictory characteristics? How can He be both up there and down here, both beyond the world and in the world at the same time? These very concepts appear to be mutually exclusive.

Response to Objection Three

For one thing, as detailed previously, transcendence and immanence are not ***intrinsic*** attributes of God; rather, they show His ***relationship*** to His creation. For example, God is intrinsically infinite (whether there is a Creation or not), but God can only be transcendent if there is a creation over which to be transcendent. Transcendence and immanence are not contradictory: The law of noncontradiction demands that something is contradictory only if it is opposite things at the same time and in the same sense or relationship. God is immanent in a different sense than He is transcendent—His transcendence is not the same relationship as His immanence. They are, in fact, two different relationships God has to the world.
Further, transcendence and immanence are not logical opposites. A contradiction

would be this: God is in the universe and not in the universe at the same time and in the same sense. It is not contradictory to say that a person can be both in the water (with part of his body) and yet also be out of the water (with the rest of his body). Better yet, since God has no parts, it is not contradictory to affirm that while my mind is in my brain, it also is beyond it in the sense that it can roam the universe while it never leaves my head. So while there is a ***mystery*** in how God can be both beyond and within the world, there is no ***contradiction***.

AN APPROPRIATE RESPONSE TO GOD'S TRANSCENDENCE

The transcendence of God should elicit ***a sense of awe*** from His creatures. Psalm 8:1 says: "O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens."

It should also prompt ***a sense of our own insignificance***. Psalm 48:1 declares: "Great is the LORD, and most worthy of praise, in the city of our God, his holy mountain."

Likewise, we should derive ***a sense of sinfulness*** from meditating on God's transcendence. Isaiah 6:1–5 proclaimed: "I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple.… And they [the seraphs] were calling to one another: 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory'.… 'Woe to me!' I cried. 'I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.' "

Further, ***a sense of submission*** ought to emerge from thinking about the transcendence of God. Philippians 2:9–11 affirms: "God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is LORD, to the glory of God the Father."

Finally, ***a sense of reverence*** is a natural consequence of contemplating God's transcendence. Revelation 4:11 asserts: "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."

THE IMMANENCE OF GOD

God's immanence is the flip side of His transcendence. In His relation with His creation, God is not only over it, but He is also in it. He is both far and near. As infinite, God must be beyond His creation, yet as its sustaining Cause He must be within it.

THE DEFINITION OF GOD'S IMMANENCE

The literal meaning of immanence is "to be within" or "near." Theologically, God's immanence means that He is within or present to the entire universe. Immanence is closely associated with God's omnipresence (see chapter 7), though there is a distinction between them. By His omnipresence God is ***present to*** all of His creation, but by His immanence He is ***within*** it.
However, God is not within the universe in the sense of being part of it, for He is the Creator and it is His creation. He is within the universe as its sustaining Cause, but not in it in the sense of its being a part of His nature.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S IMMANENCE

The Bible provides abundant evidence for God's immanence. Again, "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast" (Ps. 139:7–10). " 'Am I only a God nearby,' declares the LORD, 'and not a God far away? Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?' declares the LORD. 'Do not I fill heaven and earth?' declares the LORD." (Jer. 23:23–24). "God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. 'For in him we live and move and have our being' " (Acts 17:27–28). "What may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them" (Rom. 1:19). "In [Christ] all things hold together" (Col. 1:17). "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account" (Heb. 4:13). "By your [God's] will they … have their being" (Rev. 4:11).

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S IMMANENCE

God's immanence follows from other theological truths. Two of these are His sustaining causality of the universe and His infinity.

Immanence Follows From God's Causality

The Bible affirms that God is not only the originating Cause of the universe, but He is also the sustaining Cause of it: "The Son is … sustaining all things by his powerful word" (Heb. 1:3), and "in him all things hold together" (Col. 1:17). The fact is, as we have seen, that all creatures are constantly dependent for their continued existence. Continual dependence demands a continual Cause, and the Cause of existence is at the core of everything else that exists. Therefore, God is in this sense at the core of everything else that is.

Immanence Follows From God's Infinity

What is infinite must include, in some way, everything else that exists, for if it did not, then it would not be infinite or all-inclusive. To put it another way, if God were not in even a tiny section of His universe, then there would be somewhere that the infinite Being is not. However, by its very nature, an Infinite cannot be absent anywhere; hence, God must be within the entire universe. More appropriately stated, God is not only within the universe, but the universe is within God: "In Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). As the ultimate efficient Cause of all things, He does not participate in the effect, but the effect participates in the Cause. This being the case, it is perhaps more fitting to say that the universe is within God than that God is within the universe, though the latter is true as well.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S IMMANENCE

In addition to the biblical and theological basis for God's immanence, there is ample testimony in the early history of the church to support this activity of God.

The Early Church Fathers on God's Immanence

From the inception of the post-apostolic period, there are numerous references to God's immanence. Thus, His transcendence is balanced by His immanent presence in the world.

Ignatius

God is at work within the believer.

> A Christian has not power over himself, but must always be ready for the service of God. Now, this work is both God's and yours, when ye shall have completed it to His glory. For I trust that, through grace, ye are prepared for every good work pertaining to God. Knowing, therefore, your energetic love of the truth, I have exhorted you by this brief Epistle. (*EIP*, 7 in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, I)

Irenaeus

"Now, that this God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Paul the apostle also has declared, [saying,] 'There is one God, the Father, who is above all, and through all things, and in us all' " (***AH***, 2.3.5 in ibid.).

> This is also made clear from the words of the Lord, who did truly reveal the Son of God to those of the circumcision "Him who had been foretold as Christ by the prophets; that is, He set Himself forth, who had restored liberty to men, and bestowed on them the inheritance to incorruption. And again, the apostles taught the Gentiles that they should leave vain sticks and stones, which they imagined to be gods, and worship the true God, who had created and made all the human family, and, by means of His creation, did nourish, increase,

strengthen, and preserve them in being; and that they might look for His Son Jesus Christ." (*AH*, 3.5.3 in ibid.)

Athenagoras

First, as to our not sacrificing: the Framer and Father of this universe does not need blood, nor the odor of burnt-offerings, nor the fragrance of flowers and incense, forasmuch as He is Himself perfect fragrance, needing nothing either within or without.… When holding God to be this Framer of all things, who preserves them in being and superintends them all by knowledge and administrative skill, we "lift up holy hands" to Him. (*WA*, 13 in ibid., II)

The Medieval Fathers on God's Immanence

Augustine

The truth is that all these actions and energies belong to the one true God, who is really a God, who is wholly present everywhere, is confined by no frontiers and bound by no hindrances, is indivisible and immutable, and, though His nature has no need of either heaven or of earth, He fills them both with His presence and His power. (*CG*, 7.30)

What is more wonderful than what happens in connection with the sound of our voices and our words, a thing, forsooth, which passes away in a moment? For when we speak, there is no place for even the next syllable till after the preceding one has ceased to sound; nevertheless, if one hearer be present, he hears the whole of what we say, and if two hearers be present, both hear the same, and to each of them it is the whole; and if a multitude listen in silence, they do not break up the sounds like loaves of bread, to be distributed among them individually, but all that is uttered is imparted to all and to each in its entirety. Consider this, and say if it is not more incredible that the abiding Word of God should not accomplish in the universe what the passing word of man accomplishes in the ears of listeners, namely, that as the word of man is present in its entirety to each and all of the hearers, so the Word of God should be present in the entirety of His being at the same moment everywhere. (*L*, 137.2)

Anselm

God’s preservation of all things manifests His intimate immanence in them. In this way God is said to do many things that he does not, as when he is said to lead us into temptation when he does not prevent temptation that he could, and to cause what is not since he could make it be and does not. But if you consider the things which pass into non-being, you will see that it is not God who causes them not to be. For not only is there no essence he does not make, but nothing he does make could last if he did not preserve it, for when he stops preserving what he made, it is not the case that he turns what was a being into non-being, as if he caused non-being, but only that he stops causing it to be. And even when in anger, as it were, he destroys something by taking away its existence, the non-being is not from him; rather when God’s creative and preserving causality is removed, the thing reverts to the non-being it had of itself before it was created and does not have from God. If you were to ask someone for the cloak you had lent when he was naked, he does not receive his nakedness from you, but by the fact that you take back what is yours, he reverts to the condition that was his before you clothed him. (*ACMW*, 195)

Thomas Aquinas

God is said to be in all things by essence, not indeed by the essence of the things themselves, as if He were of their essence; but by His own essence; because His substance is present to all things as the cause of their being. (*ST*, Ia.8.3 ad 1)

Since God is very being by His own essence, created being must be His proper effect. Now God causes this effect in things not only when they first begin to be, but as long as they are preserved in being. Therefore as long as a thing has being, God must be present to it, according to its mode of being. Hence it must be that God is in all things, and innermostly. (ibid., Ia.8.1)

No action of an agent, however powerful it may be, acts at a distance, except through a medium. But it belongs to the great power of God that He acts immediately in all things. Hence nothing is distant from Him, as if it could be without God in itself. (ibid., Ia.8.1 ad 3)

The Reformation Fathers on God’s Immanence

John Calvin

It were cold and lifeless to represent God as a momentary Creator, who completed his work once for all, and then left it. Here, especially, we must dissent from the profane, and maintain that the presence of the divine power is conspicuous, not less in the perpetual condition of the world than in its first creation. (*ICR*,

1.16.1)

Martin Luther

> The word “mighty” does not denote a quiescent power, as one says of a temporal king that he is mighty, even though he be sitting and doing nothing. But it denotes an energetic power, a continuous activity, that works and operates without ceasing. For God does not rest, but works without ceasing, as Christ says in John 5, “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work” (*WL*, 3.163–64).

The Post-Reformation Theologians on God’s Immanence

Jonathan Edwards

> It is most evident by the works of God, that his understanding and power are infinite; for he that hath made all things out of nothing, and upholds, and governs, and manages all things every moment, in all ages, without growing weary, must be of infinite power. (*WJE*, 2.107)
>
> In divine ordinances, persons have immediate intercourse with God, either in applying to him, as in prayer and singing praises, or in receiving from him. (ibid., 2.186)

Stephen Charnock

> This power is divided ordinarily into absolute and ordinate. Absolute, is that power whereby God is able to do that which he will not do, but is possible to be done; ordinate, is that power whereby God doth that which he hath decreed to do, that is, which he hath ordained or appointed to be exercised; which are not distinct powers, but one and the same power. His ordinate power is a part of his absolute; for if he had not a power to do every thing that he could will, he might not have the power to do everything that he doth will. The object of his absolute power is all things possible; such things that imply not a contradiction, such that are not repugnant in their own nature to be done, and such as are not contrary to the nature and perfections of God to be done. (*EAG*, 2.12)

R. L. Dabney

> Once more, God's power must be conceived of as primarily immediate; i.e., His simple volition is its effectuation; and no means interpose between the will and the effect. Our wills operate on the whole external world through our members; and they, often, through implements, still more external. But God has no members; so that we must conceive of His will as producing its effects on the objects thereof as immediately as our wills do on our bodily members. Moreover the first exertion of God's power must have been immediate; for at first nothing existed to be means. God's immutability assures us that the power of so acting is not lost to Him. The attribution of such immediate power to God does not deny that He also acts through "second causes" (*LST*, 47).

William G. T. Shedd

> While, however, there is this transcendence in the spirituality of God, there is also a *resemblance* between the Infinite and the finite spirit. The invisible, immortal, and intelligent mind of man is like in kind to the Divine nature, though infinitely below it in the degree of excellence. (*DT*, 155)

Charles Hodge

> The infinitude of God, so far as space is concerned, includes his immensity and his omnipresence. These are not different attributes, but one and the same attribute, viewed under different aspects. His immensity is the infinitude of his being, viewed as belonging to his nature from eternity. He fills immensity with his presence. His omnipresence is the infinitude of his being, viewed in relation to his creatures. He is equally present with all his creatures, at all times, and in all places. He is not far from any one of us. "The Lord is in this place" may be said with equal truth and confidence, everywhere. (*ST*, 383–84)

J. I. Packer

> The psalmist meditates on the infinite and unlimited nature of God's presence, and knowledge, and power, in relation to people. *We are always in God's presence*, he says. You can cut yourself off from your fellow human beings, but you cannot get away from your Creator. (*KG*, 85)

OBJECTIONS TO GOD'S IMMANENCE

Two primary objections present themselves here. ***First***, how can God be both within and beyond the universe? ***Second***, how can God be in the universe without being limited?

Objection One—Based on God's Alleged Identity With the Universe

This objection alleges that God cannot be in the universe without being limited, for whatever is within something is limited by it. "Within" implies being encompassed by some boundaries around it, and whatever is so limited is finite. Nevertheless, God is not finite; hence, He cannot be within the universe.

Response to Objection One

God is ***in*** the universe, but not ***of*** it. Since God is indivisible (see chapter 2), all of God must be everywhere He is. All of God is everywhere, but no part of God is anywhere (since He has no parts). Therefore, in whatever sense God is "in" the universe, He is in it with His entire Being, which is infinite. Further, the sense in which God is "in" the universe is not ontological but relational; He is in the universe as the infinite sustaining Cause, of it, not as being part of the effect. So God is present in the entire universe, and His presence is infinite, not finite. He is present as its infinite and sustaining Cause, but not as part of a finite effect. And, as noted earlier, the universe is really in God, since it is finite and He is its infinite Cause (cf. Acts 17:28).

Objection Two—Based on Limitation

The universe is limited, as is every space in it. Thus, if God is in the universe, then He must be limited, for the only way something can be in a limited place is in a limited way.

Response to Objection Two

The universe is limited, but God is not. God is "in" the universe the only way an unlimited Being can be in it: He is not in it as being part of the effect, but as being its Cause. The Cause is unlimited, and the universe is limited; the Cause is causing the effect, but it transcends, rather than being part of, the effect.

Here again, it may be more helpful to speak of the universe being in God, as the Bible does: "In Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). The universe is in God the way a cause is in its effect, and a cause transcends its effect. It is because God transcends the universe He is in that ***He*** can be infinite, while ***what*** He is in is only finite.

Since God is a simple Being, He cannot be partly anywhere—all of Him must be everywhere. So all of God is in all of the universe: ***The infinite God is present in every finite space***.

This does not limit God, because while He is present within the universe, He is not part of it. Like the mind that is present in every part of the brain without being a part of the brain, so too is God in the universe without being of part of it.

SUMMARY

God's transcendence and immanence are complementary characteristics, each manifesting a different relationship with His creation. God is both transcendent over and immanent in His creation. In the former, He is distinct from pantheism, and in the latter He is different from deism. Both attributes are firmly based in the Bible, sound reasoning, and the history of Christian theology.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY OVER CREATION

Technically, sovereignty is not an attribute of God, but rather an activity of God in relation to His universe. Sovereignty is God's control over His creation, dealing with His governance over it: Sovereignty is God's rule over all reality.

Sovereignty should be distinguished from other related activities of God. ***Creation*** and ***preservation*** are the conditions of God's control over all things; by the former creation comes to be, and by the latter it continues to be. Without these there would be no creation for God to be sovereign over. More technically, ***dominion*** is God's ***control*** of all things; ***providence*** (see chapter 24) is the ***means*** by which God is in control over all, and ***sovereignty*** is God's ***right*** to control all things.

THE MEANING OF GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY (GOVERNANCE)

However, in this chapter, sovereignty is presented not simply as God's right to control all, but also as His actual sovereign dominion over all things. Generally, sovereignty (governance) means "to be in control of" or "to be in charge of." Theologically, sovereignty refers to God's complete control of all things. The

Westminster Confession of Faith states: “God, from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatever comes to pass” (chapter III).

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY

God’s sovereignty is based in several of His attributes, especially omnipotence, omnibenevolence, omniscience, and omnisapience. Since God is all-powerful, all-good, all-knowing, and all-wise, He both knows the best thing to do and has the power to do it. Further, since God is before all things, created all things, upholds all things, is above all things, and owns all things, He is the rightful ruler of all things.

God Is Prior to All Things

God is “before all things” (Col 1:17). “In the beginning God …” (Gen. 1:1). Before there was anything else, God existed. Moses wrote, “From everlasting to everlasting, thou ***art*** God” (Ps. 90:2 KJV). He is called “the First” (Rev. 22:13); “the Beginning” (Rev. 21:6); and “the Alpha” (Rev. 1:8). Repeatedly, the Bible speaks of God as being there “before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24 KJV; cf. Matt. 13:35; 25:34; Rev. 13:8; 17:8).

God was not only prior to all things, He was there “before the beginning of time” (2 Tim. 1:9). In fact, God brought time into existence when he “framed the world” (lit: “the ages”—Heb. 1:2). God “alone is immortal” (1 Tim 6:16); we receive immortality only as a gift (Rom. 2:7; 1 Cor. 15:53; 2 Tim. 1:10).

God Produced All Things

Not only is God prior to all things, but He also produced all things. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). “Through [Christ]

all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:3). "By him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him" (Col. 1:16).

God Sustains All Things

Further, God also upholds all things. Hebrews declares that God is "sustaining all things by his powerful word" (Heb. 1:3). Paul adds, "He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Col. 1:17). John informs us that God not only brought all things into existence, but He keeps them in existence: "They were created and have their being" from God (Rev. 4:11). Paul says that there is "one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live" (1 Cor. 8:6; cf. Rom. 11:36). Hebrews asserts "it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering" (Heb. 2:10).

God Transcends All Things

The God who is prior to all things He created, and who is upholding all things, is also above all things, is transcendent. The apostle affirmed that there is "one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4:6). The psalmist declared, "O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens" (Ps. 8:1). "Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth" (Ps. 57:5). "For you, O LORD, are the Most High over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods" (Ps. 97:9; cf. 108:5).

God Knows All Things

What is more, the God of the Bible is omniscient (see chapter 8); that God is all-knowing is clear from numerous passages of Scripture. The psalmist declared, "Great ***is*** our Lord, and mighty in power; His understanding ***is*** infinite" (Ps. 147:5 NKJV). God knows "the end from the beginning" (Isa. 46:10). He knows the very secrets of our heart; the psalmist confessed, "Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD. … Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain" (Ps. 139:4, 6). Indeed, "nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account" (Heb. 4:13). The apostle exclaimed, "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!" (Rom. 11:33). Even the elect were known by God (1 Peter 1:2) before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). By His limitless knowledge, He is able to predict the exact course of human history (Dan. 2, 7), and He is able to predict the names of individuals generations before they were born (cf. Isa. 45:1). Nearly two hundred prophecies were recorded by God about the Messiah, not one of which failed. God knows all things—past, present, and future.

God Can Do All Things

Furthermore, God is all-powerful: He not only knows all things, eternally and unchangeably, but He can do all things. Before performing a great miracle, He said to Abraham, "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" (Gen. 18:14). In fact, "With God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26).

God is literally omnipotent: He is not only infinite (not-limited) in His knowledge, He is also infinite in His power. He declared, "I am the LORD, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me?" (Jer. 32:27). That God's power is supernatural is evident by the miracles He performs that overpower the forces of nature. Jesus, as the Son of God, walked on water (John 6:19); stilled the storm (Matt. 8:23–27); and even raised the dead (John 11:38–45).

What is more, God's omnipotent power is manifest in the creation of the world from nothing—He simply spoke and things came into being (Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 11). Paul described Him as the "God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness' " (2 Cor. 4:6).

Of course, as we have seen, God cannot do what is actually impossible to do.

Since it is impossible for God to do things contrary to His unchanging nature, it is understandable that He cannot do any contradictory thing. The Bible says, "God … cannot lie" (Titus 1:2 NKJV), for "it is impossible for God to lie" (Heb. 6:18); "He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man, that he should change his mind" (1 Sam. 15:29). For example, God cannot create another God equal to Himself; it is literally impossible to ***create*** another being that is ***not created***. There is only one Uncreated Creator (Deut. 6:4; Isa. 45:18); everything else is a creature.

So God can do whatever is possible to do—there are no limits on His power except that it be consistent with His own unlimited nature. He can do anything that does not involve a contradiction. The Bible describes Him as "the Almighty" in numerous places (e.g., Gen. 17:1; Ex. 6:3; Num. 24:4; Job 5:17). ***He has all the might or power there is to have***.

God Owns All Things

Since God created this universe, He is the rightful owner of it. David affirmed, "The earth is the LORD'S, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it" (Ps. 24:1). God declared, "Every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills" (Ps. 50:10). Solomon added, "Who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand" (1 Chron. 29:14). The apostle Paul asserted, "You are not your own" (1 Cor. 6:19). James added, "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows" (James 1:17). And since God gives life, He has the right to take it: "See now that I myself am He! There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal" (Deut. 32:39).

God Rules Over All Things

It is because God is the all-powerful, all-wise Creator of all things that He can

rule over all. The Bible affirms God's sovereignty in many ways. Just as every sovereign controls his domain, even so the Ruler of the universe governs His creation. Isaiah's vision of God was of a heavenly King whose train filled the temple (Isa. 6:1). Yahweh is called "the Great King" (Ps. 48:2); His reign is eternal, for "the LORD is enthroned as King forever" (Ps. 29:10). He is king over all the earth, for "the LORD is King for ever and ever; the nations will perish from his land" (Ps. 10:16). He is also the almighty king: "Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle" (Ps. 24:8). As such, God rules over all things: "Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things (1 Chron. 29:11–12).

God Is in Control of All Things

Not only is God in charge of all things, He is also in control of them—nothing happens apart from God's will. Job confessed to God, "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted" (Job 42:2). The psalmist added, "Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him" (Ps. 115:3). Again, "the LORD does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths" (Ps. 135:6).

Earthly Kings Are Under God's Control

The great king Solomon acknowledged, "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases" (Prov. 21:1). God is the Sovereign over all sovereigns; He is "KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS" (Rev. 19:16). ***There is nothing any human power does that is not done under God's power***.

Human Events Are Under God's Control

God not only controls the hearts of kings, He ordains the course of history before it occurs, as He predicted through Daniel the great world kingdoms of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome (Dan. 2, 7). Indeed, mighty Nebuchadnezzar learned the hard way that "the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men" (Dan. 4:17). "The LORD Almighty has sworn, 'Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will stand' …. For the LORD Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him?" (Isa. 14:24, 27). Again, "So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Isa. 55:11).

Good Angels Are Under God's Control

God not only rules in the visible realm but also in the invisible domain. He is "over all creation," including "visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities" (Col. 1:15–16). The angels come before His throne to get their orders to obey (1 Kings 22:19–23; Job 1:6; 2:1) and constantly worship God (Neh. 9:6). Indeed, they are positioned before His throne, and "Day and night they never stop saying: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come' " (Rev. 4:8).

Evil Angels Are Under God's Control

God's sovereign domain includes not only the good angels but also the free choices of evil ones (Eph. 1:21). They too will bow before God's throne one day in total subjection to Him, for "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth [evil spirits], and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is LORD, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:10–11). Indeed, the evil spirits who deceived King Ahab were dispatched from the very throne of God:

> I saw the Lord sitting on his throne with all the host of heaven standing round him on his right and on his left. And the Lord said, "Who will entice Ahab into attacking Ramoth Gilead and going to his death there?" One suggested this, and another that. Finally, a spirit came forward, stood before the

Lord
and said, “I will entice him.”
“By what means?” the
Lord
asked.
“I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouths of all his prophets,” he said.
“You will succeed in enticing him,” said the
Lord.
“Go and do it” (
1 Kings 22:19–22
).

Satan Is Under God’s Control

Even Satan came among the good angels before God’s throne in the book of Job (1:6; 2:1). Although he wished to destroy Job, God would not permit him. Satan complained, saying, “Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land” (Job 1:10). God has power to bind Satan anytime He desires, and He does it for a thousand years in the book of Revelation (20:2).

The devil’s demons, who fell with him (Rev. 12:9; Jude 6), know they are eventually doomed; they cried out to Jesus, “What do you want with us, Son of God? … Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?” (Matt. 8:29). Satan was defeated by Christ at Calvary: “Having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross” (Col. 2:15). The devil himself “knows that his time is short” (Rev. 12:12), and while he is presently roaming the earth (1 Peter 5:8), he does so only on a leash, one held firmly by God’s sovereign hand.

Christ came “that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil” (Heb. 2:14). John said that “the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work” (1 John 3:8). John also foretells how “the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever” (Rev. 20:10).

All Human Decisions Are Under God’s Control

The Bible affirms that God is in sovereign control of everything we choose, even our own salvation: “In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will” (Eph. 1:11). “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified” (Rom. 8:29–30). According to Paul, “He chose us in him before the creation of the world” (Eph. 1:4). Peter said of Jesus to the Jews, “This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross” (Acts 2:23). Indeed, only those who are elect will believe, for Luke wrote, “All who were appointed for eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48).

Other verses confirm God’s actions involving the human will, even in matters of salvation. John declared that we are “children [of God] born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God” (John 1:13). Likewise, Paul affirmed, “It is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy” (Rom. 9:16 NKJV). He added in even stronger terms, “God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden” (Rom. 9:18).

God’s sovereignty over human decisions includes both those for Him and against Him. Peter wrote of Christ: He is “ ‘a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.’ They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for” (1 Peter 2:8). Likewise, God has destined the “vessels of wrath” who were “prepared for destruction” (Rom. 9:22 NKJV) as well as the “vessels of mercy” (Rom. 9:23 NKJV). No one comes to the Father except he is drawn by God (John 6:44).

Even actions that the Bible declares as freely chosen by human beings are said to be determined by God in advance. For example, Jesus said, “I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord” (John 10:17–18). However, in Acts 2:23, the Cross is said to be a result of God’s “set purpose and foreknowledge.” This can also be rendered “determinate counsel” (KJV) or “God’s definite plan” (***TCNT***). In short, God determined His plan from all eternity, and yet Christ fulfilled it freely.

Jesus proclaimed, “Truly the Son of man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!” (Luke 22:22 NKJV). In other words, God determined that it must happen, but when it occurred it did so as a result of a free

and responsible act of Judas.
Sometimes, in one and the same text, both God's determination and human free choice are affirmed. Again, Peter said, "This man [Jesus] was handed over to you by ***God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you … put him to death*** by nailing him to the cross" (Acts 2:23). While God determined their actions from all eternity, nevertheless, those responsible for crucifying Jesus were free to perform these actions—and they were morally responsible for them (Acts 4:28; see Volume 3, chapter 3).
In summary, the Bible declares that God is in complete control of everything that happens in the whole course of history. This includes even free choices, both good and evil, which He ordained from all eternity.

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

As mentioned earlier, God's sovereignty is grounded in several of His attributes, especially His omniscience, omnipotence, and omnisapience.

Omniscience Is Necessary for Complete Sovereignty

Granted that there are free creatures (with the power of contrary choice), God's omniscience is a necessary condition for complete sovereignty, for if God does not know for sure everything that will happen in advance, then He cannot be sure how free creatures will use their free will. Conversely, if God has infallible foreknowledge of how all free creatures will choose, then He can determine in advance for sure how everything will turn out. To have this kind of advanced certainty is to be in complete control of the results; hence, God's omniscience makes His minimal sovereignty possible.

Omnipotence Is Necessary for Complete Sovereignty

A completely sovereign God must not only know what will come to pass, but He must also be able to make it come to pass. Omnipotence makes this possible; therefore, a God who is both all-knowing and all-powerful can be in complete sovereign control of all things.
However, as already established, omnipotence does not include the power to do what is not possible to do, and it is impossible to force a free creature to do what it does not freely choose to do, since forced freedom is a contradiction in terms. Even a completely sovereign God cannot guarantee that all will be saved (universalism); thus, omnipotence does not guarantee that a completely sovereign God can save everyone (see Volume 3).

Omnisapience Is Necessary for Complete Sovereignty

Further, sovereignty is not only the ability to do everything God wills but also to do it in the best way possible. Consequently, omnisapience (all-wisdom) is necessary for proper sovereignty (see chapter 9). Since God is not only all-knowing but is also all-wise, He not only has complete sovereignty, but He has proper sovereignty as well; an all-wise Being not only knows all ends, but He also knows the best means to the best ends.
In summary, given these attributes (God being all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-wise), He can completely control every future event, including free ones, knowing for certain that everything will turn out for the best. Thus, not only are there no surprises for Him, but the way the world will turn out is exactly the way He chose it and knew it would turn out from all eternity (see chapter 8).

The Relationship Between Sovereignty and Free Choice

The nature of human free choice, particularly since the fall of humankind, is an intramural debate among those who hold to the classical view of God. Most theists hold to a libertarian view of the power of contrary choice (see immediately below). However, some, following the late Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and Jonathan Edwards, claim that since the Fall human beings have no

free choice with regard to their salvation. This will be discussed later (in Volume 3, chapters 5 and 16); meanwhile, it is important to point out that virtually all Christian theists believe that Lucifer and Adam were free before the Fall. And many believe that human beings are free to do otherwise by God's grace even since the Fall. This libertarian view of free will, which entails the power of contrary choice, is not incompatible with God's complete sovereignty over human freedom, for the Omniscient Mind knows for sure in advance what every free choice will be (see "Answering Objections to God's Sovereignty" below).

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

In addition to the strong biblical and theological arguments for God's complete sovereignty, there is an unbroken tradition from the earliest times in favor of this doctrine.

The Patristic Fathers on God's Sovereignty

The ***Didache*** (c. 80–140) states, "Accept as blessing all of the things that befall toil for nothing comes to pass apart from God" (7.378). The ***Martyrdom of Polycarp*** (c.135) affirms, "All the martyrdoms were blessed and noble, and they took place according to the will of God. For it befits those of us who profess greater piety than others to ascribe to God authority over all things" (***MP***, 1.39).

Irenaeus

Irenaeus stated, "The Maker of the universe is the Father, for He exercises a providence over all things and arranges the affairs of our world" (***AH***, 3.25.1 in Roberts and Donaldson, ***ANF***, I). Furthermore, "God rules over men and Satan too. In fact, without the will of our Father in heaven not a sparrow falls to the ground" (***AH***, 5.22.2 in ibid.).
"Therefore the Father will excel in wisdom, all human and angelic wisdom,

because He is Lord, and Judge, and the Just One, and Ruler over all. For He is good, and merciful, and patient, and saves whom He ought: nor does goodness desert Him in the exercise of justice, nor is His wisdom lessened; for He saves those whom He should save, and judges those worthy of judgment" (***AH***, 3.25.3 in ibid.).

Clement of Alexandria

"Nothing happens without the will of the Lord of the universe.… He overrules for good the crimes of His enemies" (***S***, 4.12 in ibid., II). Further,

> Sovereignty and free will are compatible, for many things in life take rise in some exercise of human reason, having received the kindling spark from God.… Now, all these things truly have their origin and existence because of divine providence—yet not without human cooperation as well. (*S*, 6.17 in ibid.)

Tertullian

Tertullian pointed out that "God hardened the heart of Pharaoh. However, he served to be influenced to his destruction, for he had already denied God" (***FBAM***, 2.14 in ibid., III). Indeed,

> Some things seem to indicate the will of God, seeing that they are allowed by Him. However, it does not necessarily follow that everything that is permitted proceeds out of the unqualified and absolute will of Him who permits it. (*OEC*, 3 in ibid., IV)

Origen

Origen contended, "Among those events that happen to men, none occur by accident or chance.… [For] this Providential government extends even to caring for the sale of two sparrows for a denarius" (***DP***, 2.11.5 in ibid.). Yet God's control is in accord with free choice:

> Some say that we are moved externally, and they put the blame away from ourselves by declaring that we are like stones and pieces of wood. They say we are dragged about by those forces that act upon us externally. However, this is neither true nor in conformity with reason. Rather, it is the statement of someone who desires to destroy the conception of free will, (ibid., 3.1.5)

No matter what happens to a Christian,

> In respect of all these occurrences, every believer should say, “You would have no power at all against me, unless it were given you from above.” For notice that the house of Job did not fall upon his sons until the devil had first received power against them, (ibid., 3.2.6)

Cyprian

“In our temptations, nothing is permitted to do evil unless power is given from Him” (***TC***, 4.25 in ibid.). “This includes pestilence and plague, which seems horrible and deadly and searches out the righteousness of each one” (***TC***, 4.25 in ibid., V).

Lactantius

> The Most High Father arranged from the beginning, and ordained all things that were accomplished.… All the events that where necessary to carry out the plan of salvation had been orchestrated by God from the beginning—from the first Adam to the last Adam all things were ordained by God. (*DI*, 4.26 in ibid., VII)

The Medieval Fathers on God’s Sovereignty

Although they generally spoke of it as God’s governance or rule, the great theologians of the Middle Ages did not neglect treating His sovereignty. Indeed, the Reformers later drew upon their teaching.

Augustine

Augustine questioned that in view of God’s care for every detail of creation “can anyone believe that it was the will of God to exempt from the laws of His providence the rise and fall of political societies?” (***CG***, 5.10). “God allows

nothing to remain unordered and … knows all things before they come to pass" (ibid., 5:8).

> Nor are we dismayed by the difficulty that what we choose to do freely is done of necessity, because He whose foreknowledge cannot be deceived foreknew that we would choose to do it.... We do not deny, of course, an order of causes in which the will of God is all-powerful. On the other hand, we do not give this order the name fate. (ibid., 5.8–9)

However,

> Our main point is that, from the fact that to God the order of all causes is certain, there is not [a] logical deduction that there is no power in the choice of our will. [The fact of the matter is that] our choices fall within the order of the causes which is known for certain to God and is contained in His foreknowledge—for human choices are the causes of human acts.... [Thus,] absolutely all bodies are subject to the will of God; as, indeed, are all wills, too, since they have "no power save what He gave them" and He knows exactly what they will do with it.... Our conclusion is that our wills have the power to do all that God wanted them to do and foreknew that they could do. Their power, such as it is, is a real power, (ibid.)

As to evil choices,

> He whose foreknowledge cannot be deceived foresaw, not the man's fate or fortune or what not, but that the man himself would be responsible for his own sin. No man sins unless it is his choice to sin; and his choice not to sin, that, too, God foresaw, (ibid., 5.10)

"He is the Cause of all causes, although not of all choices" (ibid., 5.8).

Anselm

Anselm affirmed that God can control the entire universe, including free actions, because of His infallible foreknowledge: "God, who knows all truth and only truth, sees all things just as they are—whether they be free or necessary; and, conversely, as He sees them so they are" (***TIR***, 159). Therefore, the future is certain, because "what is foreknown ***must*** happen in the future, and what is able not to happen in the future can't be foreknown" (***TFE***, 185). This, of course, does not mean humans are not free, "for God, who foresees what you are

willingly going to do, foreknows that your will is not compelled or prevented by anything else; hence this activity of the will is free" (***TIR***, 154).
God's control of all events is secure because, for example,

> When Satan turned his will to what he should not, both that willing and that turning were something; and yet he had this something only from God and by the will of God, since he could neither move his will nor will anything except through the permission of the One who makes all substantial and accidental and universal and individual natures.... [Thus,] insofar as Satan's will and its turning, or movement, are something, they are good and they are from God. But insofar as his will lacks the justice that it shouldn't lack, it is something evil —though not purely evil; and whatever is evil is not from God but from willing, or from the moving of the will. (*TFE*, 183)

Thomas Aquinas

For Thomas Aquinas, a Sovereign is one who governs—God, as the supreme Sovereign, governs the whole universe. In his "Treatise on Divine Government" in the *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas argued against "certain philosophers [who] denied the government of the world, saying that all things happened by chance" (ibid., 1.103.1).
Further, "God possesses, in its very essence, the government of all things, even the very least" (ibid., 1.103.6). With the exception of His sustaining causality of all things, God does not govern all things directly, for "God so governs things that He makes some of them to be causes of other things in government; as in the case of a teacher, who not only imparts knowledge to his pupils but also makes some of them to be the teachers of others" (ibid.).
What is more, nothing "happens outside the order of the divine government," for while "it is possible for an effect to happen outside the order of some particular cause, [it is] not possible outside the order of the universal cause" (ibid., 1.103.7).[1] Since God is the universal Cause of all being, "it is impossible for anything to occur outside the order of the divine government" (ibid.). Even evil does not escape God's sovereign control, for "from the very fact that from one point of view something seems to evade the order of divine providence considered in regard to one particular cause, it must necessarily come back to that order as regards some other cause" (ibid.).
As to how God controls the future and yet humans are free, Aquinas's answer is twofold.

First, "things known by God are contingent because of their proximate causes, while the knowledge of God, which is the first cause, is necessary" (ibid., 1a.4.14).

Second,

> When a thing is properly disposed to receive the movement of the first mover, a perfect action in accord with the intention of the first mover follows, but if a thing is not properly disposed and suited to receive the motion of the first mover, an imperfect action follows. [Consequently,] for this reason we maintain that the action pertaining to sin is from God, but the sin is not from God. (*OE*, 110)

"Similarly, when something moves itself [in an act of free will], it is not precluded that it is moved by another from whom it has this very ability to which it moves itself" (ibid., 111). That is, God gives us the power of free choice, but we are responsible for exercising it. Once again, He gave the ***fact*** of freedom, but we are responsible for the ***acts*** of freedom.

Finally, according to Aquinas, nothing "can resist the order of the divine government" (***ST***, 1.103.8) in general, for "every inclination of anything, whether natural or voluntary, is nothing but a kind of impression from the first mover: just as the inclination of the arrow toward a fixed point is nothing but an impulse received from the archer." Therefore, every agent, whether natural or voluntary, attains to its divinely appointed end, as though through its own accord —for this reason God is said "to order all things sweetly" (ibid.).

As for predestination, Aquinas wrote,

> Thus, as men are ordained to eternal life through the providence of God, it likewise is part of that providence to permit some to fall away from that end; this is called reprobation. Thus, as predestination is a part of providence, in regard to those ordained to eternal salvation, so reprobation is a part of providence in regard to those who turn aside from that end. Hence reprobation implies not only foreknowledge, but also something more, as does providence, as was said above (Question 22, Answer 1). Therefore, as predestination includes the will to confer grace and glory; so also reprobation includes the will to permit a person to fall into sin, and to impose the punishment of damnation on account of that sin. (ibid., Ia.23.3)

The Reformers on God's Sovereignty

The sovereignty of God was a hallmark of Reformation theology. God is in complete and sovereign control not only of the universe but also of the process of salvation.

Martin Luther

Martin Luther observed that God has in His hand the hearts of all human beings. Thus in Job 38:10–11, “God said, ‘Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further; and here shall the proud waves be stayed’…. Just so hearts of men, inflamed by anger rage terrible. But God has set limits for their fury and angers—limits which they are not allowed to pass” (***WLS***, 879). Also, Luther wrote, “The saying of Augustine if sensibly understood fits this thought. He remarks that God controls the things He has created in such a way that He allows them to take their own natural course” (ibid., 1453).

John Calvin

> Since the arrangement of all things is in the hand of God, since to him belongs the disposal of life and death, he arranges all things by his sovereign council, in such a way that individuals are born who are doomed from the womb to certain death and to glorify him by their destruction. (*ICR*, 3.23.6)

Further, “we must consider, that what each individual possesses has not fallen to him by chance, but by the distribution of the sovereign Lord of all” (ibid., 2.8). Thus, divine risk was not an option for Calvin, because he stated that “the conditions of men do not come about by chance. God directs in hidden ways all that takes place” (***CC***, 23.6).

Furthermore, although God sovereignly ordains all things, evil is not attributable to Him, for “we must also hold that God’s action is distinct from Man’s, so that Providence is free from all iniquity and his decrees have not affinity with the wrong doing of man” (ibid.).

In addition,

> God is deemed omnipotent, not because he can act though he may cease or be idle, or because by a general instinct he continues the order of nature previously appointed; but because, governing heaven and earth by his providence, he so overrules all things that nothing happens without his counsel. For when it is said in the Psalms, “He has done whatsoever he has pleased” (115: 3), the thing meant is his sure and deliberate purpose. It were insipid to interpret the psalmist’s words in philosophic fashion, to mean that God is the primary agent.... This rather is the solace of the faithful, in their adversity, that every thing which they endure is by the ordination and command of God, that they are under his hand. (*ICR*, 1.16.3)

Hence, “there is no random power, or agency, or motion in the creatures, who are so governed by the secret counsel of God, that nothing happens but what he has knowingly and willingly decreed” (ibid., 1.16.1–9).
And so

> what seems to us contingence, faith will recognize as the secret impulse of God. The reason is not always equally apparent, but we ought undoubtedly to hold that all the changes which take place in the world are produced by the secret agency of the hand of God. At the same time, that which God has determined, though it must come to pass, is not, however, precisely, or in its own nature, necessary.... Hence, again, we see that there was good ground for the distinction which the Schoolmen made between necessity, secundum quid, and necessity absolute, also between the necessity of consequent and of consequence, (ibid., 1.16.9)

The Post-Reformers on God’s Sovereignty

Jacob Arminius

> [God’s providence] preserves, regulates, governs and directs all things, and nothing in the world happens fortuitously or by chance.... [Beside this,] I place in subjection to Divine Providence both the freewill and even the actions of a rational creature so that nothing can be done without the will of God, not even any of those things which are done in opposition to it. (*WJA*, 1.251)

Furthermore,

> Through creation, dominion over all things which have been created by himself, belongs to the Creator. It is, therefore, primary, being dependent on no other dominion or on that of no other person; and it is, on this account, chief because there is none greater.... [And,] it is absolute, because it is over the entire creature, according to the whole, and according to all and each of its parts, and to all the relations which subsist between the Creator and the creature. It is, consequently, perpetual, that is, so long as the creature itself exists, (ibid., 2.66)
> It is not agreeable to this right of God, either that he delivers up his creature to

another who may domineer over such creature, at his arbitrary pleasure, so that he be not compelled to render to God an account of the exercise of his sovereignty, and be able, without any demerit on the part of the creature, to inflict every evil on a creature capable of injury, or, at least, not for any good of this creature; or that he [God] command an act to be done by the creature, for the performance of which he neither has, nor can have, sufficient and necessary powers; or that he employ the creature to introduce sin into the world, that he may, by punishing or by forgiving it, promote his own glory; or, lastly, to do concerning the creature whatever he is able, according to his absolute power, to do concerning him, that is eternally to punish or to afflict him, without [his having committed] sin. (ibid., 2.66–67)

Francis Turretin

Francis Turretin stated that God's sovereignty is founded on His preeminence and beneficence:

> First is eminence of power above others, for it is in accordance with the nature of things that the superior and more excellent should have dominion over the inferior and more ignoble.... Second is beneficence by which one man acquires a right over another. He is therefore lord because He is kind. Since, then, God is established in the highest preeminence and has bestowed upon his creatures as his work innumerable blessings, he is most justly called the Lord of all. (*IET*, 250)

Furthermore, Turretin wrote,

> The former [natural dominion] is founded upon the decree of Providence by which He [God] predetermined all things and events.... The principal property of God's dominion is that it is not only universal but also absolute and unlimited. ... As God is an independent and truly self-powerful being, so he is evidently liable to no censure or judgment (
>
> Job 9:12
>
> ;
>
> Dan. 4:25
>
>), who can do with his own what he will (
>
> Matt. 20:15
>
>), and with whom no one can contend or say to him, why hast thou done this? although the reason of his works and judgments may be hidden from us [
>
> Job 33:13
>
>]. (ibid., 251)

Stephen Charnock

> [God] hath an absolute right over all things within the circuit of heaven and earth; though his throne be in heaven, as the place where his glory is most eminent and visible, his authority most exactly obeyed, yet his kingdom extends itself to the lower parts of the earth.... [For] He doth not muffle and cloud up himself in heaven, or confine his sovereignty to that place, his royal power extends to all visible, as well as invisible things: he is proprietor and possessor of all (Deut. 10:14)..... He hath the right to dispose of all as he pleases. (*EAG*, 2:362)
>
> [God] is not determined by his creatures in any of his motions, but determines the creatures in all; his actions are not regulated by any law without him, but by a law within him, the law of his own nature.... [So] it is impossible he can have any rule without himself, because there is nothing superior to himself, nor doth he depend upon any in the exercise of his government; he needs no servants in it, when he uses creatures: it is not out of want of their help, but for the manifestation of his wisdom and power. What he doth by his subjects, he can do by himself, (ibid., 373)
>
> He is the sovereign Lord, as he is the almighty Creator. The relation of an entire Creator induceth the relation of an absolute Lord; he that gives being motion, that is the sole cause of the being of a thing, which was before nothing, that hath nothing to concur with him, nothing to assist him, but by his sole power commands it to stand up into being, is the unquestionable Lord and proprietor of that thing that hath no dependence but upon him; and by this act of creation, which extended to all things, he became universal Sovereign over all things: and those that waive the excellency of his nature as the foundation of his government, easily acknowledge the sufficiency of it upon his actual creation. His dominion of jurisdiction results from creation. (ibid., 368)

Jonathan Edwards

Jonathan Edwards stated that God is the absolute Sovereign, and that Christ, as He is God, is absolutely sovereign, for

> it is most evident by the works of God, that his understanding and power are infinite; for he that hath made all things out of nothing, and upholds, and governs, and manages all things every moment, in all ages, without growing weary, must be of infinite power. (*WJE*, 2.107)
>
> In the person of Christ are conjoined absolute *sovereignty* and perfect *resignation*. This is another unparalleled conjunction. Christ, as he is God, is the absolute sovereign of the world; the sovereign disposer of all events.... [Thus,] the decrees of God are all his sovereign decrees; and the work of creation, and all God's works of providence, are his sovereign works. It is he that worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will.

Col. 1:16–17

: “By him, and through him, and to him, are all things.”

John 5:17

: “The Father worketh hitherto, and I work.”

Matt. 8:3

: “I will, be thou clean” (ibid., 1.682).

The sovereignty of God is his ability and authority to do whatever pleases him: whereby he doth according to his will in the armies of heaven and amongst the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay his hand, or say unto him what dost thou? The following things belong to the sovereignty of God: (1) Supreme, universal and infinite Power; whereby he is able to do what he pleases.... (2) That he has supreme authority; absolute and most perfect right to do what he wills, without subjection to any superior authority or any derivation of authority from any other, or limitation by any distinct independent authority, either superior, equal, or inferior.... (3) That his Will is supreme, underived, and independent on any thing without himself; being in every thing determined by His own counsel, having no other rule but his own wisdom; his Will not being subject to or restrained by the will of any other, and other wills being perfectly subject to His. (4) That his Wisdom, which determines His Will is supreme, perfect, underived, self-sufficient, and independent.... It is the glory and greatness of the Divine Sovereign that His Will is determined by his own infinite, all-sufficient wisdom in everything; and is in nothing at all directed either by inferior wisdom, or by no wisdom; whereby it would become senseless arbitrariness, determining and acting without reason, design, or end. (ibid., 1.71)

Charles Hodge

The same doctrine is involved in the absolute dependence of all things on God, and in his absolute sovereignty over them. “Thou, even thou, art Jehovah alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all” (

Neh. 9:6

). “By Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visi and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him: and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist” (

Col. 1:16–17

). “Thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created’

Rev. 4:11

). The all things spoken of in these passages is made to include everything out o God. There can, therefore, be no preexisting matter, existing independently of his will. Everything out of God is said to owe its existence to his will. (*ST*, 1.X.3)

It is enough for us to know that God does govern all his creatures and all their actions, and that his government while absolutely efficacious is infinitely wise

and good, directed to secure the highest ends, and perfectly consistent with his own perfections and with the nature of his creatures.

The Scriptures are full of this doctrine. God uses the nations with the absolute control that a man uses a rod or a staff. They are in his hands, and He employs them to accomplish his purposes. He breaks them in pieces as a potter's vessel, or He exalts them to greatness, according to his good pleasure.

The Bible no less clearly teaches that God exercises a controlling power over the free acts of men, as well as over their external circumstances. This is true of all their acts, good and evil. It is asserted in general terms, that his dominion extends over their whole inward life, and especially over their good acts.

With regard to the sinful acts of men, the Scriptures teach that they are so under the control of God that they can occur only by his permission and in execution of his purposes. He so guides them in the exercise of their wickedness that the particular forms of its manifestation are determined by his will, (ibid., 1.XI.2)

Karl Barth

God the Father as the ruling Creator is obviously not an oppressor, and Christ as a subject creature is obviously not oppressed. There is nothing here which need frighten him. There is nothing here which need cause him to flee or rebel. To be wholly and unreservedly under the universal lordship of God, to be wholly and unreservedly a creaturely subject, is not in any sense a constraint, a misfortune, an outrage or a humiliation for the man who as a Christian can see actualized in Jesus Christ both the lordship of God and also the subordination of the creature. (*CD*, part 3, 241)

J. I. Packer

As our Maker, he owns us, and as our Owner, he has a right to dispose of us. He has, therefore, a right to make laws for us and to reward us according to whether or not we keep them. In most modern states, the legislature and the judiciary are divided, so that the judge does not make the laws he administers; but in the ancient world this was not so, and it is not so with God. He is both Lawgiver and Judge. (*KG*, 141)

The making known of God's name, that is, as always in Scripture, his nature and character, is a basic theme in Exodus. In chapter 3 , God had declared his name as "I am who I am" or "I am" simply, and in chapte 6 , as "Jehovah." These names spoke of him as self-existing, self-determining, and sovereign, (ibid., 168)

ANSWERING OBJECTIONS TO GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

Many objections have been leveled against God's sovereignty. While most of these come from outside of theism, recently neotheists have offered objections from within a broad theistic perspective. While nontheistic views have already been addressed (see Volume 1, chapter 2), theistic protests to their view of sovereignty and free choice will largely be the focus of concern here.

Objection One—Based Upon Prayer for God's Will to Be Done

Neotheist John Sanders wrote,

> Finally, in that most familiar of prayers, the Lord's Prayer, Jesus instructs us to pray that the Father's will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matt. 6:10). Requesting that God's will be done recognizes that God's sovereignty has not been realized yet.... There is an eschatological element to the divine project, for not everything happens on earth as the Father desires. We are to work and pray for God's will to be done in our lives now and in the age to come. But it is not yet a complete reality in our world. This Jesus well knew. (*GWR*, 114–15)

Response to Objection One

Actually, Sanders' qualified use of "not yet" answers his own objection. Of course, God's sovereign will is not yet completely accomplished on earth; He only willed that it would be so in the end. Thus, there is nothing in this or any other passage of Scripture to hint that in the end the complete, sovereign will of God will fail.

The many passages cited above affirm the contrary. For instance, "Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him" (Ps. 115:3). Again, "***The LORD does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth***, in the seas and all their depths" (Ps. 135:6).

Objection Two—Based Upon Humankind's Dominion

Using Genesis 1:28, another neotheist, Clark Pinnock, argues,

> In a world reflecting a triune community, God does not monopolize the power. Were he to do so, there could be no created order, certainly not a dynamic one with free agents, and not one producing love and communion.... [Hence,] to achieve that kind of creation, God needs to deploy his power in more subtle ways. Though no power can stand against him, God wills the existence of creatures with the power of self-determination. This means that God is a superior power who does not cling to his right to dominate and control but who voluntarily gives creatures room to flourish.... [So,] by inviting them to have dominion over the world (for example), God willingly surrenders power and makes possible a partnership with the creature. (*OG*, 113)

Response to Objection Two

One problem here is the failure to see that a God with infallible foreknowledge can sovereignly will to accomplish things through the free will He gives to His creatures. Just the fact that God infallibly knows what each creature will do with his freedom in advance is sufficient to assure that He has complete sovereign control over every event ***and*** the final outcome (see chapter 2). Otherwise, He would not have willed to create such a world; this is to say nothing of the power that God has to persuade and even overrule free choices, which even neotheists admit God does on occasion (see Boyd, ***GP***, 34).

Another way to pinpoint the difficulty is to note that the neotheistiac objection seems to be based on the idea that God cannot ***give*** power to free creatures without ***giving away*** power. This is a denial of infinite power, for when an infinitely powerful Being exercises power, He does not have only a finite amount of power remaining; He still has infinite power. God does not cease being an infinite power by giving us power any more than He ceases being a Creator by making a creation. Likewise, He is not transformed into less than completely sovereign by giving creatures the power of free choice.

In short, God gives power to creatures without giving it away, for He is the primary Cause, and free choice is only a secondary cause. All effects preexist in

their primary cause;[2] as a result, we can see that God is in ultimate and complete control of the entire universe through the causes He has produced, including free causes. Again, as Aquinas put it,

> When something moves itself [in an act of free will], it is not precluded that it is moved by another from whom it has this very ability to which it moves itself. And therefore it is not contrary to liberty that God is the cause of the act of free will. (*OE*, 11)

Objection Three—Based Upon Alleged Limited Foreknowledge

Neotheists claim that God does not have infallible foreknowledge of future free acts; since this has already been discussed (in chapter 2), it will only be briefly summarized here. At the heart of the neotheistic view of limited omniscience is this reasoning:

(1) God infallibly knows whatever is possible to know.
(2) It is not possible to infallibly know future free acts.
(3) Therefore, God does not infallibly know future free acts.

Response to Objection Three

Classical theists have no difficulty with the logical form of this basic argument about God's omniscience. Of course, God cannot know the impossible; the disagreement is with the content of the second premise, namely, that it is not possible to infallibly know any future free acts. Classical theists contend that the defense given for this premise is seriously lacking. An examination of each of neotheism's arguments for the nature of free choice will reveal why (see chapter 8).

Objection Four—Based Upon the Nature of Free Choice

The basis of the neotheist's objection to God's complete sovereignty (control) is that people are free in a libertarian sense of having the ability to choose otherwise. However, many strong Calvinists (see Volume 3, chapter 3) do not grant this definition of free will, and even if one accepts it, neotheists have not demonstrated that this is incompatible with God's complete sovereignty. According to this reasoning,

(1) Free acts (in the libertarian sense) are those that could have been otherwise.
(2) God's infallible knowledge of events means they cannot be otherwise (for if they could, then God would have been mistaken and not infallible in His knowledge).
(3) Hence, infallible knowledge of free acts is impossible.

Response to Objection Four

In reply, this conclusion can be challenged in at least two ways.
First, it assumes a particular view of free choice called libertarianism that not all theists accept. Many, particularly in the strong Calvinistic tradition, argue that free acts are "doing what one desires." God is capable of giving free agents the desires He decrees; hence, future free acts in this sense can be free and yet determined and, therefore, infallibly known in advance.
Second, classical theists in the tradition of the medieval Fathers—the early Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas—point out that there is no contradiction involved in claiming that (1) a future free act is determined from the relationship of God's infallible foreknowledge, and yet (2) also free when viewed from the relationship of our free choice (in the sense of the power to do otherwise). Thus, infallible foreknowledge and free choice are not contradictory, for the law of noncontradiction demands that to be contradictory, two propositions must affirm and deny the same thing at the same time and ***in the same relationship***. In this case, one and the same event is determined in one relationship, but not determined ***in a different relationship***—one in relation to God's knowledge, and the other in relation to our free choice.

Augustine's Response

As to the relation between God's absolute and unchangeable foreknowledge and man's free will, the early Augustine held that God's "foreknowledge cannot be deceived" (***CG***, 5.10), for God infallibly foreknows exactly how we are going to use our free choice. Thus, "the conclusion is that we are by no means under compulsion to abandon free choice in favor of divine foreknowledge, nor need we deny—God forbid!—that God knows the future, as a condition for holding free choice" (ibid.). Hence,

> A man does not sin because God foreknew that he would sin. Nay, it cannot be doubted but that it is the man himself who sins when he does sin, because He, whose foreknowledge is infallible, foreknew … that the man himself would sin, who if he wills not, sins not. But if he shall not will to sin, even this did God foreknow, (ibid.)

Anselm's Response

Anselm argued that God's omniscience includes infallible foreknowledge of everything, including free acts: "He foreknows every future event. But what God foreknows will necessarily occur in the same manner as He foreknows it to occur" (***TIR***, 153). "God, who foresees what you are willingly going to do, foreknows that your will is not compelled or prevented by anything else; hence this activity of the will is free" (ibid., 154).

Anselm hastened to point out that God's necessary foreknowledge does not make the event necessary: "Although He foreknows all future events, nevertheless He does not foreknow every future event as occurring by necessity, [for] He foreknows that some things are going to occur through the free will of rational creatures" (ibid., 158). Also, "He sees only what is true—whether this results from necessity or from freedom" (ibid., 161). Consequently, "God, who knows all truth and only truth, sees all things just as they are—whether they be free or necessary; and, conversely, as He sees them so they are" (ibid., 159). Thus, God's knowledge of everything, including future free acts, is "necessary," "unchangeable," "eternal," and "immutable" (ibid., 162–63).

Thomas Aquinas's Response

God is the efficient Cause of all things, and all effects preexist in their efficient cause; thus, whatever exists must preexist in God. He knows Himself perfectly, and to know Himself perfectly entails knowing all of the various kinds of perfection in Himself, as well as those who can participate in His likeness. Therefore, it follows that God knows whatever exists or will exist perfectly insofar as they all preexist in Him (***ST***, la.14.5).

God knows everything in one eternal Now, including the past, present, and future, and He knows the future before it happens in time. So when time changes, God's knowledge does not change, since He knew in advance it would change. In other words, God knows ***what*** we know, but not in the ***way*** we know it; that is, in successive time frames. God knows the whole of time from (in) eternity, but He knows what is before and what is after the present momentum (now) of human history (ibid., la.14.15). He knows the whole series of temporal moments in His one eternal Now.

God does not know things sequentially, since He is timeless and knows all things eternally at once. Nor can God know things inferentially, for He is simple and knows all things through the oneness of Himself (ibid., la.14.7). Therefore, God does not have to wait for things to happen before He can know them: He knows them eternally in Himself as the primary Cause of all things, including the power of free choice. In brief, God knows the created effects ***in*** Himself, but not ***through*** other things in a discursive way (ibid., la.14.7 ad 2). He knows them this way because, again, all effects preexist in their first Cause.

God not only knows all things in and through Himself, but He also causes all things by His knowledge, for God causes all things by His being. His Being is the cause of all other beings, and God's Being and His knowledge are identical. Hence, God causes all things by His knowledge, including future free choices (ibid., la.14.8).

Further, God's knowledge is not simply of the actual; He also knows the potential. He knows both what is and what could be, for God can know whatever is real in any way it can be known. Now, both the actual and the potential are real—only the impossible has no reality (ibid., la.14.9). Thus, God cannot know what is impossible to know, since contradictions do not fall under the omniscience of God. However, God can know future contingents; that is, things that are dependent on free choice. The future is a potential that preexists in God, and He knows whatever exists in Himself as the Cause of those things (ibid.,

la.14.13).
Therefore, as the omniscient Being, God necessarily knows true future contingents. This He can do because He knows necessarily that what will be must be; that is, if it will be and God knows it, then what God knows about what will be, must happen. The omniscient Mind cannot be wrong about what it knows; therefore, the statement that "everything known by God must necessarily be" is true if it refers to the statement of the truth of God's knowledge, but it is false if it refers to the necessity of the contingent events (ibid., la.14.4).
In summary, God has infallible knowledge from all eternity of everything that would ever occur, including all free actions. This infallible knowledge does not diminish the freedom of the creature, since God knew ***for sure*** (i.e., determined) what they would ***freely*** do (i.e., by free acts). Consequently, no contradiction is involved with God's complete control of the world in advance; He has absolute certainty of how everything will turn out, including our free choices.

Objection Five—Based Upon the Presence of Evil

Finally, one objection from outside theism: If God is sovereign and can do whatever He pleases, then why is there evil in the world? Surely, a God who is all-powerful ***could*** eliminate evil, and a God who is all-good ***would*** want to do so. Yet evil is not eradicated—it is alive and well on planet earth. Hence, it would seem to follow that no such sovereign God exists.

Response to Objection Five

In reply, the traditional theist notes several things.
First, the logic of this argument fails, for simply that God has ***not yet*** vanquished evil does not mean He never will. Indeed, according to Scripture, God will eventually defeat evil (see Rev. 21–22).
Second, God's sovereignty does not mean He can do anything; He is a ***good*** Sovereign, not a tyrannical one. God must act in accordance with His unchangeably good nature, and He must act in accordance with His infinite

wisdom. However, an infinitely good and wise Being is in a much better position than finite and evil beings to know what is the best way to achieve the best world.

Third, since God in His infinite goodness and His wisdom has granted human beings the power of free choice, He cannot violate this without a contradiction. As we have seen, forced freedom is not freedom at all; hence, even an all-powerful God cannot do what is contradictory, and it is contradictory to force a creature to act freely.

In summation, God is sovereign, but in His sovereignty He has willed that we are free. Thus, Jesus mourned, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but ***you were not willing***" (Matt. 23:37, emphasis added). Likewise, Jesus said to the Jews, "***You are not willing*** to come to me that you may have life" (John 5:40, emphasis added). As to why God has allowed so much evil and so long, Peter wrote, "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). In short, God is patient and He desires all to repent, but in the end God ***will*** defeat evil (1 Cor. 15:24–28; Rev. 21:4). In fact, His nature, as all-good and all-powerful, guarantees it, for an all-good God ***will*** defeat evil, and an all-powerful God ***can*** defeat evil.

CONCLUSION

The biblical, theological, and historical foundation of God's complete and sovereign control over all human events—past, present, and future—stands firm. Challenges both from within and without are easily answered. Even without the exercise of His persuasive influence on free creatures, God could control the destiny of all things simply by His infallible foreknowledge of how every free creature will choose to exercise freedom.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

GOD'S PROVIDENCE IN CREATION

Providence is related to other activities of God but should be distinguished from them. God's sovereignty or governance (see chapter 23) denotes the ***fact*** of His control of all things, but His providence is the ***means*** by which He controls everything.

God is not only the Producer of creation, but He is also the Preserver of it (see chapter 22). Further, He not only produced it and preserves it, but He also ***provides*** for it. The contrast can be charted as follows:

(1) ***Creation***—explains the world's existence (its coming to be);
(2) ***Preservation***—explains the world's continuance (its continuing to be);
(3) ***Providence***—explains the world's control (its direction of being).

THE DEFINITION OF GOD'S PROVIDENCE

The word ***providence*** comes from the Latin *pro* and *video*, meaning "foresight," and by that "a careful arrangement prepared beforehand for the accomplishment of predetermined ends" (A. A. Hodge, ***OT***, 258). Although providence is sometimes used to include God's sustenance and preservation of the universe, it is here used of how He governs it. As Archibald Alexander Hodge (1823–1886)

put it, providence is the means by which He

> continually controls and directs the actions of all his creatures thus preserved, so that he never violates the law of their several natures, yet he infallibly causes all actions and events singular and universal to occur according to the eternal and immutable plan embraced in his decree, (ibid., 262)

A. H. Strong said, “Providence is that continuous agency of God by which he makes all the events of the physical and moral universe fulfill the original design with which he created it” (***ST***, 419).

God’s providence relates to the means by which He controls His creation so as to accomplish His sovereign will for it. It also speaks of His ***care*** for His creatures in bringing about His purposes. This care is both general and particular, manifested in the universe as a whole and in each part of the universe specifically. It extends on earth from the tiniest particle of matter to the pinnacle of God’s creation—human beings.

By God’s infinite wisdom, He established a definite goal and will use the best means to achieve it. Because of His infinite goodness, He makes certain He will do the best for His creatures, and infinite righteousness makes certain that all is governed rightly, punishing evil and rewarding good. Providence is the means by which this is executed in the universe.

Providence stands between two extremes: ***fatalism*** and ***indeterminism***. The former maintains certainty but denies freedom, while the latter maintains spontaneity but denies certainty. Divine providence, however, maintains both certainty and liberty.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD’S PROVIDENCE

Within the context of the Christian theistic worldview,[1] providence takes on seven characteristics. It is

(1) personal,
(2) thoughtful,
(3) careful,
(4) universal,

(5) particular,
(6) effectual, and
(7) supernatural.

This is so because it is exercised by a personal, thoughtful, careful, and powerful God who is interested in His creation as a whole and in each particular part of it.

Providence is personal because God is a personal Being who is concerned about the persons and things He has made.
Providence is thoughtful because God is an intelligent Person who takes thought in the care of His creation.
Providence is careful because God is a loving Person who cares for His creatures.
Providence is universal because God is all-knowing and all-loving and, hence, He knows and cares for all He has made.
Providence is particular because in God's omniscience nothing escapes notice of His omnibenevolent care.
Providence is effectual because God is omnipotent, and nothing hinders the accomplishment of His will. He can do anything that is possible to do.
Providence is supernatural because the all-powerful God exists beyond the natural world and is able to intervene in it (see Volume 1, chapter 3).

PROVIDENCE CONTRASTED WITH OTHER WORLDVIEWS

Providence is defined differently by different worldviews (see Volume 1, chapter 2). A God who has no personality or intelligence (such as in many forms of pantheism) has no personal providential care for the universe. Likewise, a God who does not perform miracles exercises no supernatural providential care for His creation. A finite God is limited in what kind of providential care He performs for His creation. In short, only a theistic God has general, special, miraculous, and totally effective providence of all creation. Generally, the differences may be stated as follows.

Theism and Providence

Again, within the context of a Christian theistic worldview, providence takes on several characteristics: It is personal, thoughtful, careful, universal, particular, supernatural, and completely effective. This is so because it is exercised by a God characterized by these attributes who is deeply interested in His creation.

Neotheism and Providence

Neotheism (or "openness theology") is a significant deviation from the classical theistic view of providence, since it insists that God does not have infallible foreknowledge of future free events. If this were so, then His ability to providentially preplan events for the care of His creation would be limited in important ways, since God too would be surprised by events that happen as a result of human choices (see chapter 8).

Deism and Providence

Most traditional deists hold to all the characteristics of providence that theists do, except sustenance in existence and supernatural care, since traditional deism denies that miracles occur. This is why deists like Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790) could call for prayer at the First Continental Congress. It is also why Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826) could speak of God's providence in the ***Declaration of Independence***, saying, "For the support of this Declaration, with firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor." Pondering the incredible design in nature, Jefferson wrote, "It is impossible, I say, for the human mind not to believe that there is in all this, design, cause and effect up to an ultimate cause, a Fabricator of all things from matter and motion, their Preserver and Regulator."[2]

Finite Godism and Providence

As deism is a truncated form of theism, modern finite godism is a truncated form of deism. In general, finite godists hold to deism minus God's omnipotence, though some question also His complete omnibenevolence. John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) spoke of God as "a Being of great but limited power, how or by what limited we cannot even conjecture; of great, and perhaps unlimited intelligence, but perhaps, also, more narrowly limited than his power." This God "desires, and pays some regard to, the happiness of his creatures, but who seems to have other motives of action which he cares more for, and who can hardly be supposed to have created the universe for that purpose alone" (***TER***, 194). "If the maker of the world can [do] all that he will, he wills misery, and there is no escape from the conclusion" (ibid., 37).

Atheism and Providence

Strictly speaking, atheism denies all providential activity, since it does not believe there is a God of any kind who can exercise care for the world. What theists call providence, atheists call luck, chance, coincidence, or even fate. They point to the fact that highly improbable events do occur—the unlikelihood of getting six sixes on the first roll of six dice does not mean it never happens. The same is allegedly true no matter the odds; atheists claim that unusual results can be obtained on the first "roll" in the universe as well.

Polytheism and Providence

Polytheists fall into two broad categories: those who are connected with pantheism (see next) and those who are not. Since the latter deny any ultimate good or personal force in the universe, they are often left with some form of fate.

This was particularly evident in the Greek tragedies, where gods, like Zeus, encounter a fate beyond themselves. Fate, so conceived, is a determined destiny beyond any individual's control, whether a mortal human or an immortal god.

Pantheism and Providence

There are many forms of pantheism (see Volume 1, chapter 2), and what is called "providence" by theists is understood differently by different types of pantheism.
For ***absolute*** pantheism, as represented by the Greek philosopher Parmenides and the Advainta Vedanta school of Hinduism, all is absolutely one, and everything else is an illusion.
For ***emanational*** pantheism, as represented by the third-century philosopher Plotinus, everything flows from God as a flower unfolds from a seed. "Providence" can mean no more than the absolutely predetermined flow of all things from God and back to God.
In the ***developmental*** pantheism of G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831), the events of history are the inevitable unfolding manifestations of Absolute Spirit.
According to the ***modal*** pantheism of the rationalist Benedict Spinoza (1632–1677), all finite events are merely modes or moments in the thought of an infinite Being whose determined drive produces all things.
Multilevel pantheism, as expressed by Radhakrishnan's form of Hinduism, sees various levels, or God's determined manifestations, in the cycles of reincarnation.
Permeational pantheism, such as the impersonal Force of Taoism, penetrates all things. Zen Buddhism and the ***Star Wars*** movies of George Lucas exemplify this view, as does ***The Celestine Prophecy*** of James Redfield, who replaces personal providences with synchronicity.
Those like Plotinus, Spinoza, Christian Science, and others that see a Mind present within the universe often have a form of ***immanent*** providence. That is, contrary to theism, which affirms a transcendent God who exercises providential care over the universe, these forms of pantheism have a Mind working within the universe. Hence, unlike atheists, all is not the result of chance, but the working of Intelligence within the world process. Hegel said this is manifest in the developmental outworking of Absolute Spirit in history.
No form of pantheism, however, allows for supernatural providence, since in

pantheism there is no supernatural power beyond the world who can intervene in it. Furthermore, omnibenevolence and omnipotence are not attributes of God in most forms of pantheism; therefore, effectual and loving care are not characteristics of "providence" as understood by them.

Even some pantheists who do not attribute Mind to God speak of a "cosmic synchronicity" in life. James Redfield's so-called "First Insight" claims that "a new spiritual awakening is occurring in human culture—an awakening brought about by a critical mass of individuals who experience their lives as a spiritual unfolding, a journey in which we are led forward by mysterious coincidences." In the "Seventh Insight," he adds, "Knowing our personal mission further enhances the flow of mysterious coincidences as we are guided toward our destinies" (***CP***).

The problem emerges when one tries to make any sense out of terms like a "forward" journey toward our "destinies" when there is no intelligent, personal God who knows the future in advance in order to make it possible to explain all these synchronistic "coincidences" in life. It would seem that this can happen only if a theistic God exists.

Panentheism and Providence

One final worldview is positioned between pantheism and theism, called panentheism (lit. "God in all"). In some forms, panentheism holds more promise as a basis for the concept of providence, but only within the confines of a finite and morally progressing God. This view originated with Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947), was continued by Charles Hartshorne (1897–2000), and is found in the works of Schubert Ogden, John Cobb, and Lewis Ford. It is also called "process theology" and "bipolar theism."

According to this perspective, God has two poles, one actual and the other potential. One pole is God's Mind, and the other is His Body (the entire universe). Of course, God is actually finite; consequently, He is neither omnipotent nor omnibenevolent. However, He is super-intelligent and morally progressive; thus, as He unfolds in His own self-creation, God is doing His best to maximize good in the universe.

One expression of "providence" within this camp explains it in terms of "resonance" (Korsmeyer, "RMR" in ***PS***, 195). A providential act of God

supposedly is not characterized by any supernatural intervention from without, nor by any specially preplanned event using infallible foreknowledge and the special timing of events. Rather, it results from a high degree of resonance between God's aim and human aims (ibid., 195–96).[3]

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S PROVIDENCE

The biblical basis of God's providence is both direct and indirect. The indirect support comes from the very nature of a theistic God. Those properties for which biblical support has already been provided (see part 1) include primarily the following three attributes of God: omniscience (with omnisapience), omnipotence, and omnibenevolence.

The Extent of God's Providence

Some claim that God has only general providence over the world, but not over every particular in it. However, God's providence must be both general and particular (see immediately below). General providence refers to God's superintendence over the general flow of events, and particular (or special) providence relates to His superintendence over each thing. These two are interrelated and inseparable.
That God's providence for His creation is particular, and not only general, is emphasized by the following:

(1) God can't control the general without controlling the particular.
(2) God's love for the general prompts concern for the smallest detail that affects the general.
(3) The Bible confirms particular providence: Job 23:10; 2 Corinthians 2:14; Ephesians 3:1.

A general and a special Providence cannot be two different modes of divine operation. … A General Providence is special because it secures general results by the control of every event, great and small, leading to that result. A Special Providence is general

because it specially controls all individual beings and actions in the universe. (A. A. Hodge, *OT*, 266)

Since God is infinite in knowledge, wisdom, and power (see part 1), it follows that His providence must be particular as well as general. He not only knows all things, general and particular, but in His omnisapience (see chapter 9) He knows the best way to utilize them in accomplishing His overall purpose.

The Spheres of God's Providence

The direct support for God's providence is manifested in numerous passages of Scripture. These fall into various categories, revealing God's complete and meticulous providence for every minute part of His creation.

Two Great Passages on Providence

First, there is Psalm 104:1–23:

Praise the Lord, O my soul. O Lord my God, you are very great; you are clothed with splendor and majesty. He wraps himself in light as with a garment; he stretches out the heavens like a tent and lays the beams of his upper chambers on their waters. He makes the clouds his chariot and rides on the wings of the wind. He makes winds his messengers, flames of fire his servants. He set the earth on its foundations; it can never be moved. You covered it with the deep as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains. But at your rebuke the waters fled, at the sound of your thunder they took to flight; they flowed over the mountains, they went down into the valleys, to the place you assigned for them. You set a boundary they cannot cross; never again will they cover the earth. He makes springs pour water into the ravines; it flows between the mountains. They give water to all the beasts of the field; the wild donkeys quench their thirst. The birds of the air nest by the waters; they sing among the branches. He waters the mountains from his upper chambers; the earth is satisfied by the fruit of his work. He makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate—bringing forth food from the earth: wine that gladdens the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread that sustains his heart. The trees of the Lord are well watered, the cedars of Lebanon that he planted. There the birds make their nests; the stork has its home in the pine trees. The high mountains belong to the wild goats; the crags are a refuge for the coneys. The moon marks off the seasons, and the sun knows when to go down. You bring darkness, it becomes night, and all the

beasts of the forest prowl. The lions roar for their prey and seek their food from God. The sun rises, and they steal away; they return and lie down in their dens. Then man goes out to his work, to his labor until evening.

A perusal of this passage reveals that God's providence extends to

(1) the prearrangement of the universe for the development of life (vv. 1–9);
(2) the operation of natural processes for the perpetuation of life (vv. 10–23). This includes:

(a) springs of water to quench the thirst of animals (vv. 10–11);

(b) trees for birds to nest in (v. 12);

(c) rain and snow on the mountains to irrigate the earth (v. 13);

(d) food for animals and people (vv. 14, 16–17);

(e) the fruit of the vine and grain for humankind's existence and happiness (v. 15);

(f) mountains for the refuge of animals (v. 18);

(g) sun and moon for seasons (v. 19);

(h) night for nocturnal animals (vv. 20–21);

(i) day so that people can see to work (v. 23)

All these are part of God's general providence for all His creatures.

Second, there is Matthew 6:25–33. This passage speaks of providence for both subhuman creation and humankind, but especially the latter.

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness,

and all these things will be given to you as well.

It is clear from this text that God cares about our need for water, food, clothes and shelter (v. 25); His care for birds is used as an example (v. 26). Likewise, we need not worry about our need for clothes (v. 28), for God arrays the lilies in splendor (vv. 28–29), and, thus, we should have faith that He will care for our need for clothes and shelter (v. 30).[4] Further, God providentially provides for human need for food and drink (vv. 31–32), for "your heavenly Father knows that you need them." Therefore, we should seek God and His righteousness, knowing all these things will added to us.

Numerous Other Passages on Providence

God is provident over every aspect of creation: This includes the natural, animal, and human kingdoms, as well as every detail within these domains. The extent of providence is manifest in all the following areas.

Providence Over the Natural World

"He moves mountains without their knowing it and overturns them in his anger. He shakes the earth from its place and makes its pillars tremble" (Job 9:5–6).

He says to the snow, "Fall on the earth," and to the rain shower, "Be a mighty downpour." So that all men he has made may know his work, he stops every man from his labor. The animals take cover; they remain in their dens. The tempest comes out from its chamber, the cold from the driving winds. The breath of God produces ice, and the broad waters become frozen. He loads the clouds with moisture; he scatters his lightning through them. At his direction they swirl around over the face of the whole earth to do whatever he commands them. He brings the clouds to punish men, or to water his earth and show his love. (

Job 37:6–13

)

"The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all" (Ps. 103:19). "For you, O LORD, are the Most High over all the earth" (Ps. 97:9). "The LORD does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths. He makes clouds rise from the ends of the earth; he sends lightning with the rain and brings out the wind from his storehouses" (Ps. 135:6–7). "He covers the sky with clouds; he supplies the earth with rain and makes grass grow on the hills … He sends his word and melts them; he stirs

up his breezes, and the waters flow" (Ps. 147:8–18). "He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matt. 5:45). "God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire" (Matt. 6:30). "He has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy" (Acts 14:17). God "works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will" (Eph. 1:11).

Providence Over the Animal World

"Their homes are safe and free from fear; the rod of God is not upon them. Their bulls never fail to breed; their cows calve and do not miscarry. They send forth their children as a flock; their little ones dance about" (Job 21:9–11). "The lions roar for their prey and seek their food from God" (Ps. 104:21). "These all look to you to give them their food at the proper time. When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things" (Ps. 104:27–28). "He provides food for the cattle and for the young ravens when they call" (Ps.147:9). "Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them" (Matt. 6:26).

Providence Over Human Affairs in General

"Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let them say among the nations, 'The LORD reigns!' " (1 Chron. 16:31). "All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: 'What have you done?' " (Dan. 4:35). "God is the King of all the earth" (Ps.47:7; cf. Isa. 10:12–15; Dan. 2:21; Dan 4:25).

Providence Over the Affairs of Nations

"He makes nations great, and destroys them; he enlarges nations, and disperses them" (Job 12:23). "Dominion belongs to the LORD and he rules over the nations" (Ps. 22:28). "He rules forever by his power, his eyes watch the nations

—let not the rebellious rise up against him" (Ps. 66:7). "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases" (Prov. 21:1). "From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live" (Acts 17:26).

Providence Over Humankind's Lot in Life

"The LORD brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up" (1 Sam. 2:6). "The LORD said to Samuel, 'How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king' " (1 Sam. 16:1). "As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the LORD is flawless. He is a shield for all who take refuge in him" (Ps. 18:30). "No one from the east or the west or from the desert can exalt a man. But it is God who judges: He brings one down, he exalts another" (Ps. 75:6–7). "Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be" (Ps. 139:16). "In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps" (Prov. 16:9). "I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God. I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me" (Isa. 45:5). "He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble" (Luke 1:52). "He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty" (Luke 1:53). "But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man" (Gal. 1:15–16). "Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that' " (James 4:14–15).

Providence Over Seemingly Fortuitous Events

Nothing happens by chance in God's universe; what appears to be "by chance" to us is preplanned by Him. Exodus 21:13 affirms that God even plans for "accidental" deaths: "However, if he does not do it intentionally, but God lets it happen, he is to flee to a place I will designate." Even the roll of the dice is

determined by God—Proverbs 16:33 informs us that “the lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.” Jesus said in Matthew 10:30, “The very hairs of your head are all numbered.”
Even evil events are permitted in God’s providence for a greater good. Joseph said to his brothers, who left him for dead, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives” (Gen. 50:20). No detail is too small for God’s concern.

Providence Over Humanity’s Free Acts

God’s providence covers even the free actions of His creatures (Ex. 12:36; 1 Sam. 24:9–15; Ps. 33:14–15; Prov. 21:1; 19:21; 20:24; 21:1; Jer. 10:23; Phil. 2:13). This includes good acts (which He prompts—Phil. 2:13; 4:13; 2 Cor. 12:9–10; Eph. 2:10; Gal. 5:22–25), and it includes evil acts (which He permits but does not produce—2 Sam. 16:10; 24:1; Ps. 136:10; Rom. 11:32; Acts 2:23; 3:18; 4:27–28; 1 Sam. 6:6; Ex. 7:13; 14:17; Isa. 66:4; 2 Thess. 2:11). God also restrains and controls evil acts (Ps. 66:10–12; Gen. 50:20; Isa. 10:5, 15), overruling them for our good (Gen. 50:20; Acts 3:13–15). Nothing is beyond God’s cognizance and ultimate control (see chapters 7 and 8).

Providence in Protection of the Righteous

God’s providence is also manifested in the preservation of His saints. The psalmist said, “I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety” (Ps. 4:8). David added, “My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me. They who seek my life will be destroyed” (Ps. 63:8–9). Further, “He will not let your foot slip—he who watches over you will not slumber” (Ps. 121:3).

Providing for the Needs of His People

David said, “I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread” (Ps. 37:25). Paul assured the Philippians, “My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:19). Indeed, the psalmist confessed to God, “You open

your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing" (Ps. 145:16).

Providence in Answering Prayer

The providence of God is His usual way of answering our prayers. This is often manifest in His pre-timing of events to bring about unusual occurrences in response to our requests He wishes to honor. God, to Isaiah, said, "Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear" (Isa. 65:24). Jesus reminded us, "Do not be like them [unbelievers], for your Father knows what you need before you ask him" (Matt. 6:8; cf. 6:32). As Isaiah confessed, "Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him" (Isa. 64:4).

Providence in Exposing and Punishing the Wicked

God's providence is also evident in His punishment of evil ones. "If he does not relent, [God] will sharpen his sword; he will bend and string his bow. He has prepared his deadly weapons; he makes ready his flaming arrows" (Ps. 7:12–13). Further, "On the wicked he will rain fiery coals and burning sulfur; a scorching wind will be their lot" (Ps. 11:6). Of course, sometimes the wicked prosper—at least for a time (Hab. 2:1f.)—yet God's providence does not complete all His tasks within time; some await eternity, where all the wicked will receive their due (Rev. 20:11–14).

God's Special Providence

Special providence is sometimes confused with miracles (see Volume 1, chapter 3). Both are unusual acts of God to preserve His creation and perpetuate His plan, but special acts of providence do not involve any direct supernatural intervention: No natural law is suspended to perform them. Normally, they are simply a matter of pre-timing natural events so as to produce an unusual effect. God causing strong winds to blow on the waters of the Red Sea so that Israel could cross may be an example of special providence (Ex. 14:21–22). Or,

consider the wind blowing quail into the wilderness for the hungry Israelites (Num. 11:31–32), or Jesus' disciples catching a great draught of fish (Luke 5:6). Also, avalanches have been known to occur from spring rains and form a natural but temporary dam in the Jordan, which God could have pre-timed so that Israel could cross it on foot (see Josh. 3:15–17).

Often answers to petitionary prayer fit into this category. Unanticipated gifts after praying for one's financial needs are rarely if ever created *ex nihilo*—they usually come out of someone's bank account. Even speedy or unusual recoveries from sickness are usually acts of special providence by which God uses a healthy mental attitude and the natural regenerative processes of the body. The casting of lots after prayer to determine God's will as to which man should replace Judas the apostle may also be an example of special providence (Acts 1:23–26; cf. Prov. 16:33).

However, whether God indirectly works through natural law or directly intervenes in a supernatural act (such as the Virgin Birth or the resurrection of Christ), it is He who is ultimately responsible and who deserves the glory for it.

God's Miraculous Providence

There are times when God deems it necessary to transcend a law of nature (see Volume 1, chapter 3) in order to exercise providential care for His creatures; the smiting of the wicked men of Sodom to preserve the lives of God's servants is an instance of this (Gen. 19:1–29). The resurrection of Christ is a prime example, since it was necessary for our salvation (Rom. 4:25; 1 Cor. 15:12f.). The plagues by which the chosen people were enabled to get to the Promised Land and produce the promised Messiah contain numerous miracles. Even the magicians who emulated miracles by trickery admitted once: "This is the finger of God" (Ex. 8:19). Without miraculous intervention at many points, God could not have accomplished His plan to preserve His chosen people and provide salvation for the world (cf. Gen. 12:1–3; Gal. 4:4).

Some Qualifications on God's Providence

Some important distinction must be made for a proper understanding of God's providence. For one thing, He promises protection for the righteous, not for the presumptuous. For another, He provides for the needs of His creatures, but not all actually receive these provisions.

Protection, Not Presumption

The Scriptures make it clear that God's protection does not extend to every presumptuous act we commit. The psalmist wrote, "He will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone" (Ps. 91:11–12). When the devil cited this text to Jesus, alleging that it guaranteed His protection if He jumped off the temple, Jesus rebuked his misinterpretation with these words: "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test' " (Matt. 4:7). The lesson is this: We can trust God's providence to care for us if we live reasonable lives according to His laws, but we should not presume upon God's providence to protect us if we take unnecessary risks.

Provision, Not Satisfaction

As is painfully evident to anyone aware of world conditions, not everyone on earth has adequate food, drink, clothes, and shelter. Is this evidence against God's general providence? The answer is clearly negative: That God has ***provided*** enough water, material for clothes, and shelter for everyone does not in and of itself guarantee that everyone ***gets*** it. It is a fact that even most countries that have vast numbers of people starving produce more food than is needed for the minimal requirements of all of their people.

A view from an airplane is a helpful perspective. One sees vast patches of blue water, far more than is necessary for human drink and cleansing. Then there are vast patches of green—most of it is edible, and it keeps on growing. The truth is that there is much more water and food than is needed for every person on earth. What, then, is the problem? In some cases, it is the lack of proper human cultivation and conservation. Barren land can result from improper treatment or overuse.

Nevertheless, in spite of some poor usage of the land and water God has given, there is still more than enough food in the world to feed all the hungry. The issue is one of distribution. What is the bottleneck? Corruption. Human depravity, manifested in greed and the quest for power, hinders getting what God abundantly provided to all the stomachs of those who need it. So human lack is due not to a failure of God's providential provision, but to our sinfulness.[5]

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S PROVIDENCE

The theological basis for God's providence must be comprehended within a theistic worldview. A review of each paradigm (see above) on providence will set the stage for a better understanding.

Some Theological Arguments for Providence

The providence of God can be derived from a combination of other attributes, namely, His omniscience (and omnisapience), omnipotence, and omnibenevolence. Of course, God's sovereignty, which also flows from these attributes, is related to providence.

God's Sovereignty As a Basis for His Providence

Since the foundation for God's sovereignty has already been established (see chapter 23), we will proceed here to draw the logical conclusion from it. The argument for providence from God's sovereignty can be stated as follows:

(1) God's sovereignty means He controls all things.
(2) He who controls all can also provide for all things.
(3) Hence, sovereignty guarantees the possibility of God's providential care for all things.

A God who can control everything can also provide for all things, since He has, by virtue of His complete control, the resources necessary to providentially provide for everything.

God's Omniscience As a Basis for His Providence

Another attribute necessary for God's complete providence is His omniscience. The reasoning goes like this:

(1) A God who knows all knows what care His creation needs.
(2) An omniscient God knows all things (see chapter 8).
(3) An omnisapient (all-wise) God knows the best way to care for everything (see chapter 9).
(4) Therefore, an omniscient and omnisapient God can exercise providence over all things in the best way possible.

God's Omnipotence as a Basis for His Providence

Another condition for God's providence is found in His omnipotence (see chapter 7). The logic can be stated in this way:

(1) A God who has all power has the ability to meet all needs.
(2) God has all power (i.e., He is omnipotent).
(3) Thus, God has the ability to provide for the needs of all things.

It is one thing to know a need, and quite another to be able to fulfill it. A God who is both omniscient and omnipotent, as the God of the Bible is, can do both.

God's Omnibenevolence as a Basis for His Providence

Omniscience and omnipotence are the ***necessary*** conditions for complete

providence, but they are not the ***sufficient*** condition for it. Providence means care, and complete providence means complete care. Thus, in order for God to be completely provident He must be completely caring. Because of this, it is necessary for God to be omnibenevolent (completely caring) in order for there to be complete providence. The thought process behind this can be summarized thus:

(1) A God who is all-good has the desire to provide for all His creatures' needs.
(2) Complete providence entails a God who desires to provide for all His creatures' needs.

(3) Therefore, God has the desire to provide complete providence.

The Combined Argument for God's Complete Providence

The above reasoning provides both the necessary and sufficient condition for God's complete providential care over all His creation. Thus, combined, it goes like this:

(1) An omnibenevolent God desires to provide complete providential care for all His creatures.
(2) An omniscient God knows all the providential care that is needed for all His creatures.
(3) An omnisapient God knows the best way to provide this care.
(4) An omnipotent God has the ability to execute all His desires that are possible.
(5) Consequently, such a God will provide all providential care for all His creatures in the best way possible.

To summarize, any denial of God's full and complete providence is in principle a denial of one or more of these attributes of God, for if God is all-knowing, all-wise, all-powerful, and all-loving, then He will by nature be all caring.

In addition to the nature of God, other arguments for providence include the nature of created things, the order in the world, divine prediction (which is only possible if He is in control), God's blessing on good and judgment on evil; and the human conscience (which is based in the God-given moral law informing us that good should be sought and evil avoided).

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR GOD'S PROVIDENCE

The doctrine of complete divine providence is firmly rooted in the teachings of the great fathers of the church, beginning from the earliest times.

The Early Fathers on God's Providence

Polycarp

> O Lord God Almighty, the Father of Thy beloved and blessed Son Jesus Christ, by whom we have received the knowledge of Thee, the God of angels and powers, and of every creature, and of the whole race of the righteous who live before Thee, I give Thee thanks that Thou hast counted me worthy of this day and this hour, that I should have a part in the number of Thy martyrs, in the cup of Thy Christ, to the resurrection of eternal life, both of soul and body, through the incorruption [imparted] by the Holy Ghost. Among whom may I be accepted this day before Thee as a fat and acceptable sacrifice, according as Thou, the ever-truthful God, hast foreordained, hast revealed beforehand to me, and now hast fulfilled. (*EECS*, 14 in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, I)

Irenaeus

"Therefore the Father will excel in wisdom all human and angelic wisdom, because He is Lord, and Judge, and the Just One, and Ruler over all" (***AH***, 3.25.3 in ibid.).

> The God, therefore, who does benevolently cause His sun to rise upon all, and sends rain upon the just and unjust, shall judge those who, enjoying His equally

> distributed kindness, have led lives not corresponding to the dignity of His bounty; but who have spent their days in wantonness and luxury, in opposition to His benevolence, and have, moreover, even blasphemed Him who has conferred so great benefits upon them, (ibid.)
>
> Not a single thing that has been made or that will be made, escapes the knowledge of God. Hither, through his Providence, every single thing has obtained its nature, rank, number, and special quantity. Nothing whatever has been produced (or is produced) in vain or by accident. Instead, everything has been made with precise suitability and through the exercises of transcendent knowledge, (ibid., 2:26:3)

Lactantius

"There is no one, who possesses intelligence and uses reflection, who does not understand that it is one Being who both created all things and governs them with the same energy by which He created them" (***DI***, 1.3 in ibid., VII).
"Apart from divine providence and power, nature is absolutely nothing!" (1.91).

Clement of Alexandria

> Nothing happens without the will of the Lord of the universe. It remains to say that such things happen without the prevention of God. For this alone saves both the providence and the goodness of God.... Rather, we must be persuaded that He does not prevent those beings who cause them. Yet, He overrules for good the crimes of His enemies. (*S*, 4:12 in ibid., II)

Origen

> After the resurrection a person will also learn the judgment of the Divine Providence on each individual thing. He will learn that among those events that happen to men, none occur by accident or chance, but in accordance with a plan so carefully considered and so stupend [sic] that it does not overlook even the number of hairs on the heads.... I speak not only of the saints, but perhaps of all human beings. A son will learn that the plan of this Providential government extends even to caring for the sale of two sparrows for a denarius. (*DP*, 2.11.5 in ibid.)

Novatian

> We should not think that such an inexhaustible providence of God does not reach to even the very least of things. For the Lord says, “One of two sparrows will not fall without the will of the Father. For even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.” … [Thus,] His care and providence did not permit even the clothes of the Israelites to “wear out.” … Since He embraces all things and contains all things … His care consequently extends to all things. (*TCT*, 8 in ibid.)

The Medieval Fathers on God’s Providence

Augustine

> He left no part of this creation without its appropriate peace, for in that last and least of all His living things the entrails are wonderfully ordered—not to mention the beauty of birds’ wings, and the flowers of the fields and the leaves of trees. Can anyone believe that it was the will of God to exempt from the laws of His providence the rise and fall of political societies? (*CG*, 5.10)

Thomas Aquinas

Nothing “happens outside the order of the divine government,” for while “it is possible for an effect to happen outside the order of some particular cause, [it is] not possible outside the order of the universal cause” (***ST***, la.103.7).[6] Even evil does not escape God’s sovereign control, for “from the very fact that from one point of view something seems to evade the order of divine providence considered in regard to one particular cause, it must necessarily come back to that order as regards some other cause” (ibid.).

> Dearest Jesus! I know well that every perfect gift, and above all others that of chastity, depends upon the most powerful assistance of Thy Providence, and that without Thee a creature can do nothing. Therefore, I pray Thee to defend, with Thy grace, chastity and purity in my soul as well as in my body. (“PP”)
>
> It is necessary to attribute providence to God. For all the good that is in created things has been created by God, as was shown above (Question 6, Answer 4). In created things good is found not only as regards their substance, but also as regards their order towards an end and especially their last end, which, as was said above, is the divine goodness (Question 21, Answer 4). This good of order

existing in things created, is itself created by God. Since, however, God is the cause of things by His intellect, and thus it behooves that the type of every effect should pre-exist in Him, as is clear from what has gone before (Question 19, Answer 4), it is necessary that the type of the order of things towards their end should pre-exist in the divine mind: and the type of things ordered towards an end is, properly speaking, providence. (*ST*, Ia.22.1)

In God Himself there can be nothing ordered towards an end, since He is the last end. This type of order in things towards an end is therefore in God called providence. Whence Boethius says (*De Consol.*, 4, 6) that "Providence is the divine type itself, seated in the Supreme Ruler; which disposeth all things": which disposition may refer either to the type of the order of things towards an end, or to the type of the order of parts in the whole [Question 21, Answer 4]. (ibid.)

Two things belong to providence—namely, the type of the order of things foreordained towards an end; and the execution of this order, which is called government. As regards the first of these, God has immediate providence over everything, because He has in His intellect the types of everything, even the smallest; and whatsoever causes He assigns to certain effects, He gives them the power to produce those effects. Whence it must be that He has beforehand the type of those effects in His mind. As to the second, there are certain intermediaries of God's providence; for He governs things inferior by superior, not on account of any defect in His power, but by reason of the abundance of His goodness; so that the dignity of causality is imparted even to creatures [Answer 3]. (ibid.)

"Divine providence imposes necessity upon some things; not upon all, as some formerly believed" [Answer 4] (ibid.).

As is clear from what has been stated above (ibid., Ia.22. ad 3), Divine Providence produces effects through mediate causes. We can therefore consider the ordering of the effects in two ways. Firstly, as being in God Himself: and thus the ordering of the effects is called Providence. But if we consider this ordering as being in the mediate causes ordered by God to the production of certain effects, thus it has the nature of fate. This is what Boethius says (*De Consol.*, 4): "Fate is worked out when Divine Providence is served by certain spirits; whether by the soul, or by all nature itself which obeys Him, whether by the heavenly movements of the stars, whether by the angelic power, or by the ingenuity of the demons, whether by some of these, or by all, the chain of fate is forged. (ibid., Ia.116. ad 2)

The Reformation and Post-Reformation Teachers on God's Providence

He puts suffering first and the glories which are to follow second. It is clear that this order can neither be changed nor reversed.… Since God himself has ordained this conjunction, it is not for us to tear one part away from the other. … Hence we also know that we suffer not by chance but by the solid providence of God. (*CC*, 23.4)

The psalmist now comes to another commendation of God's providence as manifested in the beautiful arrangement by which the course of the sun and moon alternately succeed each other; for the diversity in their mutual changes is so far from producing confusion, that all must easily perceive the impossibility of finding any better method of distinguishing time. (ibid., Psalm 104:19)

The true doctrine of Providence has not only been obscured, but almost buried. If one falls among robbers, or ravenous beasts; if a sudden gust of wind at sea causes shipwreck; if one is struck down by the fall of a house or a tree; if another, when wandering through desert paths, meets with deliverance; or, after being tossed by the waves, arrives in port, and makes some wondrous hairbreadth escape from death—all these occurrences, prosperous as well as adverse, carnal sense will attribute to fortune. But [he who] has learned from the mouth of Christ that all the hairs of his head are numbered (Matt. 10:30), will look farther for the cause, and hold that all events whatsoever are govern by the secret counsel of God. With regard to inanimate objects again we must hold that though each is possessed of its peculiar properties, yet all of them exert their force only in so far as directed by the immediate hand of God. (*ICR*, 1.16.2)

First, then, let the reader remember that the providence we mean is not one by which the Deity, sitting idly in heaven, looks on at what is taking place in the world, but one by which he, as it were, holds the helms and overrules all events. Hence his providence extends not less to the hand than to the eye. Those do not err quite so grossly who attribute government to God, but still, as I have observed, a confused and promiscuous government, which consists in giving an impulse and general movement to the machine of the globe and each of its parts, but does not specially direct the action of every creature. It is impossible, however, to tolerate this error. For, according to its abettors, there is nothing in this providence, which they call universal, to prevent all the creatures from being moved contingently, or to prevent man from turning himself in this direction or in that, according to the mere freedom of his own will. In this way they make man a partner with God—God, by his energy, impressing man with the movement by which he can act, agreeably to the nature conferred upon him while man voluntarily regulates his own actions. (ibid., 1.16.4)

In short, Augustine everywhere teaches that if anything is left to fortune, the world moves at random. And although he elsewhere declares (*Quaestionum* , lib. 83) that all things are carried on, partly by the free will of man, and partly by

the Providence of God, he shortly after shows clearly enough that his meaning was, that men also are ruled by Providence, when he assumes it as a principle, that there cannot be a greater absurdity than to hold that anything is done without the ordination of God; because it would happen at random. For which reason, he also excludes the contingency which depends on human will, maintaining a little further on, in clearer terms, that no cause must be sought for but the will of God. (ibid., 1.16.8)

Let us suppose, for example, that a merchant, after entering a forest in company with trustworthy individuals, imprudently strays from his companions and wanders bewildered till he falls into a den of robbers and is murdered. His death was not only foreseen by the eye of God, but had been fixed by his decree. For it is said, not that he foresaw how far the life of each individual should extend, but that he determined and fixed the bounds which could not be passed (

Job 14:5

). Still, in relation to our capacity of discernment, all these things appear fortuitous. How will the Christian feel? Though he will consider that every circumstance which occurred in that person's death was indeed in its nature fortuitous, he will have no doubt that the Providence of God overruled it and guided fortune to his own end. The same thing holds in the case of future contingencies. All future events being uncertain to us, seem in suspense as if ready to take either direction. Still, however, the impression remains seated in our hearts that nothing will happen which the Lord has not provided, (ibid., 1.16.9)

Understand this verse with reference to the admirable work of God to be seen in the heavens, where we behold his matchless wisdom, in regulating, without one degree of aberration, the manifold, complex, winding courses of the stars. To each of them he assigns its fixed and distinct office, and in all the multitude there is no confusion. He therefore exclaims immediately—Great is God, and boundless, both in power and understanding. We learn from this that there cannot be greater folly than to make our judgment the measure of God's works, displaying in these, as he often does, his incomprehensible power and wisdom. (*CC*, on Psalm 147:4–5)

Those who attribute due praise to the omnipotence of God thereby derive a double benefit. He to whom heaven and earth belong, and whose nod all creatures must obey, is fully able to reward the homage which they pay to him, and they can rest secure in the protection of Him to whose control everything that could do them harm is subject, by whose authority, Satan, with all his furies and engines, is curbed as with a bridle, and on whose will everything adverse to our safety depends. In this way, and in no other, can the immoderate and superstitious fears, excited by the dangers to which we are exposed, be calmed or subdued. (*ICR*, 1.16.3)

In the Law and the Prophets he repeatedly declares that as often as he waters the earth with dew and rain, he manifests his favour, that by his command the heaven becomes hard as iron, the crops are destroyed by mildew and other evils, that storms and hail, in devastating the fields, are signs of sure and special vengeance. This being admitted, it is certain that not a drop of rain falls without the express command of God. David, indeed (

Ps. 147:9

), extols the general providence of God in supplying food to the young ravens th cry to him but when God himself threatens living creatures with famine, does he not plainly declare that they are all nourished by him, at one time with scanty, at another with more ample measure? It is childish, as I have already said, to confine this to particular acts, when Christ says, without reservation, that not a sparrow falls to the ground without the will of his Father (Matt. 10:29). Surely, if the flight of birds is regulated by the counsel of God, we must acknowledge with the prophet, that while he “dwelleth on high,” he “humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth!” [Ps. 113:5–6 kjv] (ibid., Book 1).

Ulrich Zwingli

Thus the young man is taught that all things are ordained by the providence of God: for of the two sparrows sold for a farthing not one can fall to the ground except by decision of the divine providence (which has also numbered the very hairs of our head), nothing being too insignificant for its care. (Zwingli, “CCWG” in Bromley, ed., *ZB*, 104)

Jacob Arminius

“I declare that it [God’s providence] preserves, regulates, governs and directs all things, and that nothing in the world happens fortuitously or by chance” (***WJA***, I.210).

I consider Divine Providence to be that solicitous, continued, and universally present inspection and oversight of God, according to which he exercises a general care over the whole world, but evinces a particular concern for all his [intelligent] creatures without any exception, with the design of preserving and governing them in their own essence, qualities, actions, and passions, in a manner that is at once worthy of himself and suitable to them, to the praise of his name and the salvation of believers.… I place in subjection to Divine Providence both the freewill and even the actions of a rational creature, so that nothing can be done without the will of God, not even any of those things which are done in opposition to it; only we must observe a distinction between good actions and evil ones, by saying, that “God both wills and performs good acts,” but that “He only freely permits those which are evil.” Still farther than this, I very readily grant, that even all actions whatever, concerning evil, that can possibly be devised or invented, may be attributed to Divine Providence. Employing solely one caution, not to conclude from this concession that God is

the cause of sin. (ibid., I.251)

Divine providence does not determine a free will to one part of a contradiction or contrariety, that is, by a determination preceding the actual volition itself; under other circumstances the concurrence of the very volition with the will is the concomitant cause, and thus determines the will with the volition itself, by an act which is not previous but simultaneous, as the schoolmen express themselves, (ibid., II.489)

The Westminster Confession of Faith

The ***Westminster Larger Catechism*** asks in Question 19, "What is God's providence towards the angels?" Answer:

> God by his providence permitted some of the angels, willfully and irrecoverably, to fall into sin and damnation, limiting and ordering that, and all their sins, to his own glory; and established the rest in holiness and happiness; employing them all, at his pleasure, in the administrations of his power, mercy, and justice.

The Belgic Confession

The Belgic Confession, in Article 13, the Doctrine of God's Providence states,

> We believe that this good God, after he created all things, did not abandon them to chance or fortune but leads and governs them according to his holy will, in such a way that nothing happens in this world without his orderly arrangement.
>
> Yet God is not the author of, nor can he be charged with, the sin that occurs. For his power and goodness are so great and incomprehensible that he arranges and does his work very well and justly even when the devils and wicked men act unjustly.…
>
> This doctrine gives us unspeakable comfort since it teaches us that nothing can happen to us by chance but only by the arrangement of our gracious heavenly Father. He watches over us with fatherly care, keeping all creatures under his control, so that not one of the hairs on our heads (for they are all numbered) nor even a little bird can fall to the ground without the will of our Father.
>
> In this thought we rest, knowing that he holds in check the devils and all our enemies, who cannot hurt us without his permission and will.
>
> For that reason we reject the damnable error of the Epicureans, who say that God involves himself in nothing and leaves everything to chance (Matt. 10:29–30).

Article 12, "the Creation of All Things," declares,

> We believe that the Father created heaven and earth and all other creatures from nothing, when it seemed good to him, by his Word—that is to say, by his Son. He has given all creatures their being, form, and appearance, and their various

> functions for serving their Creator. Even now he also sustains and governs them all, according to his eternal providence, and by his infinite power, that they may serve man, in order that man may serve God. He has also created the good angels that they might be his messengers and serve his elect. Some of them have fallen from the excellence in which God created them into eternal perdition; and the others have persisted and remained in their original state, by the grace of God.

Article 14:

"For there is no understanding nor will conforming to God's understanding and will apart from Christ's involvement, as he teaches us when he says, 'Without me you can do nothing' [John 15:5]. Providence is the work of Christ: 1 Cor. 8:6; John 5:17."

Francis Turretin

Turretin said that providence is "first eminence of power above others, for it is in accordance with the nature of things that the superior and more excellent should have dominion over the inferior and more ignoble" (***IET***, 250).
Furthermore, he added, "The former [natural dominion] is founded upon the decree of Providence by which He [God] predetermined all things and events.… The principal property of God's dominion is that it is not only universal but also absolute and unlimited" (ibid., 251).
Also, providence is not incompatible with human freedom:

> Therefore since Providence does not concur with the human will, either by the way of co-action, forcing an unwilling will, nor by way of a physical determinism, as though it were a thing brutish and blind, devoid of all judgment, but rationally by turning the will in a manner congruous to itself that it may determine itself, it follows, that the proximate cause of each man's action being in the judgment of his own understanding, and spontaneous election of his own will, it exerts no constraining force upon our liberty, but rather sustains it. (ibid., 50.6)

Charles Hodge

> God's works of providence are his most holy, wise, and powerful, preserving and governing all his creatures and all their actions. Providence, therefore, includes

preservation and government. By preservation is meant that all things out of God owe the continuance of their existence, with all their properties and powers, to the will of God.

Providence includes not only preservation, but government. The latter includes the ideas of design and control. It supposes an end to be attained, and the disposition and direction of means for its accomplishment. If God governs the universe He has some great end, including an indefinite number of subordinate ends, towards which it is directed, and He must control the sequence of all events, so as to render certain the accomplishment of all his purposes. (*ST*, I.XI.1–2)

The doctrine of providence excludes both necessity and chance from the universe, substituting for them the intelligent and universal control of an infinite, omnipresent God.

The Scriptures teach that God's providence in relation to the sins of men is such that the sinfulness thereof proceedeth only from the creature and not from God; who neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin.

The fact of this universal providence of God is all the Bible teaches. It nowhere attempts to inform us how it is that God governs all things, or how his effectual control is to be reconciled with the efficiency of second causes. All the attempts of philosophers and theologians to explain that point, may be pronounced failures, and worse than failures, for they not only raise more difficulties than they solve but in almost all instances they include principles or lead to conclusions inconsistent with the plain teachings of the word of God. These theories are all founded on some *a priori* principle which is assumed on no higher authority than human reason. (ibid.)

As the stability of the universe, and the welfare, and even the existence of organized creatures, depend on the uniformity of the laws of nature, God never does disregard them except for the accomplishment of some high purpose. He, in the ordinary operations of his Providence, operates with and through the laws which He has ordained. He governs the material as well as the moral world by law.

It is obvious that the Scriptural doctrine of providence is not inconsistent with the "Reign of Law" in any proper sense of the words. The Scriptures recognize the fact that the laws of nature are immutable; that they are the ordinances of God; that they are uniform in their operation; and that they cannot be disregarded with impunity. But as man within his sphere can use these fixed laws to accomplish the most diversified purposes, so God in his unlimited sphere has them always and everywhere under his absolute control, so that, without suspending or violating them, they are ever subservient to his will.

Such are the general principles involved in this most difficult doctrine of Divine Providence. We should be equally on our guard against the extreme which merges all efficiency in God, and which, in denying all second causes, destroys human liberty and responsibility, and makes God not only the author of sin, but in reality the only Being in the universe; and the opposite extreme which banishes God from the world which He has made, and which, by denying that He governs all his creatures and all their actions, destroys the foundation of all religion, and dries up the fountains of piety, (ibid., 1.XI. 4)

The whole universe, so far as it can be subjected to our observation, exhibits evidence of God's omnipresent intelligence and control. Mind is everywhere active. There is everywhere manifest the intelligent adaptation of means to an

> end; as well in the organization of the animalcule, which it requires the microscope to reveal, as in the order of the heavenly bodies. This mind is not in matter. It is not a blind *vis naturae*. It is, and must be, the intelligence of an infinite, omnipresent Being. It is just as much beyond the power of a creature to form an insect as it is to create the universe. And it is as unreasonable to assume that the organized forms of the vegetable and animal worlds are due to the laws of nature, as it would be to assume that a printing-press could be constructed to compose a poem. (ibid., 1.XI. 2)

"Thus the fact that God does govern all his creatures and all their actions, is clearly revealed in the Scriptures" (ibid., 1.XI. 609). And, "we should be as helpless orphans were it not for this constant oversight and protection of our heavenly Father" (ibid., 1.XI. 590).

B. B. Warfield (1851–1921)

> A firm faith in the universal providence of God is the solution of all earthly troubles. It is almost equally true that a clear and full apprehension of the universal providence of God is the solution of most theological problems. Most of the religious difficulties with which men disturb their minds, rest on the subtle intrusion into our thinking of what we may call Deistic postulates, and would vanish could but the full meaning of God's universal providence enter and condition all our thinking. It is because we forget this great truth that we vex and puzzle ourselves over difficulties which seem to be insoluble, but which cease to be difficulties at all so soon as we remember that God's providence extends over all.… The real contrast is not between the divine and human in the Bible; but between the inspirational and the providential factors which have entered into the divine making of the Bible. It is all from God.… Is it not easy for him to convey the gospel to the remotest isle? And may we not be perfectly certain that no man was ever lost for lack of power on God's part to convey to him the gospel? His providence is over all; and by his providence he both can and will always present the means where his grace has determined in the end. … His purposes of mercy will never fail because of our unfaithfulness, for his providence is over all. And there are none of us—not the neediest, not the meanest, not the most remote who can be robbed of God's providence.… Thus we can better understand what he means when he declares that all power and authority have been committed to Christ, and that he has been made head over all things for his Church. Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of men, is now the God of providence, and all providence is administered, now, for the interests of his saving work. That work, therefore, cannot fail in a single particular for lack of providential co-operation. (*SSWBBW*, I:114–15)

Karl Barth

That the creature is, presupposes this finished act in all the temporal developments, extensions and relationships of this being, in all the individual forms of the creaturely world and in all the historical manifestations and modifications of its existence. It also presupposes a further action of God, namely, His activity in providence. But it does not presuppose further acts of creation. As distinct from creation, providence is God's knowledge, will and action in His relation to the creature already made by Him and not to be made again. Providence guarantees and confirms the work of creation. And no creature could be if it did not please God continually to confirm and guarantee and thus to maintain it. This does not mean, however, that He continually creates it afresh. It is presupposed that the work of creation is done, and done perfectly, and therefore concluded. (*CD*, part 3, 6)

The recognition that of His free and unmerited goodness, and therefore with the highest degree of certainty, God and God alone guarantees the existence of the creature, its being and nature and the whole expression of its life belongs indeed to the very beginning of the doctrine of the divine providence, (ibid., 60)

Creation and providence are not identical. In creation it is a matter of the establishment, the incomparable beginning of the relationship between Creator and creature; in providence of its continuation and history in a series of different but comparable moments. In creation we see particularly the difference of the nature, position and function of the Creator on the one side and the creature on the other; in providence their reciprocal relationship, the address of the Creator to the existence of His creature on the one side, and the participation of the creature in the existence of its Creator on the other. The act of creation takes place in a specific first time; the time of providence is the whole of the rest of time right up to its end. Creation has no external basis apart from the free will and resolve of God, and no internal apart from the mystery of the election of grace in the divine being itself; providence has its basis not only in God's unconditioned freedom and decision and the mystery of His election of grace, but also externally in the presupposed being of the creature and internally in its neediness in relation to the Creator. (ibid., 8)

Millard Erickson

By Providence we mean the continuing action of God by which he preserves in existence the creation which he has brought into being, and guides it to his intended purposes for it.…

The major features of God's governing: God's governing activity is universal.… God's providence does not extend merely to his own people.… God is good in his government.… God is personally concerned about those who are his.… Our activity and divine activity are not mutually exclusive.… God is sovereign in his

government.
We need to be careful as to what we identify as God's providence. (*CT*, 387–404)

OBJECTIONS TO GOD'S PROVIDENCE

In view of the biblical and theological claims for divine providence, several problems emerge. Most of them center around either the apparent dysteleology (lack of design) in the world or the problem of evil.

Objection One—Based Upon Apparent Randomness in the Natural World

Nature has seemingly random processes. For instance, there is no order in the mixture of molecules in the air one exhales—they tumble around randomly as they mix into the atmosphere. The same is true of seeds blowing in the wind, or sand on the seashore.

Response to Objection One

This objection overlooks the fact that there is order and purpose in this apparent randomness. For example, when one exhales carbon dioxide, if the molecules did not randomly mix in the air, then he would be inhaling the same poisonous gas he just exhaled instead of the oxygen he needs. Hence, there is a providential purpose for the supposed randomness. The same is true of other seemingly random processes of nature.
Indeed, scientists inform us that even the apparently random explosion of the universe was so perfectly fine-tuned from its inception that, without this meticulous tweaking, life on earth would not be possible: This is called the anthropic principle. Famous astronomer Alan Sandage remarked,

> The world is too complicated in all of its parts to be due to chance alone. I am convinced that the existence of life with all its order in each of its organisms is simply too well put together. Each part of a living thing depends on all its other parts to function. How does each part know? How is each part specified at conception? The more one learns of biochemistry the more unbelievable it becomes unless there is

> some kind of organizing principle—an architect for believers.... (“SRRB” in *T*, 54)

And all of the conditions for this were set from the very moment of the universe’s origin.

Albert Einstein (1879–1955) said that “the harmony of natural law … reveals an intelligence of such superiority that, compared with it, all the systematic thinking and acting of human beings is an utterly insignificant reflection” (***IO***, 40). Even agnostic astronomer Robert Jastrow acknowledged,

> The anthropic principle is the most interesting development next to the proof of the creation, and it is even more interesting because it seems to say that science itself has proven, as a hard fact, that this universe was made, was designed, for man to live in. It is a very theistic result. (“SCBTF” in *CT*, 17)

Objection Two—Based Upon Indeterminacy in the Subatomic World

Some have taken Werner Heisenberg’s “principle of uncertainty” or “indeterminacy” as support for their rejection of God’s meticulous providence over every detail of creation. This is a principle of quantum mechanics stating that “the position and speed of a particle cannot be simultaneously known with complete certainty. If one is known with high certainty, the other becomes very uncertain” (Lightman, ***O***, 560). For example, according to this theory, “it is possible to accurately predict what fraction of the [uranium atoms] will radioactively disintegrate over the next hour, but it is impossible to predict ***which*** atoms will do so” (ibid.).

Response to Objection Two

This principle of uncertainty does not support the view that events arise without a cause or that human actions are uncaused. This is clear for many reasons.
First, Heisenberg’s principle of uncertainty does not say there is no cause or purpose for the events, but that one cannot predict the course of a given particle. Hence, it is not to be understood as the principle of ***uncausality***, but the principle of ***unpredictability***.
Second, the principle of indeterminacy does not even deny predictability in

general; it states only that “physical systems must be described in terms of probabilities” (Lightman, ***O***, 553). That is, one can accurately predict what fraction of the particles will react in a certain way, but not ***which*** atoms will do so (ibid.). What is more, even though a particular particle’s position cannot be predicted, nonetheless, the overall pattern can be predicted, which implies a causal connection. Nor does this axiom deny that even given particles are predictable, but only that scientists, ***with their limited instruments and observational abilities***, cannot (at present) predict the course of individual subatomic particles. The principle does not mean that the course of given subatomic particles is absolutely unpredictable. If an infinite Mind exists, He could predict both.

Third, Heisenberg’s principle describes the subatomic realm, which is not known without investigator interference. The electron microscopes, by which the subatomic realm is observed, bombard the subatomic particles in order to “see” them. Mortimer Adler noted,

> At the same time that the Heisenberg uncertainty principles were established, quantum physics acknowledged that the intrusive experimental measurements that provided the data used in the mathematical formulations of quantum theory conferred on subatomic objects and events interdeterminate character.... It follows, therefore, that the indeterminacy cannot be intrinsic to subatomic reality. (*TR*, 96–100)

Hence, the unpredictable behavior may result in part from the bombardment in the very attempt to observe the

Fourth, not all modern physicists accept quantum physics and the uncertainty theory; one of the greatest physicists of the twentieth century rejected it. In response to it, Albert Einstein affirmed that “God does not play dice with the universe.”

Objection Three—Based Upon the Problem of Evil

How can God be in control of the world when there is so much evil in it? It would seem that if He were in complete control, then there would be no evil. Conversely, if there is so much evil, it would appear that God is not in control of the world.

Response to Objection Three

In response, God's providence in relation to evil is ***preventive*** (Gen. 20:6; 31:24; Ps. 19:13; Hos. 2:6); ***permissive*** (2 Chron. 32:31; Deut. 8:2; Ps. 17:13–14; 81:12–13; Isa. 53:4, 10; Hos. 4:17; Acts 14:16; Rom. 1:24–25; 3:25; Ps. 29:3; 2 Sam. 24:1; 1 Chron. 22:1); ***providential*** (Gen. 50:20; Ps. 76:10; Isa. 10:5–6; John 13:27; Acts 4:27–28); and ***productive*** (Job 1:12; Ps. 124:2; 1 Cor. 10:13; 2 Thess. 2:7; Rev. 20:2–3). While God permits evil for now, He oversees its process providentially, and ultimately He produces a greater good out of it.

Objection Four—Based Upon Disproportionate Distribution of Happiness

Another problem with providence is the apparently unfair distribution of happiness in the world. It is clear upon observation that not all persons in the world are equally happy; good fortune has not been shared equally among the inhabitants of this planet.

Response to Objection Four

In reply, several comments are in order.
First, as fallen human beings, no matter what our lot, we have more good from God's hand than we deserve.
Second, even if we all deserved some happiness, there is no moral obligation upon God to make everyone equally happy.
Third, happiness and misery are more equally distributed than they appear. As a general rule, virtue is rewarded and vice is punished in this life.
Fourth, and finally, this life is only a preparation for the next, where ***all*** inequities here will be rectified.

CONCLUSION

The biblical, historical, and theological foundation of God's complete and sovereign control over all human events—past, present, and future—stands firm. Challenges both from within and without are answerable. Even without the exercise of His persuasive influence on free creatures, God can control the destiny of all things simply by His infallible foreknowledge of how every free creature will choose to exercise freedom.

Likewise, God exercises both general and particular providential control over all creation. Even evil is permitted for His ultimate and good end. Nothing in all of creation escapes His careful eye and loving concern.

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APPENDIX ONE

CHRISTOLOGY

Christology is discussed in three other places in these volumes: The work of Christ on the cross is treated under ***soteriology*** in Volume 3, chapters 8–9; the nature of Christ as a member of the Trinity is discussed in this volume in chapter 12; and Christ's future reign is examined in Volume 4 on ***eschatology*** ("last things"). Other elements of Christology are outlined here in this appendix.

CHRIST'S PREINCARNATE STATE

That Christ is the eternal Son of God is clear from both Old and New Testaments. As Son, He is eternally submissive to the Father, which is evident in eternity past from His willingness to submit to the will of the Father to be the Redeemer of humankind. Jesus proclaimed,

> "Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, O God." First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them." … Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (Heb. 10:7–10)

While on earth, Christ always obeyed the will of the Father (John 15:10):

> [Jesus], being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to

be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! (Phil. 2:6–8)

In eternity to come, Christ will still submit to the Father. Paul wrote,

Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. … When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all. (1 Cor. 15:24–28)

Christ's Eternal Sonship According to the New Testament

As the second person of the blessed Trinity (see chapter 12), Christ had no beginning. John wrote, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). In fact, "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:3). Paul added, "By him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Col. 1:16–17).

Jesus prayed, "Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began" (John 17:5). " 'I tell you the truth,' Jesus answered, 'before Abraham was born, I am!' " (John 8:58). Christ is the eternal Son of the eternal Father. When He said, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30), [the Jews] took up stones, claiming the right to kill him "for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God" (10:33).

Christ's Eternal Sonship According to the Old Testament

Even the Old Testament speaks of the eternal Son. Psalm 2 reads:

> “I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill.” I will proclaim the decree of the Lord
> : He said to me, “You are my Son; today I have become your Father. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.” … Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment, (vv. 6–8
> ,
> 12
>)

Proverbs adds,

> Who has gone up to heaven and come down? Who has gathered up the wind in the hollow of his hands? Who has wrapped up the waters in his cloak? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and the name of his son? Tell me if you know! (
> 30:4
>)
> Of His virgin birth, Isaiah wrote, “The Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel [i.e., God with us]” (
> Isa. 7:14
>). Isaiah also declared, “To us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (
> 9:6
>).

Christ as the Messenger of Yahweh in the Old Testament

One of the striking proofs of Christ’s preincarnate sonship and deity in the Old Testament is His appearance as “the Angel [Messenger] of the Lord.” Consider the following.

The Messenger of Yahweh Is Yahweh

The term “Yahweh” (LORD) is used exclusively of God in the Old Testament. Indeed, God Himself proclaimed,

> This is what the
> Lord
> says—he who created the heavens, he is God; he who fashioned and made the earth, he founded it; he did not create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited—he says, “I am the
> Lord
> [Yahweh], and there is no other” (
> Isa. 45:18
>).

God calls this title His “Name,” saying, “I am the LORD [Yahweh]. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name the LORD I did not make myself known to them” (Ex. 6:2–3).

The Messenger of the Lord Is Yahweh

This was made clear when He appeared to Moses, for “There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush” (Ex. 3:2). He is called “the LORD” [Yahweh] in verse 8, and He gives His Name as “I AM WHO I AM” in verse 14.

Elsewhere in the Old Testament, the Messenger of the Lord is called God; one of the messengers (angels) who appeared to Abraham was called Yahweh (“the LORD”) in Genesis 18:1. When the other two angels left to go to Sodom, it says, “Abraham remained standing before the LORD [Yahweh]” (Gen. 18:22). Likewise, the “angel of the LORD” who appeared to Manoah’s wife (Judg. 13:3) accepted and answered Manoah’s prayer, which he “prayed to the LORD [Yahweh]: ‘O Lord, I beg you, let the man of God you sent to us come again to teach us how to bring up the boy who is to be born’ ” (Judg. 13:8). In fact, when asked, He gave his name as “Wonderful” (Judg. 13:18 NKJV cf. Isa. 9:6).

The Angel of the LORD Is a Different Person Than the LORD

On occasion in the Old Testament, the Angel of the LORD, who is the Lord, spoke with another person who is called “the LORD” (Yahweh). For example,

Zechariah recorded, “Then the angel of the LORD said, ‘LORD Almighty, how long will you withhold mercy from Jerusalem and from the towns of Judah, which you have been angry with these seventy years?’ So the LORD [Yahweh] spoke … to the angel” (Zech. 1:12–13). The same kind of conversation took place between the Father and the Son in Psalm 110:1, where David wrote, “The LORD [Yahweh] says to my Lord [adonai]: ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.’ ” (Jesus verified this understanding of the text in Matthew 22:42–45.) In Psalm 45, the Father speaks to the Son, saying, “Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom” (Ps. 45:6; cf. Heb. 1:8).

The Angel of the LORD Is Christ

That the Angel of the Lord is the second person of the Trinity is derived from two main lines of evidence.

First, the Angel of the Lord in the Old Testament serves the same role as does Christ in the New Testament: The Father is the one who plans and sends the Redeemer, the Son is the one who is the Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit is the one who convicts and applies redemption to those who are redeemed. In fact, all three members of the Godhead are found in one passage in the Old Testament. Isaiah wrote,

> I will tell of the kindnesses of the Lord [the Father], the deeds for which he is to be praised, according to all the Lord has done for us—yes, the many good things he has done for the house of Israel, according to his compassion and many kindnesses. He said, “Surely they are my people, sons who will not be false to me”; and so he became their Savior. In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence [the Son] saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old. Yet they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit [the Spirit]. (Isa. 63:7–10)

Second, once the Son (Christ) came in permanent incarnate form (John 1:1, 14; 1 John 4:2), never again does ***the*** Angel of the Lord appear, though ***an*** angel appears from time to time (cf. Acts 12:7ff.). ***No angel that commands or accepts***

worship or claims to be God ever appears again.
Other references to the Angel of the Lord, though sometimes with different names, confirm the same conclusions. For example, the Angel of the Lord (Christ) appeared to Joshua to confirm that He was the real leader of Israel:

> Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, "Are you for us or for our enemies?"
> "Neither," he replied, "but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come." Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, "What message does my Lord have for his servant?" (Josh. 5:13–14)

CHRIST'S VIRGIN BIRTH

The evidence for the miraculous conception of Christ in the virgin's womb begins in the Old Testament.

Old Testament Anticipations of the Virgin Birth

The earliest messianic prediction in the Bible (called the protoevangelium) foreshadows the Virgin Birth.

Genesis 3:15

Speaking to the tempter (serpent), God said, " 'I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.' " That the coming Redeemer was to be the "offspring" or "seed" of the woman is important in a patriarchal culture. Normally, descendants were traced through their father (cf. Gen. 5; 11:10f.); even the official genealogy of the Messiah (in Matt. 1) is traced through Jesus' legal father (Joseph). In the "seed of the woman," there is an implication that the Messiah would not have a natural father, that is, He would be virgin-born.

Jeremiah 22:30 (cf. 2 Samuel 7:11ff.)

Another possible intimation of the Virgin Birth in the Old Testament is found in the curse placed on Jeconiah, which says, “Record this man as if childless, a man who will not prosper in his lifetime, for none of his offspring will prosper, none will sit on the throne of David or rule any more in Judah” (Jer. 22:30). The potential problem with this prediction is that Jesus was the descendant of the throne of David through Jeconiah (cf. Matt. 1:12). However, since Joseph was only Jesus’ ***legal*** father (by virtue of being engaged to Mary when she became pregnant), he did not inherit the curse on Jeconiah’s ***actual*** descendants. Since Jesus was the actual son of David through Mary, according to Luke’s matriarchal genealogy (cf. Luke 3), He fulfilled the conditions of coming “from the loins of David” (2 Sam. 7:11f.) without losing legal rights to the throne of David by falling under the curse upon Jeconiah. Thus, the Virgin Birth is implied in the consistent understanding of these Old Testament passages.

Isaiah 7:14

The Virgin Birth of Christ is not only implied in the Old Testament, but it is also predicted in Isaiah 7:14: “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.” Critics, following the interpretation of many Bible scholars, use Isaiah 7:16 to place the birth of the prophesied child before the invasion of the Assyrian armies and the fall of Samaria (in 722 B.C.). Further, they argue that Isaiah 8:3 is the fulfillment of this prophecy in the natural birth of Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz. If so, Isaiah 7:14 cannot be used as a prediction of the Virgin Birth of Jesus.

However, in response to this, many biblical scholars have contended as follows. *First*, the word ***almah*** in this text should be translated “virgin,” since there are no examples in the Old Testament where it means anything but a young unmarried girl. And, since she was to conceive and bear the child as a virgin, it cannot refer to someone who conceived in a natural way.

Second, ***bethulah*** was not used here because it does not always mean a young unmarried girl. It can even refer to a married person (Joel 1:8).

Third, the Greek Old Testament (LXX) translated ***almah*** by the unambiguous word ***parthenos***, which can only mean “virgin.” Hence, the translators of the Hebrew Old Testament believed that this was a prediction of the Virgin Birth of the Messiah.

Fourth, the inspired New Testament sanctioned the LXX translation of ***almah*** as "virgin" when it quoted the LXX of Isaiah 7:14, in which ***parthenos*** is used to show that this prophecy was fulfilled in the Virgin Birth of Christ (Matt. 1:23).
Fifth, since ***almah*** always means a young girl who is not yet married, it follows that to deny it refers to a virgin demands that she get married before the child is born. Nevertheless, if she is married, then it is no longer a virgin who is conceiving, but a married woman. This is contrary to Isaiah 7:14 (KJV), which says clearly, "The virgin shall conceive, and bear a son." That is, both the conception and birth were by a virgin—this would not be true of a natural birth.
Sixth, there are dimensions of this prophecy that can only refer to Christ. For example, the one born of a virgin will be called "Immanuel" ("God with us"), used both here and in the New Testament, which quotes it as a reference to the deity of Christ (cf. Matt. 1:23).
Seventh, the prediction obviously goes beyond King Ahaz, since it is given to the whole "house of David" (Isa. 7:13). Therefore, it cannot be limited to the natural birth by the prophetess in Isaiah's day.
Eighth, since the emphasis is on some wonderful, unheard-of "sign" (Isa. 7:11–14), it is best explained by the supernatural birth of Christ, not just to the natural birth of Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz. Why should an ordinary birth be understood as an extraordinary sign?
Ninth, the whole context of Isaiah 7–11 (cf. Micah 5:2ff.) forms an unbreakable chain of messianic prophecy (cf. Isa. 7:14; 8:8; 9:6; 11:1–5).
Tenth, the New Testament interprets Isaiah 7:14 as prophetic. This is indicated by

(1) the phrase "that it might be fulfilled" (Matt. 1:22);
(2) the intensifying phrase used with it, namely, "all this was done that it might be fulfilled";
(3) the manner in which the passage is used to show the supernaturalness of the birth and deity of Christ (Matt. 1:23).

Eleventh, and finally, one and the same verse cannot refer to the birth of Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz in Isaiah's day. Otherwise, either ***he*** was virgin-born, or else ***Christ*** was not—the same verse cannot mean two different (opposing) things. If both the LXX and the inspired New Testament affirm that it refers to someone

who was a virgin, it would not apply to the birth of Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz. Thus, it seems best to take it as referring to Christ.[1]

The New Testament Basis for the Virgin Birth

While some of the Old Testament references are only implicit, the New Testament is explicit about Christ's virgin birth.

Matthew 1:18–23

The New Testament clearly affirms that Christ was born of a virgin. Matthew wrote,

> This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but *before they came together*, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, *he had in mind to divorce her quietly*. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because *what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit*. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." *All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"*—which means, "God with us" (Matt. 1:18–23, emphasis added).

The italicized sections point to four factors demonstrating that Christ was virgin-born.

First, Mary conceived "***before they came together***," thus revealing that Christ's was not a natural conception.

Second, Joseph's initial reaction reveals that he had not had sexual relations with Mary, since when he found that she was pregnant "***he had in mind to divorce her quietly***."

Third, the phrase "***what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit***" reveals the supernatural nature of the event.

Fourth, and finally, the citation of the prophet about a "virgin" giving "birth" to a child indicates that she had not had sexual relations with anyone. She was not simply a virgin before the baby was conceived, but also during and after He was conceived—even when He was born.

Luke 1:26–35

Mark says nothing about Jesus' ancestry, birth, or childhood, beginning immediately with His ministry, which is in accord with his stress on Christ as a Servant (cf. Mark 10:45). However, Dr. Luke gives great attention to all of these. He begins with the announcement of Christ's birth of a virgin:

> In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a *virgin pledged to be married* to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Mary was *greatly troubled* at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus.... *The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you*. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.
>
> (
>
> Luke 1:26–31
>
> ,
>
> 35
>
> , emphasis added)

Here again, the italicized text demonstrates that the conception of Christ was supernatural.

First, Mary was a "virgin" (***parthenos***) at the time, a Greek word that always means someone who had not had sexual relations with a man.

Second, Mary's reaction of being "greatly troubled" and being "afraid" reveals that she knew she was a virgin.

Third, the angel said the conception would be from "the power of the Most High."

Luke 2:1–19

Luke records:

> [Joseph] went [to Bethlehem] to register with Mary, *who was pledged to be married to him*

> *and was expecting a child*…. And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. *An angel of the Lord appeared to them*, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.” … Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.” … But *Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart*. (
>
> 2:5
>
> ,
>
> 8–11
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> ,
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> 13–14
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> ,
>
> 19
>
> , emphasis added)

When Luke records the actual birth of Christ, there is further indication that it was a virgin birth.

First, he stresses both that Mary was only “pledged to be married” but not married, which in those days meant she had not yet had sexual relations with Joseph.

Second, the supernatural appearance of the angel and the heavenly choir point to something amazing that had happened.

Third, Mary’s reaction and her meditation on the mystery of the event shows that she knew it was supernatural.

John 2:1–5

There are also a couple of strong intimations in John’s gospel that Jesus was virgin-born. When Christ performed His first miracle at Cana, His mother revealed an awareness of His supernatural origin by her confidence that He could do the supernatural. John wrote,

> On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus’ mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus’ mother said to him, “*They have no more wine*.” “Dear woman, why do you involve me?” Jesus replied. “*My time has not yet come*. “His mother said to the servants, “*Do whatever he tells you*” (
>
> John 2:1–5

, emphasis added).

The italicized text reveals that Mary seems not only to have believed that Jesus could do a miracle but also that she was requesting one, even though she had never seen Him perform a miracle, since this was Jesus' "first" (John 2:11). This is a strong indication that she knew of His supernatural origin via His virgin birth.

John 8:41

Later in John, even the insult of Jesus' enemies provides a backhanded compliment (that He was born of a virgin). Jesus said to them, " 'You are doing the things your own father does.' "
" 'We are not illegitimate children,' they protested" (John 8:41). Their response implies they were aware of the claim that Jesus was virgin-born and did not accept it, but rather charged that He was born of fornication. Of course, even Joseph thought this until he was supernaturally convinced by an angel (Matt. 1:20). The problem with this accusation is, how could someone born in sin live a sinless and miraculous life? Jesus boldly challenged in response, "Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?" (John 8:46).

Galatians 4:4

The New Testament epistles are filled with references to Jesus' sinlessness, which, again, imply His virgin birth (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 1 John 3:3). Even so, Paul's reference to Jesus being "born of a woman" is even more explicit: "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law" (Gal. 4:4). This is a hearkening back to Genesis 3:15 (see above). In a Jewish patriarchial culture, one is begotten of a male (the father), and to bring attention to Christ's being "born of a woman" is to show that something unusual is occurring—in Jesus' case, a virgin birth.

CHRIST'S MINISTRY AND MIRACLES

Miracles are not only a possibility but also a reality in a theistic universe (see Volume 1, chapter 3). As God-incarnate, Jesus performed miracles to

demonstrate His deity and to confirm His message.

A List of Jesus' Recorded Miracles					
Description	**Matthew**	**Mark**	**Luke**	**John**	**Other**
Turning water into wine				2:1–11	
Healing the nobleman's son				4:46–50	
Escaping from the hostile multitude			4:30		
Catching a draught of fish			5:6		
Casting out an unclean spirit		1:23		4:33	
Healing Peter's mother-in-law	8:14	1:30–32	4:38–39		
Healing many sick people	8:16	1:32	4:40		

Cleansing a leper	8:2–3	1:40–42	5:12–13				
Healing a paralytic	9:2–8	2:3–12	5:18–26				
Healing an infirmed man at Bethesda				5:1–9			
Healing a man’s withered hand	12:9–13	3:1–5	6:6–10				
Healing of many people	12:15	3:10					
Healing a centurion’s servant	8:5–13	7:1–10					
Raising a widow’s son at Nain			7:11–17				
Casting out a demon from a blind mute	12:22						

Stilling the storm on the Sea of Galilee	8:23–27	4:35–41	8:22–25				
Casting out the demons and allowing them to enter the herd of swine	8:28–32	5:1–13	8:26–33				
Raising the ruler’s daughter	9:18–26	5:22–24, 35–43	8:40–42, 49–56				
Healing the woman with an issue of blood	9:20–22	5:25–34	8:43–48				
Healing two blind men	9:27–31						
Casting out a demon from a deaf mute	9:32–34						
Feeding the 5,000	14:13–21	6:35–44	9:12–17	6:5–13			

Walking on the sea	14:22–33	6:45–52		6:16–21			
Healing of many at Gennesaret	14:34–36	6:53–56					
Healing a Gentile woman’s daughter	15:21–28	7:24–30					
Healing a deaf mute		7:31–37					
Feeding of 4,000	15:32–39	8:1–10					
Healing a blind paralytic at Bethsaida		8:22–26					
Being transfigured	17:1–9	9:2–10	9:28–36				

Healing an epileptic boy	17:14–18	9:15–27	9:38–43				
Recovering the temple tax from a fish’s mouth	17:24–27						
Healing a man born blind				9:1–41			
Curing a demon-possessed, blind mute			11:14–23				
Healing an infirmed woman			13:10–17				
Healing a man with dropsy			14:1–6				
Raising of Lazarus				11			
Cleansing ten lepers			17:11–19				

Healing two blind men	20:29–34	10:46–52	18:35–43				
Withering a fig tree	21:18–22	11:12–14					
Restoring a servant’s ear			22:49–51				
Being resurrected	28	16:1–8	24	20			
An angel rolls the stone from the grave and speaks to the women	28:1–8						
Angelic appearance to those at the sepulcher	28:2–7	16:4–7	24:4–9				
Angels appear to Mary Magdalene				20:11–14			

Appearing to Mary Magdalene		16:9		20:11–18			
Appearing to the women	28:8–10						
Appearing to two followers on the road to Emmaus		16:12–13	24:13–35				
Appearing to ten apostles				20:19–23			
Appearing to eleven apostles		16:14–18	24:36–48	20:26–31			
Appearing to seven apostles				21:1–25			
Producing a miraculous catch of fish				21:5–6			
Appearing to all	28:16–20	16:14–					

the apostles		18					
Appearing to all the apostles			24:44–53		Acts 1:3–8		
Appearing to Peter and the apostles					1 Cor. 15:5		
Appearing to more than five hundred					1 Cor. 15:6		
Appearing to James					1 Cor. 15:7		
Ascending into heaven					Acts 1:9–11		

The Purpose of Jesus' Miracles

The purpose of Jesus' miracles can be derived from the three basic words for miracles used in the New Testament.

Miracle as a "Sign"

The word sign (***semeion***) is used seventy-seven times (forty-eight times in the Gospels). "Sign" is used of the most significant miracle in the New Testament, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave. Jesus said to His unbelieving generation, "[No sign] will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.… The Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12:39–40). Jesus repeated this prediction of His resurrection when He was asked for a sign in Matthew 16:1, 4. Not only was the Resurrection a miracle, but it was also a miracle that Jesus predicted (John 2:19; Matt. 12:39–40; 16:21; 20:19).

Miracle as a "Wonder"

The word ***wonder*** (***teras***) is used sixteen times in the New Testament and almost always refers to a miracle. In fact, in every occurrence it is used in combination with the word ***sign. Teras*** is used of the supernatural events before the second coming of Christ (Matt. 24:24; Mark 13:22; Acts 2:19–20), of Jesus' miracles (John 4:48; Acts 2:22), of the apostles' miracles (Acts 2:43; cf. 4:30; 5:12; Heb. 2:3–4), of Stephen's miracles (Acts 6:8), of Moses' miracles in Egypt (Acts 7:36), and of Paul's miracles (Acts 14:3; 15:12; Rom. 15:19). ***Teras*** means a "miraculous sign, prodigy, portent, omen, wonder" (Brown, ***MCM***, 2:633), carrying with it the idea of "that which is amazing or astonishing" (ibid., 623–25).

Miracle as "Power"

The word ***power*** (***dunamis***) is used on numerous occasions in the New Testament, occasionally of human power (2 Cor. 1:8) or abilities (Matt. 25:15), and sometimes of spiritual (satanic) powers (Luke 10:19; Rom. 8:38). Like its Old Testament parallel, the New Testament term "power" is often translated "miracles." ***Dunamis*** is used in combination with "signs and wonders" (Heb. 2:4), of Christ's miracles (Matt. 13:58), of the power to raise the dead (Phil. 3:10), of the Virgin Birth of Christ (Luke 1:35), of the special gift of miracles (1 Cor. 12:10), of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 1:8), and of the "power" of the gospel to save sinful people (Rom. 1:16). The emphasis of the word is on the ***divine energizing*** aspect of a miraculous event.

In summary, a miracle is an unusual event ("wonder") that has its source in God

(“power”) and its significance in that it is a confirmation of God’s message (“sign”). Thus, the purpose of miracles in the New Testament follows that of the Old Testament: They are the divine confirmation of a prophet or spokesperson for God. Moses was told a miracle was given “that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers … has appeared to you” (Ex. 4:1–5). When Israel hesitated between Baal and Yahweh, God confirmed Elijah over the prophets of Baal by sending fire from heaven to consume the sacrifices: “Let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant” (1 Kings 18:36).

Miracles in the New Testament have a confirmatory purpose. John said, “This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed His glory, and His disciples put their faith in him” (John 2:11). He also wrote, “Jesus did many other miraculous signs.… These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God” (John 20:30–31). Therefore, the reason for miraculous “signs” is divine confirmation of a prophet of God. Nicodemus said of Jesus: “We know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him” (John 3:2). Indeed, many people followed Him because they saw the signs He performed on those who were sick (John 6:2). When some rejected Jesus, even though He had cured a blind man, others said, “How can a sinner do such miraculous signs?” (John 9:16). The apostles were confident in proclaiming, “Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know” (Acts 2:22).

Perhaps the most definitive passage on miracles in the New Testament is Hebrews 2:3–4:

> How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

In summary, miracles are God’s way of accrediting His spokespersons. There is a miracle to confirm the message as true, a sign to substantiate the sermon, an act of God to verify the Word of God.

Of course, not all believe, even when they witness a miracle. In this event, says the New Testament, the miracle is a witness against them. John grieved that “even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him” (John 12:37). Jesus Himself said of some, “They will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead” (Luke 16:31). So in this

sense the result (not the purpose) of disbelieving in miracles is the condemnation of the unbeliever (cf. John 12:31, 37).

CHRIST'S SINLESS LIFE AND HUMANNESS (see Vol. 1, pp. 275–277)
CHRIST'S VICARIOUS DEATH

Jesus was not only a Prophet to His people but was also a Priest for them and will one day be King over them.

Christ as Prophet

God, through Moses, said of Jesus, "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him" (Deut. 18:18). The New Testament confirms that Moses spoke here of Christ (Acts 7:37). Jesus' teachings recorded in the Gospels were part of His prophetic ministry.

Christ as Priest

Jesus did not come simply to speak to His people but also to be a sacrifice for them. He said, "Even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). In John, He promised, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full … and I lay down my life for the sheep" (John 10:10, 15).

Christ's atoning death was not merely exemplar, but it was also sacrificial. He died in our place as a substitute for our sins (Isa. 53:4–7; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 7–10; 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18). This is discussed more completely elsewhere (in Volume 3, chapters 8–9).

Christ as King

One day Jesus will literally be King over His people. He affirmed, “I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matt. 19:28). John added,

> I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (
>
> Rev. 20:4–6
>
>)

Indeed, Christ is called “KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS” (Rev. 19:16). For a more detailed discussion of this, see Volume 4.

CHRIST’S RESURRECTION

The crowning miracle of Jesus’ life was His resurrection, predicted in the Old Testament and reaffirmed in the New Testament.

Old Testament Predictions of Christ’s Resurrection

Two Old Testament passages are cited as predictions of Christ’s resurrection by the New Testament. Psalm 2:7 reads: “I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, ‘You are my Son; today I have become your Father.’ ” This is repeated in Hebrews 1:5, and it is specifically applied to the Resurrection in Acts 13:33–34, where it says:

> What God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm: “You are my Son; today I have become your Father.” The fact that God raised him from the dead, never to decay, is stated in these words: “I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David.”

The resurrection of Christ is also predicted in Psalm 16:10, which affirms: “You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.” Peter argues explicitly in Acts 2:29–32 that this could not refer to David but must refer to Christ, declaring,

> Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.

Another explicit Old Testament reference to the Resurrection is in Job 19:25–26, where Job pronounced triumphantly: “I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God.” This, too, emphasizes the physical nature of the resurrection of the “flesh,” as did Peter in Acts 2.

Jesus’ Predictions of His Own Resurrection

The prediction of His own resurrection began early in Christ’s ministry and continued to the very end.

Early Prediction of His Resurrection

Just after Jesus performed His first miracle, He predicted His resurrection, declaring, “ ‘Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.’ … But the temple he had spoken of was his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said” (John 2:19–22).

Later Prediction of His Resurrection

Later in His ministry, Jesus repeated His claim: “He answered, ‘A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth’ ” (Matt. 12:39–40).

Final Predictions of His Resurrection

As He approached the cross, His predictions became more frequent and specific: "When they came together in Galilee, he said to them, 'The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life.' And the disciples were filled with grief" (Matt. 17:22–23). Jesus added, "No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again" (John 10:18).

CHRIST'S PHYSICAL DEATH

The evidence of Jesus' death is overwhelming and is found both inside and outside the Bible.

First, the Old Testament predicted (see "PPB" in Geisler, ***BECA***) that the Messiah would die (Isa. 53:5–10; Ps. 22:16; Dan. 9:26; Zech. 12:10), and that Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah (cf. Matt. 4:14–16; 5:17–18; 8:17; John 4:25–26; 5:39).

Second, the historicity of the gospel records have been confirmed by the multitudinous manuscripts of contemporary eyewitnesses (see Volume 1, chapter 26).

Third, Jesus announced many times during His ministry that He was going to die and rise again (John 2:19–21; 10:10–11; Matt. 12:40; 17:22–23; Mark 8:31).

Fourth, all the predictions of His resurrection, both in the Old Testament (cf. Ps. 16:10—see also Isa. 26:19; Dan. 12:2) and in the New Testament (cf. John 2:19–21; Matt. 12:40; 17:22–23), are based on the fact that He would die. Only a dead body can be resurrected.

Fifth, the nature and extent of Jesus' injuries indicate that He must have died: He had no sleep the night before He was crucified, He was beaten several times and whipped, and He collapsed on the way to His execution while carrying His cross. This in itself, to say nothing of the crucifixion to follow, was totally exhausting and life-draining.

Sixth, the nature of crucifixion assures death. Jesus was on the cross from nine in the morning until just before sunset (Mark 15:25, 33). He bled from wounded

hands and feet and also from the thorns that pierced His head (in addition to His shredded back). There would have been a tremendous loss of blood after more than six hours. Plus, crucifixion demands that a man constantly pull himself up in order to breathe, thus causing excruciating pain from the nails. Doing this all day would quickly kill nearly anyone who might even have been in good health before.

Seventh, the piercing of Jesus' side with the spear, from which came "blood and water" (John 19:34), is proof that He had physically died before the piercing. When this has happened, it is a medical fact that the person has already expired (see "Twelfth" below). This detail may also be seen to validate the claim that we are reading an eyewitness account.

Eighth, Jesus said He was in the act of dying on the cross when He declared, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit!" (Luke 23:46). And, "after he had said this he breathed his last." John renders this, "He gave up his spirit" (John 19:30). His death cry was heard by those who remained (Luke 23:47–49).

Ninth, the Roman soldiers, accustomed to crucifixion and death, pronounced Jesus dead. Although it was a common practice to break the legs of the victim to speed death (so that the person can no longer lift himself and breathe), they did not do so with Jesus (John 19:33; cf. Ps. 34:20).

Tenth, Pilate double-checked to make sure Jesus was dead before he relinquished the corpse to Joseph to be buried: "Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph" (Mark 15:44–45).

Eleventh, Jesus was wrapped in about seventy-five pounds of cloth and spices and placed in a sealed tomb for three days (John 19:39–40; Matt. 27:63). If He was not dead by then (which He clearly was), He would have died from lack of food, water, and medical treatment.

Twelfth, medical authorities who have examined the circumstances and nature of Christ's death have concluded that He actually died on the cross. An article in the ***Journal of the American Medical Society*** concluded:

> Clearly, the weight of historical and medical evidence indicates that Jesus was dead before the wound to his side was inflicted and supports the traditional view that the spear, thrust between his right ribs, probably perforated not only the right lung but also the pericardium and heart and thereby ensured his death. Accordingly, interpretations based on the assumption that Jesus did not die on the cross appear to be at odds with modern medical knowledge. (*JAMA* [Mar. 21, 1986]: 1463)

In addition, many other medical authorities have come to the same conclusion, beginning with Dr. Stroud (***On the Physiological Cause of Christ's Death***, 1871); Pierre Barbet (***A Doctor at Calvary***, 1953); C. Truman Davis ("The

Crucifixion of Jesus: The Passion of Christ From a Medical Point of View" in ***Arizona Medicine*** [March 1965]); Robert Bucklin ("The Legal and Medical Aspects of the Trial and Death of Christ" in ***Medicine, Science and Law*** [January 1970]); and Robert Wassenar ("A Physician Looks at the Suffering of Christ" in ***Moody Monthly*** [March 1979]).

Thirteenth, non-Christian historians and writers from the first and second centuries recorded the death of Christ. Flavius Josephus (c. 37–100), a Jewish historian of the time of Christ, believed that Jesus died on the cross: "Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had ***condemned him to the cross***" (***AJ***, 18:3, 379, emphasis added). Likewise, the Roman historian Cornelius Tacitus (c. 55–117) wrote: "A wise man who was called Jesus.… ***Pilate condemned Him to be condemned and to die***" (ibid., emphasis added). He also noted that Jesus' disciples "reported that He had appeared to them three days after ***His crucifixion*** and that He was alive" (***A***, 15.44). According to Julius Africanus (c. A.D. 211), the first-century Samaritan-born historian Thallus (c. A.D. 52), "when discussing the darkness which fell upon the land ***during the crucifixion of Christ***," spoke of it as an eclipse (F. F. Bruce, ***The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*** 113, emphasis added). The second-century Greek writer Lucian referred to Christ as "***the man who was crucified in Palestine*** because he introduced a new cult into the world." He calls him the "***crucified sophist***" (Habermas, ***Ancient Evidence on the Life of Jesus***, chap. 4). The "Letter of Mara Bar-Serapion" (c. A.D. 73), housed in the British Museum, mentions Christ's death, asking, "What advantage did the Jews gain from ***executing their wise King***?" (ibid., op. cit., 114, emphasis added). Indeed, even the ***Talmud*** says, "***on the eve of Passover they hanged***

Yeshu

(***of Nazareth***).… Let everyone knowing aught in his defense come and plead for him. But they found naught in his defense and ***hanged him on the eve of Passover***" (***Babylonian Talmud***, Sanhedrin 43a, emphasis added). Finally, there was the Roman writer Phlegon, who referred to Christ's death and resurrection in his ***Chronicles***, noting, "Jesus, while alive, was of no assistance to himself, but that ***he arose after death, and exhibited the marks of his punishment, and showed how his hands had been pierced by nails***" (***C***, cited by Origen, ***Against Celcus***, 2.23, emphasis added). Phlegon even mentioned "the eclipse in the time of Tiberius Caesar, in whose reign Jesus appears to have been crucified, and the great earthquakes which then took place" (ibid., 445).

Fourteenth, and finally, the earliest Christian writers after the time of Christ

affirmed His death on the cross by crucifixion. Polycarp (fl. second century), a disciple of the apostle John, repeatedly affirmed the death of Jesus, speaking, for example, of "our Lord Jesus Christ, who for our sins suffered even unto death" (***Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians***, chap. 1, 3). Ignatius (d. c. 110) was a friend of Polycarp who clearly confirmed the suffering and death of Christ, saying, "***He really suffered and died***, and rose again" (emphsis added). Otherwise, he adds, all His apostles who suffered for this belief, died in vain. "But (in truth), none of these sufferings were in vain; for ***the Lord was really crucified*** by the ungodly" (ibid., 107, emphasis added). In his ***Dialogue With Trypho***, Justin Martyr (c. 100–165) noted that Jews of his day believed that "Jesus [was] a Galilean deceiver, whom we crucified" (***DT***, 253).
This unbroken testimony from the Old Testament to the early church Fathers, including believers and unbelievers, Jews and Gentiles, is overwelming evidence that Jesus really suffered and died on the cross. The death of Christ by crucifixion is an historical fact beyond all reasonable doubt.

CHRIST'S PHYSICAL RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD

Since Jesus truly died on the cross, the evidence that He was actually raised from the dead consists of the empty tomb and His numerous appearances.

Direct Evidence for the Physical Resurrection of Christ

Again, the ***direct*** evidence for the resurrection of Christ is both the empty tomb and His physical appearances in the same body, now raised, in which He died.

The Empty Tomb

While the empty tomb in and of itself is not proof of the Resurrection, it is an indispensible prerequisite to the evidences (the physical appearances of Christ). Even the physical appearances themselves would not be convincing proof that

Jesus was resurrected bodily if His body was rotting in some grave. The appearances alone, in another body or physical form, are not proof that the body that died had indeed been raised again, as Jesus said it would be (John 2:19). Each gospel provides an empty tomb scene (Matt. 28:1–8; Mark 16:1–8; Luke 24:1–12; John 20:1–8). In each case they see a vacated tomb, and in each case there was the appearance of angels to confirm that "He is not here. He is risen" (cf. Matt. 28:6; Mark 16:6; Luke 24:6; John 20:12). John mentions the empty graveclothes with the headcloth folded up in a place by itself, evidence enough to convince John that Jesus had risen (John 20:6–8).

The Appearance to Mary Magdalene (John 20:10–18)

It is an unmistakable sign of the authenticity of the gospel record that in the male-dominated Jewish culture, Jesus appeared first to a woman. In the first century, for example, a woman's testimony was invalid in court. Certainly, anyone faking the record would have Jesus appearing first to a more prominent disciple, such as Peter, James, or John. During this appearance, there were several proofs of the visibility, materialty, and identity of the resurrection body.
First, Mary ***saw*** Christ with her natural eyes. The text says, "She turned around and saw Jesus standing there" (v. 14). The word "saw" (***theoreo***) is a normal term for seeing with the naked eye; it is used many times of seeing human beings in their physical bodies (Mark 3:11; 5:15; Acts 3:16) and even of seeing Jesus in His pre-resurrection body (Matt. 27:55; John 6:19).
Second, Mary ***heard*** Jesus: "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" (v. 15). Then, again, she heard Jesus say, "Mary," and she recognized His voice (v. 16). Of course, hearing alone is not a sufficient evidence of materiality. God is immaterial, and yet His voice was heard in John 12:28. Nevertheless, physical hearing connected with physical seeing is significant supportive evidence of the physical nature of what was seen and heard. Mary's familiarity with Jesus' voice is also evidence of the identity of the resurrected Christ.
Third, Mary ***touched*** Christ's resurrected body. Jesus replied, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father" (v. 17). The word "hold" (***aptomai***) is a term for the physical touching of a material body; it too is used of the physical touching of other human bodies (Matt. 8:3; 9:29) and of Christ's pre-resurrection body (Mark 6:56; Luke 6:19). The context indicates that Mary was

grasping on to Him so as not to lose Him again. In a parallel experience, the women “clasped his feet” (Matt. 28:9).

Fourth, Mary also “went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance.” Then she ran to Peter and announced that the body was gone (v. 2). This would imply that she saw the ***empty tomb***. The parallel account in Matthew informs us that the angels said to her, “Come and see the place where he lay” (Matt. 28:6). Later Peter and John also went into the tomb; John “bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there,” and Peter “went into the tomb … and saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus’ head” (vv. 5–7). Seeing the same physical body that once lay there is proof of the numerical identity of the pre-and post-resurrection body. In this one account Jesus was seen, heard, and touched. In addition, Mary witnessed both the empty tomb and Jesus’ graveclothes. All the evidence for an unmistakable identity of the same visible, physical body that was raised immortal is present in this first appearance.

Jesus’ Appearance to Mary Magdalene and the Other Women (Matthew 28:1–10)

Jesus not only appeared to Mary Magdalene but also to the other women with her, including Mary the mother of James and Salome (Mark 16:1). During this appearance there were four evidences presented that Jesus rose in the same tangible, physical body in which He was crucified.

First, the women ***saw*** Jesus. They were told by the angel at the empty tomb, “He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him” (v. 7). And, as they hurried away from the tomb, “suddenly Jesus met them. ‘Greetings,’ he said” (v. 9). Thus, they received visual confirmation of His physical resurrection.

Second, when the women saw Jesus, “they came to him, clasped his feet, and worshiped him.” That is, they not only saw His physical body, but they felt it as well. Since spiritual entities cannot be sensed with any of the five senses, the fact that the women actually handled Jesus’ physical body is a convincing proof of the tangible, physical nature of the resurrected body.

Third, the women ***heard*** Jesus speak. After giving greetings (v. 9), Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me” (v. 10). Therefore, the women saw, touched, and heard Jesus with their

physical senses, a threefold confirmation of the physical nature of His resurrection body.

Fourth, in addition to all this, the women saw the ***empty tomb*** where that same resurrected body once lay. The angel said to them at the tomb, "He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay" (v. 6). The same "He" who had been dead is not living, demonstrated by the fact that the same body that once lay there is now alive forevermore. So in both the cases of Mary Magdalene and the other women, all four evidences of the visible, material resurrection of the numerically identical body were present. They saw the empty tomb where His physical body once lay, and they saw, heard, and touched that same body after it came out of the tomb.

Jesus' Appearance to Peter (1 Corinthians 15:5; cf. John 20:3–9)

First Corinthians 15:5 declares that Jesus "was seen of Cephas (Peter)." There is no narration of this event, but the text says He was ***seen*** (Gk: ***ophthe***) and implies that He was ***heard*** as well. Certainly Peter was not speechless. Jesus definitely spoke with Peter in a later apearance when He asked him to feed His sheep (John 21:15–17). Mark confirms that Peter (and the disciples) would "see him, just as he told you" (Mark 16:7). Peter, of course, saw the ***empty tomb*** and the ***graveclothes*** just before this appearance (John 20:6–7). Hence, Peter experienced four of the evidences of the physical resurrection; he saw and heard Jesus, and he observed the empty tomb and graveclothes. These are definite pieces of evidence that the body that rose is the same, visible, material body He had before the Resurrection.

Jesus' Appearance to Two Disciples on the Way to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–35; Mark 16:12–13)

During this appearance there were three evidences of the Resurrection presented. They not only saw and heard Jesus, but they also ate with Him. Combined, these provide clear proof of the tangible, material nature of the resurrection body.

First, there were two disciples, one of whom was named Cleopas (v. 18). As they were walking toward Emmaus, "Jesus himself came up and walked along with them" (v. 15). Although at first they did not recognize who He was, they nevertheless clearly ***saw*** Him. When they finally realized who it was, the text says, "He disappeared from their sight" (v. 31). So when present, Jesus' resurrection body was as visible as any other material object.

Second, they ***heard*** Jesus with their physical ears (vv. 17, 19, 25–26). In fact, Jesus carried on a lengthy conversation with them: "Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself" (v. 27). Of course, they were not the only ones Jesus taught after the Resurrection. Luke informs us elsewhere, "He appeared to them [the apostles] over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3). During these times He "gave many convincing proofs that he was alive."
Third, one further evidence of Jesus' physical resurrection was that He ***ate*** with the two disciples. Luke says, "When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them" (v. 30). Although the text does not say specifically that Jesus also ate, it is implied by being "at the table with them." Later in the chapter it ***is*** explicitly stated that he ate with the ten apostles (v. 43). And, in two other places, Luke states that Jesus ate with the disciples (Acts 1:4; 10:41). Thus, on this appearance, the eyewitnesses saw Him, heard Him, and ate with Him. It is difficult to imagine how Jesus could have done anything more to demonstrate the genuine physical nature of the resurrection body.

Jesus' Appearance to the Ten Disciples (Luke 24:36–49; John 20:19–23)

Later, when Jesus appeared to the ten apostles (Thomas being absent), He was seen, heard, touched, and they saw Him eat fish. Thus, four major evidences of the visible, material nature of the resurrection body were present on this occasion.
First, "while they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' " In fact, Jesus carried on a conversation with them also about how "everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms" (v. 44). So Jesus obviously was ***heard*** by the disciples.
Second, the disciples also ***saw*** Jesus on this occation. In fact, they thought at first that He was a spirit (v. 37). However, Jesus "showed them his hands and his feet." Therefore, they clearly saw Him as well as heard Him. In the parallel account, John records that "the disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord" (20:20; cf. 25).
Third, it may be inferred from the fact that they were at first unconvinced of His tangible materiality when Jesus presented His wounds to them, that they ***touched***

Him as well. In fact, Jesus clearly said to them, “Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see I have” (v. 39). The use of “I” and “me” in connection with His physical resurrection body indicates that He is claiming to be numerically identical with His preresurrection body. Jesus also “showed them his hands and feet,” confirming to His disciples that His resurrection body was the very same nailscarred body of flesh and bones that was crucified.

Fourth, on this occasion Jesus actually ***ate*** physical food. In order to convince the disciples that He was raised in a literal, physical body, Jesus asked, “Do you have anything here to eat?” In response, “they gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence” (vv. 41–43). What makes this passage such a powerful proof is that Jesus offered His ability to eat physical food as a demonstration of the material nature of His body of flesh and bones. Jesus literally exhausted the ways in which He could prove the corporeal, material nature of His resurrection body. Thus, if Jesus’ resurrection body was not really the same material body of flesh and bones in which He died, then He cannot be exonerated from the charge of deception.

Jesus’ Appearance to the Eleven Disciples (John 20:24–31)

Again, Thomas was not present when Jesus appeared to the ten apostles (John 20:24). Even after they reported whom they had seen, Thomas refused to believe unless he could see and handle Christ for himself. A week later his wish was granted (John 20:26): When Jesus appeared to Thomas, he got to see, hear, and touch the resurrected Lord.

First, Thomas ***saw*** the Lord: “A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’ ” (v. 26). Jesus was clearly visible to Thomas and later said to him, “You have seen me” (29).

Second, Thomas also ***heard*** the Lord. In fact, he heard Jesus say, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe” (v. 27). To this unquestionably convincing display of physical evidence, Thomas replied, “My Lord and my God!” (v. 28).

Third, it can be inferred from this that Thomas also ***touched*** the Lord. Certainly this is what Thomas said he wanted to do (v. 25), and this is precisely what Jesus told him to do (v. 27). Although the text only says that Thomas saw and believed (29), it is natural to believe that he also touched Jesus. Jesus was touched on at

least two other occasions: John 20:27. At any rate, Thomas certainly encountered a visible, physical resurrection body with his natural senses.
Fourth, whether or not Thomas touched Christ, he certainly ***saw*** His ***crucifixion wounds*** (John 20:27–29). And the fact that Jesus still had these physical wounds from His crucifixion is an unmistakable proof that He was resurrected in the very same material body in which He was crucified. This was the second time that Jesus "showed them his hands and feet" (Luke 24:40). Once again, it is difficult to suggest that greater proof could be offered that the resurrection body was the same body of flesh that was crucified and is now glorified.

Jesus' Appearance to the Seven Disciples (John 21)

John records Jesus' appearance to the seven disciples who went fishing in Galilee. On this occasion the disciplies saw, heard, and ate breakfast with Jesus, thus manifesting again the tangible, physical nature of His resurrection body, as well as its real activity in space and time.
First, they ***saw*** Jesus, for the Bible says that "Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Tiberias" (John 21:1). Early in the morning they saw Him standing on the shore (v. 4), and after He talked and ate with them, the text says this was "now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead" (v. 14).
Second, the disciples ***heard*** Jesus speak on this occasion (vv. 5–6, 10, 12). Jesus carried on an extended conversation with Peter in which he was asked three times whether he loved Jesus (vv. 15–17). Since Peter had denied Jesus three times, not only did Peter hear Jesus speak, but Jesus' words no doubt rang in his ears. Jesus also told Peter how he would die (vv. 18–19).
Third, Jesus apparently also ***ate*** with the disciples during this time. He asked them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" (v. 5). After telling them how to catch some (v. 6), Jesus requested them to "bring some of the fish you have just caught" (v. 10). Then He said, "Come and have breakfast" (v. 12). As they did, "Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish" (v. 13). Although the text does not explicitly state that Jesus ate; nevertheless, as host of the meal it would have been strange for Him not to have partaken with them. So in addition to seeing and hearing Jesus, He evidenced the material nature of His resurrection by eating physical food.

Jesus' Appearance to All the Apostles at the "Great Commission" (Matthew 28:16–20; Mark 16:14–18)

The next appearance of Christ was at the Great Commission. As Jesus commanded them to disciple all nations, He was both seen and clearly heard by all the apostles.

First, the text says that the disciples went to Galilee, where Jesus had told them to go (v. 16), and "when they saw him, they worshiped him" (v. 17). Mark adds, "Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating" (Mark 16:24). However, it was not simply what they saw, but what they heard that left a permanent impression as Jesus made His last appearance to them.

Second, the apostles ***heard*** Jesus, since on this occasion He "spoke about the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3). During this specific appearance Jesus commanded them: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about" (Acts 1:4). Thus, it was not only a familiar voice, but a familiar teaching that confirmed to the apostles that it was the very same Jesus speaking to them after the Resurrection as before.

Third, Luke also says in this passage that Jesus ***ate*** with the disciples. This last appearance to them before the Ascension was "on one occasion, while he was eating with them" (Acts 1:4). This is the fourth recorded instance of Jesus eating after the Resurrection. It was apparently something He did often, since even the short summary of His ministry by Peter in Acts 10 declares that the apostles "ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead" (v. 41). Surely both the intimate fellowship and the physical ability to eat food were more than sufficient proof that Jesus was appearing to them in the same tangible, physical body He possessed before His resurrection.

Jesus' Appearance to Paul After the Ascension (1 Corinthians 15:8; Acts 9:1–9)

Jesus also appeared to Paul; this was actually Jesus' "last" appearance (1 Cor. 15:8). It is important to note that this appearance was not a mere vision; that is, something occurring only within the mind of Paul. Rather, it was an objective, external event observable to all who were within visual distance. This is clear from several facts.

For one thing, Paul called this an "appearance" (Gk: ***ophthe***), the same word used of Christ's literal appearance to the other apostles (1 Cor. 15:5–7), which Paul calls His "last" appearance to them.

For another, seeing the resurrected Christ was a condition for being an apostle (Acts 1:22), and Paul claimed to be one, saying, “Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?” (1 Cor. 9:1).

Also, mere visions do not have physical manifestations connected with them, such as light and a voice.

In addition, the resurrection experiences, including Paul’s, are never once called “visions” (***optasia***) anywhere in the Gospels or the Epistles: They are real physical appearances. During the appearance to Paul, Jesus was both seen and heard, which is always indicative of a true physical appearance rather than a mere vision. The Gospels do speak of a “vision” of angels (Luke 24:23), and Acts refers to Paul’s “vision from heaven” (Acts 26:19), which may be a reference to the vision(s) he and Ananias received later (Acts 9:11–12; cf. 22:6–11). Indeed, speaking of visions, Kittel’s ***Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*** declares that the New Testament “distinguishes them … from the Damascus experience” (5:357). Even if it could be shown that this was a reference to Paul’s Damascus-Road experience, it would only prove that the word ***vision*** had an overlapping usage with the kind of literal physical appearance Christ made to Paul.

As for the actual appearance to Paul, Christ was both seen and heard with the physical senses of those present.

First, the physical manifestation of the resurrected Jesus to Paul was both heard and seen by the apostle. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul said that Jesus “appeared to me also” (v. 8). In the detailed account of this in Acts 26, Paul said, “I saw a light from heaven” (v. 13). That Paul is referring to a physical light is clear from the fact that it was so bright it blinded his physical eyes. Paul not only saw the light, but he saw Jesus (1 Cor. 9:1).

Second, Paul also ***heard*** the voice of Jesus speaking distinctly to him “in Aramaic” (Acts 26:14). The physical voice Paul heard asked, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” (Acts 9:4). Paul carried on a conversation with Jesus (vv. 5–6) and was obedient to His command to go into the city of Damascus (v. 8). Paul’s miraculous conversion, his tireless efforts for Jesus, and his strong emphasis on the literal Resurrection (Rom. 4:25; 10:9; 1 Cor. 15) all show what an indelible impression the appearance made upon him.

Not only did Paul see the light and hear the voice, but those who were with him did as well. This shows that the experience was not private; it was not purely subjective but had an objective referent. It happened “out there” in the real physical world, not merely in the world of his exclusive spiritual experience.

Anyone who had been there could also have seen and heard the physical manifestation.

The sum total of the direct evidence for the physical resurrection of Christ is massive. Compared to the evidence for other events from the ancient world, it is overwhelming (see chart). During these twelve recorded appearances, Jesus was seen by more than five hundred people over a forty-day period of time (Acts 1:3; cf. 1 Cor. 15:6). On all twelve occasions Jesus was not only seen, but probably heard. Four times He offered Himself to be touched.

THE TWELVE APPEARANCES OF CHRIST				
Persons	*Saw*	*Heard*	*Touched*	*Other Evidence*
Mary	•	•	•	Empty tomb
Mary & women	•	•	•	Empty tomb
Peter	•	•*		Empty tomb, graveclothes
(John)				(Empty tomb, graveclothes)
Two disciples	•	•		Ate food
Ten apostles	•	•	•†	Death wounds, ate food
Eleven apostles	•	•	•†	Death wounds
Seven apostles	•	•		Ate food
All apostles	•	•		
500 brethren	•	•*		
James	•	•*		
All apostles	•	•		Ate food
Paul	•	•		

(He was definitely touched twice.) Jesus revealed His crucifixion scars on two occasions. There were four times the empty tomb was seen, and twice the empty graveclothes were viewed. In another four instances Jesus ate food.

The sum total of this evidence is tremendous confirmation that Jesus rose and lived in the same visible, material body He possessed before His resurrection.

Indirect Evidence for the Physical Resurrection of Christ

In addition to all the direct evidence for the bodily resurrection of Christ, there are many lines of confirming evidence. These include the immediate transformation of the disciples, the reaction of those who rejected Christ, the existence of the early church, and, among other things, the amazingly rapid spread of Christianity.

The Immediate Transformation of the Disciples

After Jesus' death His disciples were scared, scattered, and skeptical. Only one apostle (John) was present at the Crucifixion (John 19:26–27); the rest had fled for their lives (Matt. 26:56). Mary, the first one to whom Jesus appeared, doubted, thinking she had seen a gardener (John 20:15). The apostles doubted the women who first reported seeing the empty tomb (Luke 24:11) and the risen Christ. Some doubted until they saw Christ for themselves (John 20:25). One would not believe when all the other apostles told him Christ had appeared to them. Two disciples on the road to Emmaus doubted even as they talked with Jesus, thinking He was a stranger (Luke 24:16–18).

Yet within a few weeks these very same skeptical disciples, who were earlier huddling in secret for fear of their lives (John 20:19), were fearlessly and openly proclaiming the resurrection of Christ in the face of death (Acts 4–5). The best explanation for this immediate and miraculous change is that they were absolutely convinced they had encountered the bodily resurrected Christ.

The Predominant Theme of Apostolic Preaching

Of all the wonderful things Jesus taught them about love (Matt. 22:36–37), non-retaliation (Matt. 5), and the kingdom of God (cf. Matt. 13), the prevailing theme of apostolic preaching was none of these: It was the resurrection of Christ. This was the subject of both Peter's first sermon at Pentecost (Acts 2:22ff.) and his next sermon in the temple (Acts 3:15, 26). It was also the content of his message to the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:10). Indeed, they went everywhere, and "with great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 4:33; cf. 4:2). Again, in point of fact, being "a witness … of His resurrection" was a condition for being an apostle (Acts 1:21–22; cf. 1 Cor. 9:1). The best explanation of why ***this*** theme, out of all Jesus' teaching, was their immediate preoccupation within weeks of His death was that they had, as the Gospels tell us, repeatedly encountered Him alive a few days after His crucifixion and resurrection.

The Reaction of Those Who Rejected Christ

The reaction of the Jewish authorities is also testimony to the fact of Christ's resurrection.

First, they did not ***refute*** it; rather, they ***resisted*** it (cf. Acts 4:2ff.). Surely if they could have found Jesus' dead body somewhere they would have produced it and defeated once and for all the claim of His disciples. But they did not—instead of ***finding*** the dead body, they ***fought*** the disciples who testified that they had seen the body alive. The very fact that they persecuted the witnesses to the Resurrection, rather than disproving them, is evidence that what the disciples witnessed was real.

Second, the authorities tried to discredit the Resurrection by bribing the soldiers who guarded the tomb (Matt. 28:11ff). The claim that Jesus' body was stolen shows how desperate they were in their attempts to resist the reality of the Resurrection.

The Existence of the Early Church

Another indirect proof of the Resurrection is the very existence of the early church. There are good reasons why the church should not have arisen.

First, the original church consisted largely of Jews who believed there was only one God (Deut. 6:4), and yet they proclaimed that Jesus was God (see "CD" in Geisler, ***BECA***.) They prayed to Jesus (Acts 7:59), baptized in His Name (Acts 2:38), claimed He was exalted to God's right hand (Acts 2:33; 7:55), and called Him Lord and Christ (2:34–36), the very title that earned Jesus the charge of blasphemy from the Jewish high priest at His trial (Matt. 26:63–65).
Second, they were persecuted, beaten, threatened with death, and even martyred (Acts 7:57–60). Even so, they not only maintained their belief but quickly grew in number. If what they testified to was not real, they had every reason and opportunity to give it up. ***But they did not***. Only a real encounter with the resurrected Christ can adequately account for their existence as a Jewish sect that later came to be known as the "Christians" (Acts 11:26).

The Immediate Amazingly Rapid Growth of Christianity

In contrast to other religions, which grew slowly at first, Christianity experienced an immediate and rapid growth. Three thousand were saved the very first day (Acts 2:41), while many others were added to their ranks daily (Acts 2:47), and within days five thousand more became believers (Acts 4:4). The "number of the disciples was increasing" so rapidly that deacons had to be appointed to care for the widows (Acts 6:1). And all of this occured in the very city (Jerusalem) in which Jesus had been crucified and from where the disciples had fled. Surely nothing other than the bodily resurrection of Christ and His promised power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8) can sufficiently account for this amazing growth.
When taken together, the evidence for the resurrection of Christ is both voluminous and compelling: There is nothing like it for any other historical event from the ancient world. There are more documents, more eyewitnesses, and more corraborative evidence than anything from ancient history. In addition, the secondary and supplementary evidence is convincing in its own right—combined with the direct evidence, it presents an overwhelming case for the physical resurrection of Christ, placing it, to borrow legal terminology, "beyond all reasonable doubt."

The Early Conversion of Jewish Priests

The most unlikely group to be converted to early Christianity were the Jewish priests. They were the guardians of first-century Judaism with whom Jesus and

His followers found themselves in constant conflict. However, we read that very soon after Jesus' resurrection many Jewish priests who had the best access to the evidence ***and*** the strongest motive not to convert became believers. Acts 6:7 records that "the word of God spread … [and] the number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith."

The Conversion of the Apostle Paul

Perhaps the least likely person to be converted to Christianity was Saul of Tarsus, student of the great Jewish Rabbi Gamaliel. He assisted in the first martyrdom of a Christian, Stephen (Acts 7:58; 8:1). He persecuted Christians (9:1) and was one of the most devout and zealous anti-Christians of the day (Phil. 3:4–6). Nothing short of an appearance of the resurrected Christ can account for His sudden and miraculous conversion (Acts 9). Indeed, later he lists himself along with Peter and James as one who had "seen Jesus our Lord" (1 Cor. 9:1) after His resurrection.

Objections to the Physical Resurrection of Christ

There are, of course, many objections leveled against the physical resurrection of Jesus. Some claim that this would be a miracle and that miracles are not believable, but this has already been refuted (see Volume 1, chapter 3). Others claim that the New Testament documents and witnesses recording these events were not reliable, yet this too has been rebutted (see Volume 1, chapter 26). Still others have devised alternative theories opposing the Resurrection, such as the "swoon theory" or the "stolen-body hypothesis," or that the alleged appearances were cases of mistaken identity. But all of these fly in the face of the evidence for Christ's death and the evidence for His resurrection just presented. The facts are that Jesus of Nazareth really died and actually came back from the dead on the third day in the same physical body.

CHRIST'S BODILY ASCENSION INTO HEAVEN

Several New Testament texts affirm clearly that Jesus rose in the same body in which He died. This physical body was made immortal at His resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20; cf. 15:53), and it was glorified (John 17:1, 5; 1 Tim. 3:16; 1 Peter 1:11) at His ascension—***the same physical body in which He lived and died*** (cf. John 2:19; Luke 24:39).

Luke 9:51

“As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.” In this passage, Jesus is looking forward to Jerusalem, where He will be crucified, and to the final assumption into heaven after His resurrection.

Luke 24:49–51

“I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high. When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven.”

John 6:62

“What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before!” Here Jesus appears to allude to His later ascension, noting that He will return to the Father from whom He came—this time, of course, in bodily form.

John 14:2–3

“In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”
Christ’s ascension was necessary to complete the work of salvation by preparing a place for His bride. Paul said, “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless” (Eph. 5:25–27).

John 14:12, 28

“I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.… You heard me say, ‘I am going away and I am coming back to you.’ If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father.”
Without Christ’s ascension, the Holy Spirit would not have descended to indwell and empower the disciples.

John 16:10, 28

“I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer.… I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father.”
The language is unequivocal. Jesus came from and returned to His Father; He descended and then ascended.

John 20:17

“Jesus said [to Mary Magdalene], ‘Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, “I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” ’ ”
Here the resurrected Christ predicted His ascension and told Mary to stop clinging to Him, since He had not completed His work by ascending to the Father and receiving the Father’s acceptance of His completed work of salvation.

Ephesians 4:9–10

“What does ‘he ascended’ mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.”
Just as Jesus in His humiliation descended to the earth, so in His exaltation He ascended into heaven.

Philippians 2:8–11

> Being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The Ascension is implied here in Christ’s exaltation.

Acts 1:9–11

> After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into

heaven."

This is the chief text on Christ's bodily assumption into heaven; it affirms that it was a literal, visible ascension in Jesus' resurrection body. His body was not, as some suggest, transformed into being invisible, but rather His physical body simply passed out of their sight behind "a cloud [which] hid him from their sight."

This also raises the question of where Jesus' body is at the present time. Evangelical scholars offer two views. One is that Jesus' body moved literally and physically into another dimension. This, they suggest, is evidenced by the apparent immediacy with which Jesus appeared and disappeared after His resurrection (cf. Luke 24:31). Modern physics, with its many dimensions, appears to make something like this possible. It would also provide an answer to the problem of Jesus' being physical and, thus, visibly present somewhere in the physical cosmos where, say, a high-powered telescope could see Him. However, none of these are insurmountable difficulties, since Jesus could surely hide behind a cloud of His shekinah glory in some remote place in the universe that we could not penetrate.

The other view is that Jesus is still present in this space-time dimension. The fact that the text implies He did not disappear immediately but ascended gradually until He was hidden by a cloud would seem to lend support to the view that His body is still present but hidden in the space-time universe. Whichever view, Christ still exists in the numerically same physical body, now glorified, in which He died, rose, and ascended.

CHRIST'S PRESENT SESSION

In addition to Christ's physical death, literal bodily resurrection, and bodily ascension, He has an important present priestly session for believers in heaven.

1 John 2:1–2

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

Satan is the accuser of God's people (cf. Rev. 12:8–10; Job 1–2). John testified,

> I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down" (Rev. 12:10).

In view of this, Christ—our Advocate—counters by pleading the efficacy of His blood, shed for our sins.

Hebrews 7:17–26

> It is declared: "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek." … Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant. Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. Such a high priest meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.

Because Christ has humanity as well as deity, He can sympathize with our human frailties:

> Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. (Heb. 4:14–15)

Since He Himself was tempted in all points that we are, He can, by His present session, overcome these temptations: "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it" (1 Cor. 10:13). This "way out" is provided by Christ's present intercession for us—it is His present priestly ministry on our behalf.

CHRIST'S RETURN AND REIGN

As noted above, Christ will come again literally and physically to fulfill His role as King over His people. A complete discussion of Christ's second coming and

subsequent reign is found under ***eschatology*** (“last things”) in Volume 4, chapters 15–16.

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APPENDIX TWO

BIBLICAL REFERENCES TO CREATION

There are some three hundred references to Creation in the Bible, making it one of the major teachings of Scripture. These citations range from Genesis to Revelation, with large concentrations in Genesis, Job, Psalms, and Isaiah. Jeremiah and Proverbs have many allusions to Creation as well. In the New Testament, Hebrews, Revelation, Mark, and Romans have the most.

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES TO CREATION

- Genesis—1:1–27; 2:1–23; 3:1, 19, 23; 5:1–2; 6:6–7; 7:4; 9:6
- Exodus—4:11; 20:11; 31:17
- Deuteronomy—4:32; 32:6, 15, 18
- 2 Kings—19:15, 25
- 1 Chronicles—1:1; 16:26
- 2 Chronicles—2:12
- Nehemiah—9:6

- Job—4:17; 9:8–9; 10:8–12; 26:7, 13; 31:15; 32:22; 33:4, 6–7; 34:15; 35:10; 36:3; 38:4–6; 40:15, 19
- Psalms—8:3–8; 19:1–4; 33:6; 86:9; 89:11–12, 47; 90:2–3;94:9; 95:5–6;96:5; 100:3; 102:18, 25; 104:2–5, 19 (see NKJV), 24–25, 30; 115:15; 119:73; 121:2; 124:8; 134:3; 135:7; 136:5–9; 139:14–15; 146:6; 148:1–5; 149:2
- Proverbs—8:23–29; 14:31; 16:4 (see NKJV); 17:5; 20:12; 22:2; 26:10 (see NKJV)
- Ecclesiastes—3:11; 7:29; 11:5; 12:1, 7
- Isaiah—17:7; 22:11; 27:11; 29:16; 37:16, 26; 40:21, 26, 28; 41:20; 42:5; 43:1, 7, 10, 15, 21; 44:2, 21, 24; 45:7–9, 11–12, 18; 48:7, 13; 49:5; 51:13; 54:5, 16; 57:16; 66:2, 22
- Jeremiah—1:5; 10:11–13, 16; 27:5; 31:35; 32:17; 33:2; 51:15–16
- Ezekiel—21:30; 28:13, 15
- Hosea—8:14
- Amos—4:13; 5:8; 9:6
- Jonah—1:9
- Habakkuk—1:14
- Zechariah—12:1
- Malachi—2:10, 15

NEW TESTAMENT REFERENCES TO CREATION

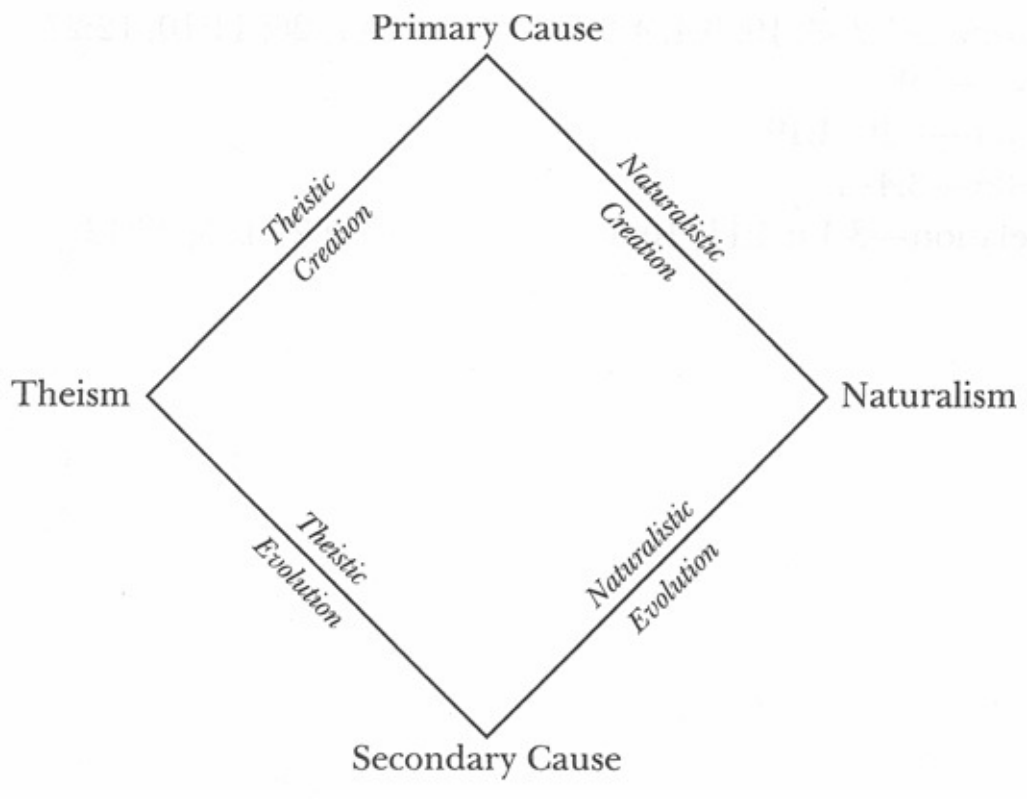
- Matthew—13:35; 19:4, 8; 24:21; 25:34

- Mark—2:27; 10:6; 13:19
- Luke—3:38; 11:50
- John—1:2–3, 10; 8:44; 9:32 NKJV; 17:5
- Acts—4:24; 7:50; 14:15; 17:24, 26
- Romans—1:19–20, 25; 5:12–14;8:19–23, 39; 9:20
- 1 Corinthians—11:8–9, 12; 15:22, 38, 45–47
- 2 Corinthians—4:6
- Ephesians—1:4; 3:9
- Colossians—1:16–17, 23; 3:10
- 1 Timothy—2:13; 4:3–4
- Hebrews—1:2–3, 10; 3:4; 4:3–4, 10, 13; 9:11, 26; 11:10; 12:27
- James—3:9
- 1 Peter—1:20; 4:19
- 2 Peter—3:4–7
- Revelation—3:14; 4:11; 10:6; 13:8; 14:7; 17:8; 21:1, 5; 22:13

APPENDIX THREE

VARIOUS VIEWS ON ORIGINS

There are four basic views on origins (see Geisler and Anderson, ***Origin Science***, 165 ff.); two are naturalistic, and two are super naturalistic. The naturalistic views are called ***naturalistic creation*** and ***naturalistic evolution***. The super-natural views are named ***theistic creation*** and ***theistic evolution***. They can be diagrammed as follows.



Naturalistic Evolution

Naturalistic evolution believes there is no God involved in creation—things emerged by purely natural processes. Carl Sagan (1934–1996) and Isaac Asimov (1920–1992) are examples of adherents to this view.

Naturalistic Creation

Naturalistic creation believes there is no theistic Creator beyond the world—only a creative Mind within the universe that creates. This view is represented by Sir Fred Hoyle (1915–2001) and Nalin Chandra Wickramasinghe (b. 1939).

Theistic Evolution

Theistic evolution holds that there is a theistic God beyond the world who created it, but that from that point on all living things[1] emerged under His control by largely natural processes. This position has been held by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955) and by many Christian scholars, such as Howard Van Till.

Theistic Creation

Theistic creation contends that God directly created the universe, living things, and human beings. Those in this camp differ on how many things were created and how much time it took God to create them, but there is agreement that God was directly involved in creating the world, life, and humankind. Most believe, as I do, that God directly created different forms of plant and animal life, from which all variety of living things has emerged.

Both theistic evolution and theistic creation believe in a supernatural primary Cause of the universe. They disagree on whether/to what degree God used secondary causes to bring about living things (and especially human beings).

Both naturalistic evolution and naturalistic creation hold that there is no supernatural Cause beyond the universe. They disagree, however, on whether there is an intelligent primary Cause (Mind) within the universe that accounts for its design and complexity. C. S. Lewis's note on this view is penetrating:

> To be complete I ought to mention the in-between view called Life Force philosophy, or Creative Evolution, or Emergent Evolution.... One reason why many people find Creative Evolution so attractive is that it gives one much of the emotional comfort of believing in God and none of the less pleasant consequences. When you are feeling fit and the sun is shining and you do not want to believe that the whole universe is a mere mechanical dance of atoms, it is nice to be able to think of this great mysterious Force rolling on through the centuries and carrying you on its crest. If, on the other hand, you want to do something rather shabby, the Life-Force, being only a blind force, with no morals and no mind, will never interfere with you like that troublesome God we learned about when we were children. The Life-Force is a sort of tame God. You can switch it on when you want, but it will not bother you. All the thrills of religion and none of the cost. Is the Life-Force the greatest achievement of wishful thinking the world has yet seen? (*Mere Christianity*, 35, note)

APPENDIX FOUR

VARIOUS VIEWS OF THE “DAYS” OF GENESIS

There are two major views with regard to the time involved in Creation: the old earth view and the young-earth view. The latter believes the universe is no more than approximately 15,000 years old, while the former holds that it is probably about 15,000,000,000 years old.

Young-earthers take the “days” of Creation to be six successive, literal, solar days of twenty-four hours each, totaling 144 hours of Creation. They also reject any significant time gaps between the accounts in Genesis 1 or within the genealogies in Genesis 5 and 11.[1]

THE SIX TWENTY-FOUR-HOUR-DAY VIEW OF CREATION

Not all scholars who take the days of Genesis to be twenty-four hour days are young-earthers (some hold a gap theory); however, all who hold to a young earth hold to the twenty-four-hour-day view.

Arguments Offered for the Twenty-Four-Hour-Day View

There are many biblical arguments presented in favor of the twenty-four-hour-day position. These include the following.

The Normal Meaning of the Word Day (***Yom***)

It is contended that the usual meaning of the Hebrew word ***yom*** ("day") is twenty-four hours unless the context indicates otherwise. The context does not indicate anything but a twenty-four-hour-day in Genesis 1; hence, the days should be taken as solar days.

The Use of Numbered Series

Further, it is noted that when numbers are used in a series (1, 2, 3 …) in connection with the word ***day*** (***yom***) in the Old Testament, it always refers to twenty-four-hour-days. The absence of any exception to this in the Old Testament is given as evidence of the fact that Genesis 1 is referring to twenty-four-hour-days.

The Use of "Evening and Morning"

Another line of evidence is the use of the phrase "evening and morning" in connection with each day in Genesis 1. Since the literal twenty-four-hour-day on the Jewish calendar began in the "evening" (***by*** sunset) and ended in the "morning" (***before*** sunset) the next day, it is concluded that these are literal twenty-four-hour-days.

The Comparison With a Six-Day Workweek

According to the law of Moses (Ex. 20:11), the Jewish workweek (Sunday through Friday) was to be followed by a day of rest on Saturday, just as God had done in His "six-day week" of creation. The Jewish workweek refers to six

successive twenty-four-hour-days. This being the case, it seems that the creation week, like the workweek, was only 144 hours long.

Life Cannot Exist for Thousands of Years Without Light

Young-earthers claim that according to Genesis 1, light was not made until the fourth day (v. 14), but there was life on the third day (v. 1:11–13). However, life on earth cannot exist for millions (or even thousands) of years without light; thus, the "days" must not have been long periods of time.

Plants Cannot Live Without Animals

Plants were created on the third day (1:11–13), and animals were not created until later (1:20–23). There is a symbiotic relation between plants and animals, one depending on the other for its life. For example, plants give off oxygen and take in carbon dioxide, and animals do the reverse. Therefore, plants and animals must have been created closely together, not separated by long periods of time.

The Old Earth View Implies Death Before Adam

According to the old-earth position, there was death before Adam. Nevertheless, the Bible declares that death came only after Adam, as a result of his sin: "Just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned" (Rom. 5:12; cf. 8:20–22).

The Old-Earth View Is an Accommodation to Evolution

It is well known that the theory of evolution (or common ancestry) depends on very long periods of time for life to develop from a one-celled animal to human beings. Without these long periods of time, evolution would not be possible. Thus, it is argued by young-earthers that granting long periods of time is an accommodation to evolution.

Mark 10:6 Affirms That Adam and Eve Were Created at the Beginning

According to this text, "At the beginning of creation God 'made them male and

female.' "If God created humankind at the beginning of Creation, then they were not created at the end of millions of years, as the old-earth view contends.

A Response to the Arguments Offered for the Twenty-Four-Hour-Day View

In spite of the fact that many find these arguments convincing proof of six successive twenty-four-hour-days of Creation, the case is less than definitive for several reasons. Those who reject the six-successive-solar-day view reply as follows.

The Normal Meaning of the Word Day (***Yom***)

It is true that most often the Hebrew word ***yom*** ("day") means "twenty-four hours." However, this is not definitive for its meaning in Genesis 1 for several reasons.

First, the meaning of a term is not determined by majority vote, but by the context in which it is used. It is not important how many times it is used elsewhere, but how it is used here.

Second, even in the creation story in Genesis 1–2, "day" (***yom***) is used of more than a twenty-four-hour period. Speaking of the whole six "days" of creation, Genesis 2:4 refers to it as "the day" (***yom***) when all things were created.

Third, and finally, ***yom*** is elsewhere used of long periods of time, as in Psalm 90:4, which is cited in 2 Peter 3:8: "A day is like a thousand years."

The Use of Numbered Series

Critics of the twenty-four-hour-day view point out that there is no rule of the Hebrew language demanding that all numbered days in a series refer to twenty-four-hour-days. Further, even if there ***were*** no exceptions in the rest of the Old Testament, it would not mean that "day" in Genesis 1 does not refer to more than a twenty four hour period of time: Genesis 1 may be the exception! Finally, contrary to the solar-day view, there is another example in the Old Testament of a numbered series of days that are not twenty-four-hour-days. Hosea 6:1–2

reads: “Come, let us return to the LORD. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence.” It is clear that the prophet is not speaking of twenty-four-hour “days,” but of longer periods of time in the future. Even so, he uses numbered days in a series.

The Use of “Evening and Morning”

First, the fact that the phrase “evening and morning” is ***often*** used in connection with twenty-four-hour-days does not mean it must ***always*** be used in this way.
Second, if one is going to take everything in Genesis 1 in a strictly literal way, then the phrase “evening and morning” does not encompass all of a twenty-four-hour-day, but only the late afternoon of one day and the early morning of another. This is considerably less than twenty four hours.
Third, technically, the text does not say the “day” was composed of “evening and morning” (thus allegedly making a twenty four hour Jewish day); rather, it simply says, “And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day” (Gen. 1:5). Further, the phrase may be a figure of speech indicating a beginning and end to a definite period of time, just as we see in phrases like “the dawn of world history” or the “sunset years of one’s life.”
Fourth, if every day in this series of seven is to be taken as twenty-four hours, why is the phrase “evening and morning” not used with one of the days (the seventh)? In fact, as we shall see (below), the seventh day is not twenty-four hours, and thus there is no necessity to take the other days as twenty four hours either, since all of them alike use the same word (***yom***) and have a series of numbers with them.
Fifth, and finally, in Daniel 8:14, “evenings and mornings” (cf. v. 26) refer to a period of 2,300 days. Indeed, often in the Old Testament the phrase is used as a figure of speech meaning “continually” (cf. Ex. 18:13; 27:21; Lev. 24:3; Job 4:20).

The Comparison With a Six-Day Workweek

It is true that the creation week is compared with a workweek (Ex. 20:11); however, it is not uncommon in the Old Testament to make unit-to-unit comparisons rather than minute-for-minute ones. For example, God appointed

forty years of wandering for forty days of disobedience (Num. 14:34). And, in Daniel 9, 490 days equals 490 years (cf. 9:24–27). What is more, we know the seventh day is more than twenty-four hours, since according to Hebrews 4 the seventh day is still going on. Genesis says that "on the seventh day [God] rested" (Gen. 2:2), but Hebrews informs us that God is still in that Sabbath rest into which He entered after He created: "There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his" (Heb. 4:10).

Life Cannot Exist for Thousands of Years Without Light

Light was not created on the fourth day, as defenders of the solar day argue; rather, it was made on the very first day when God said, "Let there be light" (Gen. 1:3). As to why there was light on the first day when the sun did not appear until the fourth day, there are various possibilities. Some scholars have noted a parallelism between the first three days (light, water, and land—all empty) and the second three days (light, water, and land—all filled with bodies). This may indicate a parallelism in which the first and fourth days cover the same period, in which case the sun existed from the beginning.
Others have pointed out that while the sun was ***created*** on the first day, it did not ***appear*** until the fourth day. Perhaps this was due to a vapor cloud that allowed light through, but not the distinct shape of the heavenly bodies from which the light emanated.

Plants Cannot Live Without Animals

Some plants and animals are interdependent, but not all. Genesis does not mention all the plants and animals, but only some. If the "days" are six successive periods, then those forms of plant and animal life that need each other could have been created together. In fact, the basic order of events is the order of dependence. For instance, many plants and animals can exist without humans (and they were created first), but humans (who were created on the sixth day) cannot exist without certain plants and animals. In addition, if the "days" are parallel, then the problem does not exist, since plants and animals would exist at the same time. In any event, the argument from the symbiotic relation of plants and animals does not prove that the six "days" of Genesis 1 must be only 144

hours in duration.

The Old-Earth View Implies Death Before Adam

There are several problems with this argument.
First, Romans 5:12 does not say ***all animals*** die because of Adam's sin, but only that "all men" die as a consequence.
Second, Romans 8 does not say that animal death results from Adam's sin, but only that the "creation was subjected to frustration" as a result of it (v. 20).
Third, if Adam ate anything—and he had to eat in order to live—then at least plants had to die before he sinned.
Fourth, and finally, the fossil evidence indicates animal death before human death, since people are found only on the top (later) strata while animals are found in lower (earlier) strata.

The Old-Earth View Is an Accommodation to Evolution

In response to this charge, it must be observed that allowing for long periods of time for the development of life came long before the idea of evolution. Augustine (354–430), for one, held to long periods of time for the development of life (***CG***, 11.6).
Also, even in modern times, scientists had concluded that long periods of time were involved before Darwin wrote in 1859.
Furthermore, long periods of time do not help evolution, since without intelligent intervention, more time does not produce the specified complexity involved in life. Natural laws randomize, not specify. For example, dropping red, white, and blue bags of confetti from a plane at 1,000 feet in the air will never produce an American flag on the ground. Giving it more time to fall by dropping it at 10,000 feet will diffuse it even more.

Mark 10:6 Affirms That Adam and Eve Were Created at the Beginning

First, Adam was not created at the ***beginning*** but at the ***end*** of the creation period (on the sixth day), no matter how long or short the days were.
Second, the Greek word for "create" (
ktisis
) can and sometimes does mean "institution" or "ordinance" (cf. 1 Peter 2:13). Since Jesus is speaking of the institution of marriage in Mark 10:6, it could mean "from the beginning of the institution of marriage."

Third, and finally, even if Mark 10:6 is speaking of the original creation events, it does not mean there could not have been a long period of time involved in those creative events.

THE "DAYS" OF GENESIS MAY INVOLVE LONG PERIODS OF TIME

Other orthodox Christians believe that the "days" of Genesis 1 may involve significant periods of time. They offer two lines of evidence in support of this view: biblical and scientific.

The Biblical Evidence for Long Days in Genesis

There are many indications within the text of Scripture to support the belief that the creation "days" were longer than twenty-four hours. The following are those most often given in support of this position.

The Word Day (Yom) Often Means a Long Period of Time

The fact is that the same word that can mean twenty-four hours also often means a longer period of time. First of all, "day" sometimes means a prophetic day; that is, a future time period of differing lengths, as in "the day of the Lord" (Joel 2:31; cf. 2 Peter 3:10). Furthermore, as we have seen, 2 Peter 3:8—"A day is as a thousand years"—is based on Psalm 90:4: "A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by." As with any other word, the meaning of the word ***day*** must be determined by the context in which it is used. In many contexts, "day" means much more than twenty-four hours. It can mean thousands, or even more.

The Word Day Is More Than Twenty-Four Hours Even in Genesis 1–2

Even in the creation passage, ***yom*** is used of a period of time longer than twenty-four hours. Summing up the entire six "days," the text declares: "This ***is*** the history of the heavens and earth when they were created, in the day [***yom***] that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens" (Gen. 2:4 NKJV). "The day" here means six "days," which indicates a broad meaning of the word ***day*** in the Bible, just as we have in English.

The Seventh "Day" Is Thousands of Years Long

Everyone agrees that it has been at least thousands of years since the time of creation, yet the Bible declares that God rested on the seventh day after His six days of creation (Gen. 2:2–3). According to the book of Hebrews, God is still in His Sabbath rest from creation (4:3–5); hence, the seventh day has been at least six thousand years long, even on the shortest of all the chronologies of humankind.

The Third "Day" Is Longer Than Twenty-Four Hours

On the third "day," God not only created vegetation, but it grew to maturity. The text says that on the third day "the land ***produced vegetation:*** plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds" (Gen. 1:12, emphasis added). To grow from seeds to maturity and produce more seeds is a process that takes much longer than a day, a week, or even a month for most plants. There is no indication in the text that its ***growth*** was anything but natural; it is its ***origin*** that was supernatural.

The Sixth "Day" Is Longer Than Twenty-Four Hours

It would also appear that the sixth "day" of creation was considerably longer than a solar day. Consider everything that happened during this one "day."
First, God created all the many hundreds (or thousands) of land animals (Gen. 1:24–25).
Second, God "formed" man of the dust of the earth (Gen. 2:7). This Hebrew word (***yatsar***) means "to mold" or "form," which implies time. ***Yatsar*** is used

specifically of the work of a potter (cf. Jer. 18:2f.).[2]
Third, God said, "I ***will*** make a helper suitable for him" (Gen. 2:18, emphasis added). This indicates a time subsequent to the time of the announcement.
Fourth, Adam observed and named this whole multitude of animals (Gen. 2:19). As Robert Newman noted, "If every one of the approximately 15,000 living species of such animals (not to mention those now extinct) were brought to Adam to be named, it would have taken ten hours if he spent only two seconds on each."[3] This is hardly enough time for Adam to study each animal and determine an appropriate name for it. Assuming a minimum of only two minutes each, the process would have taken six hundred hours (or twenty-five days).
Fifth, Adam searched for a helpmate for himself, apparently among all the creatures God had made. "But for Adam no suitable helper ***was found***" (implying a time of searching) (Gen. 2:20, emphasis added).
Sixth, God put Adam to sleep and operated on him, taking out one of his ribs and healing the flesh (Gen. 2:21). This too involved additional time.
Seventh, Eve was brought to Adam, who observed her, accepted her, and was joined to her (Gen. 2:22–25).
In conclusion, it seems highly unlikely that all of these events—especially the fourth one—were compressed within a twenty-four-hour period or, more precisely, within the approximately twelve hours of light each day afforded.

The Scientific Evidence for Long Days in Genesis

In addition to the biblical evidence for long periods of time, there are scientific arguments that the world has existed for billions of years. The age of the universe is based on

(1) the speed of light and the distance of the stars;
(2) the rate of expansion of the universe;
(3) the fact that early rocks have been radioactively dated in terms of billions of years;
(4) the rate that salt runs into the sea and the amount of salt there, which

indicates multimillions of years.

While all of these arguments have certain unprovable presuppositions, nonetheless, they may be true and, hence, point to a universe that is billions rather than thousands of years in age (see Ross, ***CT***).

OTHER VIEWS OF THE "DAYS" OF GENESIS

If, of course, the "days" of Genesis ***are*** long periods of time, there is no conflict with modern science on the age of the earth. Nevertheless, even if the "days" of Genesis are twenty-four hours, there are still many ways to reconcile long periods of time with Genesis 1–2.

The Revelatory-Day View

Some conservative scholars have suggested that the "days" of Genesis may be twenty-four-hour days of ***revelation***, not days of ***Creation*** (see Wiseman, ***CRSD***, all). That is, they propose that it took God a literal solar week (of 144 hours) to reveal to Adam (or Moses) what He had done in the long ages before humans were created. Even in the Exodus passage (20:11) that speaks of the heavens and earth being "made" (
asah
) in six days, the word can mean "revealed." Just as a prophet can get revelation from God looking forward to a future series of events (cf. Dan. 2, 7, 9; Rev. 6–19), even so God can reveal a past series of events to one of His servants. Indeed, Moses was on Mount Sinai for forty days (Ex. 24:18), and God could have taken six of these days to reveal the past creation events to him. Or, after God created Adam, He could have taken six literal days to reveal to him what He had done before Adam was created. Some scholars believe this material could have been memorized and passed on as the first "account of the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 2:4), just as the other "histories" (or "genealogies") were apparently recorded and passed on (cf. Gen. 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; etc.).

The Alternate-Day-Age View

Other evangelical scholars have suggested that the "days" of Genesis are twenty-four-hour periods of time in which God created the things mentioned, but that they are separated by long periods of time in between. This would account for the indications in Genesis 1 that these are twenty-four-hour days (like numbered days and "evening and morning"), while at the same time leaving room for the geological ages demanded by modern science.

Gap Theories

C. I. Scofield (1843–1921) made popular the view that there could be a great gap of time between the first two verses of the Bible into which all of the geological ages fit. In this way, the "days" could be twenty-four hours each, and yet the world could still be many millions of years old or more.
Others believe that there may be a "gap" or, better, a lapse of time before the six twenty-four-hour days of Genesis begin. In this case, the first verse of the Bible would not necessarily indicate the original *ex nihilo* creation of God, but more recent acts of God forming a world He had previously created (see Waltke, ***CAG***, all).

The Ideal-Time View

There is also a position variously known as the prochronism, apparent-age, or ideal-time view. According to this perspective, the earth and all living things were created with the appearance of age (see Gosse, ***O***, chapters 6–7)—that is, they were created mature. For example, Adam may have looked twenty-one years old a minute after he was created, but he was really only a minute old. Likewise, it is argued that Adam may have had a naval, like all his descendants

do, even though he was never connected by an umbilical cord to a mother. Also, it is theorized that the first trees may have been created with rings in them rather than receiving them from annual growth. If this is so, then the world can be actually young and only apparently very old.[4]

The Literary-Framework View

Still others, like Herman Ridderbos (b. 1900), have suggested that the use of "days" and "evening and morning" are merely ancient literary devices to frame certain periods of time in order to encapsulate them in literary form much like we use a "chapter" to do the same. It is reasoned that since evening and morning were natural ways to point to a period of time with a beginning and an end, this was an appropriate way for God to reveal to Adam (or Moses) what He had done in certain periods of time before humans arrived on the scene.

In summary, there are numerous ways that one can account for long periods of time and still accept a literal understanding of Genesis 1–2. That is, one does not have to give up the normal historical-grammatical way of interpreting the Bible in order to embrace these views. Therefore, there is no necessary conflict between Genesis and the belief that the universe is millions or even billions of years old. Indeed, of all the ways of interpreting Genesis 1–2, only the "religious only" or "myth" view is flatly incompatible with an evangelical understanding of Scripture, since it rejects that Genesis 1 is providing literal information about the origin of the space-time universe and all living things.

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APPENDIX FIVE

THE AGE OF THE EARTH

There seems to be no way to actually prove how old the universe really is, either from science or from the Bible, for there are known and possible gaps in the biblical genealogies (see below). In addition, there are unprovable presuppositions in most, if not all, the scientific arguments for an old earth (see below); that is, an earth of millions or billions of years is biblically possible but not absolutely provable.

Gaps in the Biblical Record

Bishop James Usher (1581–1656), whose chronology was used in the old ***Scofield Reference Bible***, argued that Adam was created in 4,004 B.C. However, his calculations are based on the assumption that there are no gaps in the genealogical tables of Genesis 5 and 11, while we know this is false. For instance, the Bible says: "Arphaxad … became the father of Shelah" (Gen. 11:12), but in Jesus' genealogy in Luke 3:35–36, "Cainan" is listed between Arphaxad and Shelah. If there is one gap, there may be more—indeed, we know there ***are*** more. For example, Matthew 1:8 says: "Jehoram the father of Uzziah," but the parallel listing in 1 Chronicles 3:11–14 illustrates missing generations between Jehoram and Uzziah (Azariah), namely, Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah.

Just how many gaps there are in biblical genealogies and how much time they represent is not known. Even so, gaps there are and, hence, ***complete*** chronologies cannot be made; only ***accurate*** genealogies (lines of descent) are given.

Presuppositions in the Scientific Arguments

There are many scientific arguments for an old universe, some of which one may find persuasive. However, none of these is foolproof, and all of them may be wrong. A few examples will illustrate the point of why we should not be dogmatic one way or the other.

The Speed of Light Is Not Guaranteed

In spite of the facts that Albert Einstein (1879–1955) considered it to be absolute and that modern science has held it to be unchanging, it has not been proven that the speed of light has never changed. The speed of light (about 186,000 miles per second) is an assumption for many arguments favoring an old earth. However, ***if*** the speed of light is constant, and ***if*** God did not also create the light rays when He created the stars, then it would appear that the universe is billions of years old, for it has apparently taken millions of years for that light to get to us. Nevertheless, these are big "ifs" that have not been proven, and they would actually appear to be unprovable. So while the arguments from the speed of light to an old universe may seem plausible, they fall short of being a demonstrable proof.

Radioactive Dating

It is well known that the elements U235 and U238 give off lead isotopes at a known rate per year. By measuring the amount of their deposit, one can calculate when the decay began. Many early rocks in the earth's crust have been dated in billions of years by this method. But, again, as plausible as this may be, it is not a proven fact, for one must assume at least two things that apparently cannot be

proven in order to come to the conclusion that the world is billions of years old. *First*, it must be assumed that there were no lead deposits at the beginning. *Second*, it must be assumed that the rate of decay has been unchanged throughout its entire history. This has not been proven; hence, radioactive dating has not proved beyond all doubt that the world is billions of years old.

The Amount of Salt in the Sea

The same is apparently true of all arguments for an old earth. For example, the oceans have a known amount of salt and minerals in them, and these go into the ocean at a given rate every year. By simple mathematics, it can be determined how many years this has been going on. However, here also it must be assumed (1) that there were no salts and minerals in the ocean to begin with, and (2) that the rate has not changed over the years. A worldwide flood, such as the Bible describes, would certainly have changed the rate of deposits during that period. All of this is not to say that the universe is not billions of years old—it may be. However, this has not been proven beyond question, and the arguments given in favor of it all possess presuppositions that have not been or cannot be proven. Nonetheless, given the basics of modern physics, it seems plausible that the universe is billions of years old. And, as shown above, there is nothing in Scripture that contradicts this. With that in view, the following conclusions are appropriate:

(1) There is no demonstrated conflict between Genesis 1–2 and scientific fact.
(2) The real conflict is not between God's ***revelation*** in the Bible and scientific ***fact***; it is between some Christians' ***interpretation*** of the Bible and many scientists' ***theories*** about the age of the world.
(3) Science has not proven that a six-successive-twenty-four-hour-day view is impossible.
(4) A literal interpretation of Genesis is consistent with a universe that is billions of years old.
(5) Since the Bible does not say exactly how old the universe is, the age of the earth should not be a test for orthodoxy. In fact, many orthodox scholars have held the universe to be millions of years old or more (such as Augustine, B. B. Warfield, C. I. Scofield, John Walvoord, Francis Schaeffer, Gleason Archer, Hugh Ross, and most of the leaders of the movement that produced the famous

"Chicago Statement" [1978] on the inerrancy of the Bible [see ***Systematic Theology***, Volume 1, chapters 14 and 27]).

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APPENDIX SIX

THE SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE FOR CREATION

The scientific evidence for creation is found in three different areas. ***First***, there is the scientific evidence for the creation of the physical universe.

Second, there is the scientific evidence for the creation of first life.
Third, there is the scientific evidence for the creation of all basic life forms, including human beings.

OPERATION (EMPIRICAL) SCIENCE VERSUS ORIGIN (FORENSIC) SCIENCE

Before this evidence is examined, it is necessary to distinguish two basic kinds of science, one dealing with the ***present*** world and the other with the ***past***. The first is called ***operation science***, the other, ***origin science*** (see Geisler and Anderson, ***OS***, chapters 6–7). Operation science is an ***empirical*** science; origin science is more like a ***forensic*** science. Operation science deals with present regularities, while origin science deals with past singularities. The latter deals with the ***origin*** of the universe and life, and the former deals with its ***functioning***.
The crucial difference between origin and operation science is that in operation

science there is a recurring pattern of events against which a theory can be tested. In origin science, there is no such recurring pattern in the present, since it deals with a past singularity. Hence, there is no direct way to test a theory or model of origin science: It must be judged as plausible or implausible on how consistently and comprehensively it reconstructs the unobserved past on the basis of evidence available in the present.

The basic principles of these two kinds of science are also different. Operation science is based on ***observation*** and ***repetition***. The laws of physics and chemistry, for example, are founded on the observation of some recurring patterns of events. Such observations can be made with the naked eye or with the aid of instruments, such as the telescope and microscope. ***Observation is crucial to operation science***—there must be a repetition or recurring pattern to be observed. No empirical scientific analysis can be made on the basis of a singular event, for operation science involves not only ***present*** regularities but also ***future*** ones that can be projected from a present pattern. Again, no scientific trend or prediction can be made from a singular event; it takes a series or pattern of events before a valid scientific law can be posited or a projection can be made.

Origin science, on the contrary, is not based on either the observation or repetition of the events of origin, since we did not observe them, nor are they being repeated in the present. So origin science deals with unobserved past singularities, such as the origin of the universe and the origin of life. Since no human was there to observe the ***origin*** of life, it is not the subject of ***operation*** science. The operation of the cosmos, for example, is the science of ***cosmology***, but the origin of the cosmos is the science of ***cosmogony***. The former deals with its present operation; the latter treats the genesis of the world. The operational science of biology does not deal with the ***beginning*** of life, but with its continual ***functioning*** since that point of origin. How life began is ***biogeny***; how it continues is ***biology***. Basically, then, there are two kinds of science.

Origin Science	Operation Science
Past singularities	Present regularities
Beginning of universe	Running of universe
Forensic science	Empirical science

The Cause of Origin Versus the Laws of Operation

It is important to note that the laws by which something operates are not the same as the cause (s) by which it began. For example, the laws necessary for ***running*** a windmill are not sufficient to ***produce*** one; a windmill functions by the purely natural laws of physics (pressure, motion, inertia, etc.). However, these natural laws do not ***create*** windmills; they only ***operate*** by them. The reason for this is that natural laws deal with the ***continuation*** of things, but they are not sufficient to explain their ***commencement***.

It is only because things operate in a regular way in the present that it is possible to make observations and predictions based on them; thus, both observation and repetition are necessary for natural (operational) science. The origin of past events, whether the universe or life, was not observed and it is not repeated; therefore, it does not fall under the domain of natural (operation) science. Since an origin event is by its very nature not repeated, it falls into a class of its own—it is an unobserved singularity, and it has not happened again. Hence, it must be approached in a different way than empirical (natural, observational) science is. Actually, as we have seen, origin science is more like a forensic science, which is where there was no observation of the event and it cannot be repeated. For instance, take the case of an unobserved death by an unknown cause. Since no one saw it, the principle of ***observation*** used in operation science cannot be invoked, and since the person is dead, it cannot be repeated. Likewise, the principle of ***repetition*** is not present—so neither of the two bases of operation science is present in origin science.

Lacking the principles of ***empirical*** science does not totally frustrate a scientific analysis of a death, for example—the principles of forensic science can be evoked. Using the evidence that remains (such as weapons, wounds, fingerprints, DNA, etc.), the forensic scientist can make a plausible reconstruction of the original event. In a similar way, the origin scientist attempts to reconstruct past unobserved singularities, such as the origin of the universe and the origin of life.

THE PRINCIPLES OF ORIGIN SCIENCE

Every discipline has its own principles. ***Operation*** science is based on

observation and ***repetition***: Without a recurring pattern of events against which to measure theories, there is no valid operational science. Since ***origin*** science lacks both the observation and repetition of origin events, it must depend on other principles. Besides the two obvious ones (***consistency*** and ***comprehensiveness***) that every theory or model should employ, the most crucial principles of origin science are ***causality*** and ***uniformity*** (analogy).[1] This contrast can be diagrammed as follows:

Principles of Origin Science	**Principles of Operation Science**
Causality	Observation
Uniformity (analogy)	Repetition

The Principle of Causality

Like the forensic scientist, the origin scientist believes that ***every event has an adequate cause***, which is true of unobserved events as well as observed ones. This principle has a venerable history in science and scarcely needs justification. It is sufficient to note that Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) held that "the wise man seeks causes," while Francis Bacon (1561–1626) believed that true knowledge is "knowledge by causes" (***NO***, 2.2.121), and even the skeptic David Hume (1711–1776) said, "I never asserted so absurd a Proposition as that anything might arise without a cause" (***LDH***, 1.187). It is self-evident to rational beings, uncorrupted by philosophical speculation, that ***everything that comes to be has a cause***: Nothing does not produce something. If something came into existence, then something caused it. Indeed, without the principle of causality, there would be no science of operation ***or*** origins.

It is important to note that the principle of causality does not claim that ***everything*** has a cause. The principle of causality does not apply to everything but only to

- everything that ***begins***;

- everything that is ***finite***;
- everything that is ***contingent***;
- everything that is ***dependent***.

That is, every ***event*** needs a cause, but every ***thing*** does not. If there is some thing (being) that is eternal and independent (whether it is the universe or God), then it does not need a cause. Causality applies to things that ***come to be***, not to what simply ***is***. Whatever simply is, does not need a cause; it is uncaused. The question to be answered is whether the cosmos (space-time universe) came to be (as creationists hold) or whether it always was (as many noncreationists believe).

The Principle of Uniformity (Analogy)

There is another principle of origin science, known as the principle of uniformity (or analogy). Generally stated, it affirms that "the present is the key to the past." Applied more specifically to the question of past unobserved causes, the principle of uniformity (analogy) asserts that the kind of cause that regularly produces a certain kind of event in the present is the kind of cause that produced a like effect in the past. Or, more briefly, ***past events have causes similar to the causes of like present events***.

The principle of uniformity derives its name from the ***uniform*** experience on which it is based; that is, repeated observations reveal that certain kinds of causes regularly produce certain kinds of events. For example, water flowing over rocks has a rounding effect on them. Likewise, wind blowing on sand (or water) produces waves, and heavy rain on dirt results in erosion, and so on. All of these causes are natural (i.e., secondary) ones, meaning that their effects are produced by natural forces whose processes are an observable part of the ongoing ***operation*** of the physical universe.

There is another kind of cause, known as primary. Intelligence is a primary cause, and the principle of uniformity (based upon constant conjunction) informs us that certain kinds of effects come only from intelligent causes. Human language, pottery, portraits, and symphonies all have intelligent causes. So convinced are we by previous repeated experience that only intelligence

produces these kinds of effects that when we see even a single event that resembles one of these kinds of effects, we invariably posit an intelligible cause for it.

For example, when we see “Buy Fords” written in the sky, we never assume it was placed there by a secondary cause (like wind and clouds). In a similar manner, when we see the faces of four presidents on Mount Rush-more, we always conclude that some intelligence caused them, and when we come across “John loves Mary” written on the beach, we never assume the waves did it. The reason we unhesitatingly posit intelligent causes for these kinds of things is that we have repeatedly observed that similar kinds of effects are produced by intelligent causes. Now, the question is whether the origin of the first living organism (which we did not observe) was by a secondary (natural) cause or by a primary (intelligent) cause. The only scientific way to determine this is by analogy with our experience of what kind of cause regularly produces that kind of effect in the present.

Another thing to observe about the principle of uniformity is that it is an argument from analogy: It is an attempt to get at the unknown (past) through the known (present). Since we do not have direct access to the past, we can “know” it only indirectly by analogies with the present. This is how human history is reconstructed, and it is the way earth history and life history are re-created as well. Historical geology is a case in point—it is totally dependent as a science on the principle of uniformity. Unless we can presently observe in nature or in the laboratory certain kinds of causes producing certain kinds of events, we cannot validly reconstruct geological history. However, since we can observe natural causes producing these kinds of effects today, we can postulate that similar natural causes produced similar effects in the geological record of the past.

The same point can be made for human history, where primary intelligent causes are involved. Archaeology as a science is possible only because we assume the principle of uniformity. Thus, when we find certain kinds of tools, art, or writing, we posit intelligent beings who produced them. Even finding simple arrowheads leads us to the conclusion that intelligent beings produced them, not natural forces like wind and water. When past remains contain writing, art, poetry, or music, we have no problem whatsoever in insisting on intelligent primary causes for them. So whether it is a secondary or primary cause that is called for, the principle of uniformity is the basis, for unless we have a constant conjunction of a certain kind of cause with a certain kind of effect in the present, we have no grounds on which to apply this principle of analogy to past events known only

from their remains.
The SETI (Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence) program is also based on the principle of analogy. Carl Sagan (1934–1996) affirmed that “the receipt of a single message from space would show that it is possible to live through such technological adolescence” (***BB***, 275). The reason this can be done is that the letter sequences in a human language are recognizably different from that which results from natural laws. This has been established scientifically in the studies on information theory by Claude E. Shannon at the Bell Laboratories.

THE PRACTICE OF ORIGIN SCIENCE

Now that we have an understanding of the basic principles of origin science, let us apply them to the three main areas of origin: the beginning of the universe (cosmogony), the emergence of first life (biogeny), and the appearance of human (rational) beings (anthrogeny).

	ORIGIN SCIENCE	**OPERATING SCIENCE**
Universe	Cosmogony	Cosmology
Life	Biogeny	Biology
Humans	Anthrogeny	Anthropology

In each of the areas of origin—the cosmos, first life, and human beings—we will try to determine whether the scientific evidence favors positing the direct action of a primary cause or only a secondary cause for these events. The main two principles used to determine this will be the principle of causality and the principle of uniformity (analogy). The question is this: Was the cause of the origin event (by analogy to the present) a natural cause or an intelligent one?

The Origin of the Universe (Cosmogony)

The Christian doctrine of Creation states that there was a beginning of the

universe (see chapters 2–3). The universe is not eternal; it came into existence out of nothing. The question here is whether there is any scientific evidence to support this belief.

Evidence From the Second Law of Thermodynamics

There are several lines of evidence that convince even agnostic scientists that the universe came into existence out of nothing. One of the most important is the second law of thermodynamics, which states that ***the amount of usable energy in the universe is decreasing***. Nuclear fission is occurring in the stars, and, thus, the universe is running out of usable fuel to keep itself going—energy is being transformed into unusable heat. Another way to put it is that in the universe as a whole, things are generally moving from order to disorder, for ***in a closed, isolated system, such as the physical universe is, things left to themselves tend to become more random and disordered***.

This disorder is not always true of smaller areas within the universe, because these smaller areas are open systems that receive energy from outside themselves. A living organism, for instance, receives outside energy (from the sun) that keeps it from going into disorder and using up its energy. Nevertheless, since the universe ***as a whole*** is a closed system, there is by definition no outside source of physical energy to help it overcome the degenerating effects of the second law.

The universe as a whole is running down, and if it is running down, it is not eternal. If the universe were infinite, it would not be running down, for something cannot run out of an infinite amount of energy. In short, whatever is petering out must have had a beginning, because it does not take forever to run out of a limited amount of energy. So the second law of thermodynamics points to a ***beginning of the universe***.

Looking at this evidence, the agnostic astrophysicist Robert Jastrow concluded that “three lines of evidence—the motions of the galaxies, the laws of thermodynamics, and the life story of the stars—pointed to one conclusion; all indicated that the Universe had a beginning” (***GA***, 111). If so, then this is scientific support for the Christian doctrine of the creation of the universe, for it is a rational inference based on scientific evidence that the physical universe is not eternal. It came into being, and whatever comes to be needs a cause, so it is reasonable to posit a Creator of it.

Evidence From the Expanding Universe

Most contemporary astronomers believe that the universe is expanding; measurements indicate that stars are moving apart. Indeed, the analogy often given is that of dots and a balloon that is increasing in size so that the dots (stars) are getting farther away from one another. One of the most significant studies undertaken on this was by Allan Sandage. "He compiled information on 42 galaxies, ranging out in space as far as six billion light years from us." His measurements indicate "that the universe was expanding more rapidly in the past than it is today. This result lends further support to the belief that the universe exploded into being" (Jastrow, ibid., 95).

If these observations and inferences are correct, then they are further confirmation that the cosmos had a point of beginning, for if one reverses the "camera" of time, the universe gets smaller and smaller until it is invisible. Indeed, if it is carried back mathematically and logically, one reaches a point where there is no space, no time, and no matter: There is literally nothing.

So there was nothing, and then suddenly there was something out of nothing. Needless to say, if this was the case, as many scientists are now claiming, then it is scientific confirmation of the belief in Creation *ex nihilo*; even many nontheistic astronomers and scientists are speaking of "creation out of nothing." Some who want to avoid God are claiming that "the universe came into existence from nothing and by nothing" (see Kenny, ***FW***, 147). This, however, is a denial of the principle of causality and is contrary to the very nature of science, which is to find an adequate cause for events. Even so, it does show that the evidence for the universe coming into existence out of nothing is so persuasive to them that they have had to stop positing an eternal, and therefore uncaused, universe. Thus, they have not been able to avoid a Creator.

Evidence From the Radiation Echo

A third line of evidence has convinced many scientists that the universe had a beginning. Two scientists, Arno Allan Penzias (b. 1933) and Robert Woodrow Wilson (b. 1936), were given a Nobel Prize for the discovery of the radiation fireball (see Jastrow, ***GA***, 5). The entire universe is giving off a radiation glow, the exact wavelength of that produced by a gigantic explosion. Penzias and

Wilson postulate that this could have been the “big bang” produced when the universe exploded on the scene some billions of astronomical years ago. Since the evidence for the expanding universe shows the universe expanded faster in the past, this fits with the concept of an explosion, which also produces greater velocities at first but later slow down and eventually peter out. And, the petering-out fits the data from the second law, which indicates the universe is running down.

Thus, these three lines of evidence converge to show that the cosmos had a ***beginning***—exactly the point of the biblical teaching about creation. Indeed, Robert Jastrow declared, “Science has proven that the universe exploded into being at a certain moment.” So he concluded, “The scientist’s pursuit of the past ends in the moment of creation” (***GA***, 114–15). If the universe was created, then it is reasonable to posit a Creator for it.

In addition, Einstein’s general theory of relativity and the large mass of energy discovered by the Hubble Space Telescope (a mass predicted by the big bang theory) confirm the view that the universe had a beginning.

Of course, this scientific evidence is not absolute proof that the physical universe had a beginning for at least two reasons.

First, scientific evidence by its nature does not yield full proof of things.

Second, other more satisfactory explanations may be found for the expanding universe and the radiation. Some have even suggested that the second law does not apply to the whole universe, but only to closed isolated systems within it. Most often, they suggest a rebound theory: The universe will bounce back from its expansion and start over again, and so on infinitely. Although this view lacks convincing evidence, it does show that one must temper dogmatism about scientific arguments. Perhaps it is simply sufficient to say that the prevailing view in the scientific community presents evidence that strongly supports what Christians have always believed on biblical (and some even on philosophical) grounds, namely, that the universe had a ***beginning***.

Now, if the evidence supports the view that the cosmos came into existence out of nothing, then it is reasonable to posit a Cause for it. In addition, since the cosmos is the natural universe, then, by its very nature, as a Cause beyond the natural world, this first Cause would be a supernatural Cause. This is, of course, what Christian theists have always affirmed: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1).

Evidence From the Great Mass of Energy

It is widely accepted in the scientific community that when a theory can predict a result that is later acquired by observation, this counts as confirmation of that theory. This is precisely what happened when, in 1992, it was reported that the Hubble Space Telescope discovered a great mass of energy in outer space that was predicted from the big bang theory. After viewing the evidence from the Hubble, one scientist, George Smoot, exclaimed, "If you are religious, it is like looking at God!" ("Science, God and Man" in ***Time***, Dec. 28, 1992).

Evidence From General Relativity

In addition to these four lines of evidence, there is Einstein's general theory of relativity. According to this view, the universe must have had a beginning.

> De Sitter studied Einstein's equations, and discovered that they had an expanding-Universe solution. [Arthur Eddington] acclaimed it as "a revolution of thought," and set out to work to organize the eclipse expedition that proved the validity of Einstein's ideas in 1919. The expedition measured the bending of light by gravity—an effect predicted by relativity, (cited by Jastrow, *GA*, 36)

This dramatic verification of Einstein's theory confirmed that the universe had a beginning.

However, Einstein failed to draw this conclusion, introducing a "fudge factor" into his formula. After being challenged and recanting, he later called it the biggest error of his career (ibid., 25–27). Indeed, general relativity demands a beginning of the universe, thus providing a fifth line of scientific evidence for the Creator.

Conclusion From the Astronomical Evidence

In view of the strong scientific evidence, Robert Jastrow concluded, "That there are what I or anyone would call supernatural forces at work is now, I think, a scientifically proven fact" (ibid., 18). He further observed, "Astronomers now find that they have painted themselves into a corner because they have proven, by their own methods, that the world began abruptly in an act of creation.… And they have found that all this happened as a product of forces they cannot hope to discover" (ibid., 15). Thus, he notes that "the scientist's pursuit of the past ends in the moment of creation," and "this is an exceedingly strange development,

unexpected by all but theologians. They have always accepted the word of the Bible: ‘In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth’ ” (“SCBTF” in ***CT***, 115).

The Origin of Life (Biogeny)[2]

The Bible declares, “God created … every living thing” (Gen. 1:21 NKJV). By contrast, the prevailing theory among scientists is that life began by spontaneous generation from nonliving chemicals. As a matter of fact, there are only two possible views: Either life originated by an Intelligent Creator, or else it resulted by purely natural processes from nonliving matter. Robert Jastrow said, “***Either*** life was created on the earth by the will of a being outside the grasp of scientific understanding, ***or*** it evolved on our planet spontaneously, through chemical reactions occurring in nonliving matter lying on the surface of the planet” (***USD***, 62).

Which view of the origin of life is more scientifically plausible? Before answering this, we must remind ourselves that in origin science there is no direct way to measure our theory against the origin event (of the emergence of first life) by ***observation***. No scientist observed the origin of first life, and it is not being repeated over and over again. Ever since Francesco Redi (1626–1697) and Louis Pasteur’s (1822–1895) experiments, the theory of the spontaneous (unsupernatural) generation of life has been discredited. In spite of this, many scientists hold out hope that life in the past arose contrary to the evidence in the present. This, of course, is a violation of the principles of uniformity and causality, by which theories of origin are tested. Since the second principle simply says there must be an adequate cause, attention will be focused on the first principle, which deals with what kind of cause is adequate to explain the origin of life.

Distinguishing Different Kinds of Effects

The principle of uniformity (analogy) declares that the kinds of causes that produce certain kinds of effects in the present should be posited for these

kinds of effects in the past. That being so, the question is: What kind of effect takes the direct action of an intelligent cause, and what kind takes only a natural cause? First, let's consider a series of illustrations that make the point intuitively. We know by observing constant conjunction in the present that natural causes can and do produce sand dunes, but that it takes intelligent causes to produce sand castles. Likewise, natural causes make crystals, but only intelligent causes create chandeliers. The following contrasts will further this distinction.

NATURAL CAUSES PRODUCE	INTELLIGENT CAUSES PRODUCE
sand dunes	sand castles
crystals	chandeliers
waterfalls	power plants
round stones	arrowheads
Mt. McKinley	Mt. Rushmore
clouds	skywriting
arrangement of letters in alphabet soup	arrangement of letters in an encyclopedia

When looking at these two lists, we know that natural causes alone never produce the kinds of effects in the right-hand column. Why? The answer is the principle of uniformity—our uniform experience, based on constant conjunction of intelligent causes with these kinds of effects, leads us to believe that other similar effects will also have an intelligent cause. This being the case, we need only ask: Is a living cell more like an encyclopedia or a bowl of alphabet soup? The intelligent-design movement is based on this distinction. Both Phillip Johnson (see his ***DT***) and William Dembski (see his ***ID***) use it to demonstrate that irreducible complexity and specified complexity, such as found in living cells, are best explained by positing an Intelligent Designer.

Specified Complexity Distinguishes Life

Definitions of biological life are hard to come by; however, some distinguishing characteristics are clear. The famous biologist Leslie Orgel observed the important differences when he said, "Living organisms are distinguished by their specified complexity. Crystals … fail to qualify as living because they lack complexity; random mixtures of polymers fail to qualify because they lack specificity" (***OL***, 189). That is to say,

(1) Crystals are ***specified*** but not complex.
(2) Random polymers are ***complex*** but not specified.
(3) Life is both ***specified*** and ***complex***.

In brief, life on the genetic level is characterized by ***specified complexity***. What this means can be understood by the concept of boundary conditions. Michael Polanyi explains,

> When a saucepan bounds a soup that we are cooking, we are interested in the soup; and, likewise, when we observe a reaction in a test tube, we are studying the reaction, not the test tube. The reverse is true for a game of chess. The strategy of the player imposes boundaries on the several moves which follow the laws of chess, but our interest lies in the boundaries—that is, in the strategy, not in the several moves as exemplification of the laws. And similarly, when a sculptor shapes a stone or a painter composes a painting, our interest lies in the boundaries imposed on a material, and not in the material itself.

These boundary conditions

(1) transcend the laws of physics and chemistry;
(2) result in letter sequences that are mathematically identical to those in a human language; and
(3) resemble those made by an intelligent sculptor who imposes boundaries on stone.

So life is made up of a (four-letter) genetic alphabet that manifests the characteristics of intelligently imposed boundary conditions, such as a skywriter imposes on smoke, a potter on clay, or an author on letters. In fact, studies done by Hubert Yockey on the application of information theory (developed for human language) reveal that the pattern sequence in the genetic code and that in a human language are "mathematically identical." Yockey concludes, "The sequence hypothesis applies directly to the protein and the genetic text as well as to written language and therefore the treatment is mathematically identical" (***JTB***, 16).

Boundary Conditions

Now we have an answer on the genetic level to our question: Is life more like a bowl of alphabet soup or an encyclopedia? ***It is exactly like an encyclopedia***. In fact, the genetic information in a single-celled animal, if spelled out in English, is equal to that of a thousand volumes of the ***Encyclopedia Britannica***. In spite of his confessed agnosticism, Carl Sagan provided powerful proof for an intelligent Creator of life when he argued that "a single message" (***BB***, 275) from outer space would prove to him that there is supernormal intelligence behind it. If one short message takes superhuman intelligence, then how much more would a whole volume of an encyclopedia? Famous contemporary American astronomer Allan Sandage said it well:

> The world is too complicated in all its parts and interconnections to be due to chance alone. I am convinced that the existence of life with all its order in each of its organisms is simply too well put together. Each part of a living thing

> depends on all its other parts to function. How does each part know? How is each part specified at conception? The more one learns of bio-chemistry the more unbelievable it becomes unless there is some type of organizing principle. ("SRRB" in *T*, 20)

Evidence of intelligence behind living things is not limited to the cosmic or microscopic genetic level: It can be observed with the naked eye. Renowned Harvard biologist Louis Aggasiz observed,

> [Darwin] has lost sight of the most striking of the features, and the one which pervades the whole, namely, that there runs throughout Nature unmistakable *evidence of thought*, corresponding to the mental operations of our own mind, and therefore intelligible to us as thinking beings, and unaccountable on any other basis than that they own their existence to the working of intelligence; and no theory that overlooks this element can be true to nature. (*AJS*, 1860)

Irreducible Complexity Is Evidence of Design

Discoveries in microbiology also confirm that life is designed. In Michael Behe's revolutionary book ***Darwin's Black Box***, the argument for intelligent design of life is clearly set forth. Behe notes that Darwin admitted, "If it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed which could not possibly have been formed by numerous, successive, slight modifications, my theory would absolutely break down" (from Darwin, ***OOS***, sixth ed., 154). Evolutionist Richard Dawkins agrees:

> Evolution is very possibly not, in actual fact, always gradual. But it must be gradual when it is being used to explain the coming into existence of complicated, apparently designed objects, like eyes. For if it is not gradual in these cases, it ceases to have any explanatory power at all. Without gradualness in these cases, we are back to miracle, which is a synonym for the total absence of [naturalistic] explanation. (*ROE*, 83)

However, remarks Behe, this is precisely the case with what was a "black box" in Darwin's day, namely, the human cell. Now microbiologists have peered into the human cell and discovered an irreducibly complex organism that cannot be explained in incremental, step-by-step stages:

> No one at Harvard University, no one at the National Institutes of Health, no member of the National Academy of Sciences, no Nobel Prize winner—no one at all can give a detailed account of how the cilium, or vision, or blood clotting,

> or any complex biochemical process might have developed in a Darwinian fashion. But we are here. All these things got here somehow; if not in a Darwinian fashion, then how? (*DBB*, 187)

Behe concludes that "other examples of irreducible complexity abound, including aspects of DNA reduplication, electron transport, telomere synthesis, photosynthesis, transcription regulation, and more" (ibid., 160). Hence, "Life on earth at its most fundamental level, in its most critical components, is the product of intelligent activity" (ibid., 193). It follows, then, that "the conclusion of intelligent design flows naturally from the data itself—not from sacred books or sectarian beliefs. Inferring that biochemical systems were designed by an intelligent agent is a humdrum process that requires no new principles of logic or science" (ibid.). So

> the result of these cumulative efforts to investigate the cell—to investigate life at the molecular level—is a loud, clear, piercing cry of "design!" The result is so unambiguous and so significant that it must be ranked as one of the greatest achievements in the history of science. The discovery rivals those of Newton and Einstein, (ibid., 232–33)

Even before Behe, it was observed that nature manifests amazing designs that are like things known to have intelligent causes. The human eye is an incredible camera that human inventors have not yet rivaled. A bird's wing is amazingly adapted to flight and would have to be completely and wholly intact before flight was possible. Furthermore, nature's anticipatory design bespeaks of intelligent forethought. Bodily glands anticipate danger and secrete appropriate chemicals into the blood to enable one to react. Many animals lay their eggs, in advance, where food and survival are possible for their offspring. All of this resembles an advance plan of some Mind beyond creatures that has preprogrammed their "instincts" for the ongoing of life. Even the casual observer cannot avoid seeing the similarities between the kinds of effects known to be produced by intelligent causes and those present in living things.

Of course, some have suggested that this could have happened by purely natural processes apart from an intelligent intervention; natural selection is often suggested as one such mechanism that makes this possible. However, this response will not suffice when speaking of the origin of ***first*** life, for there was no natural selection on the prebiotic level. Natural selection is a process that operates only ***after*** life has begun. Evolutionist Theodore Dobzhansky declared, "Prebiotic natural selection is a contradiction in terms" (***OPSTMM***, 311). Some naturalists have speculated that the first living organism could have been

more simple than one-celled organisms alive today. Nevertheless, this response is insufficient to negate the argument for an intelligent Cause of first life for at least two reasons.

First, it is purely speculative, without any basis in fact.

Second, even if first life were more simple, it would still have specified complexity, which is known to require an intelligent Cause. For example, even if the first living thing did not have as much information as an encyclopedia, but only as much as one essay in it, it would still need an intelligent Cause. Only intelligent beings write articles, or even paragraphs. If an agnostic like Carl Sagan would accept a "single message" as proof of intelligence, then why not the highly complex message known to be in a living cell?

The Anthropic Principle

Another bit of evidence for an intelligent Creator of life is the anthropic principle. According to it, the universe from its very inception was amazingly fine-tuned for the emergence of human life. From the beginning of the cosmos, to the formation of the earth, to the emergence of living things, all conditions were incredibly adapted to the eventual appearance of human life. Again, commenting on this phenomena, one agnostic scientist confessed,

> The anthropic principle is the most interesting development next to the proof of the creation, and it is even *more* interesting because it seems to say that science itself has proven, as a hard fact, that this universe was made, was designed, for man to live in. It's a very theistic result. (Jastrow, "SCBTF" in *CT*, 17)

Highly regarded physicist and astronomer Stephen Hawking described how the value of many fundamental numbers in nature's laws "seem to have been very finely adjusted to make possible the development of life" and how God appears to have "very carefully chosen the initial configuration of the universe" (cited by Heeren, ***SMG***, 67). Albert Einstein said, "The harmony of natural law … reveals an intelligence of such superiority that, compared with it, all the systematic thinking and acting of human beings is an utterly insignificant reflection" (***IO***, 40).

Examples of the fine-tuning of the universe are listed by Hugh Ross (see ***FG***, 119–38). A select sample includes the following:

(1) The 21 percent oxygen in the atmosphere is just right. At 25 percent, spontaneous fires would break out, and at 15 percent, humans would suffocate.

(2) If the gravitational force were altered by only 1 part in 10 to the fortieth, the sun would not exist, and the moon would crash into the earth.

(3) If the centrifugal force of planetary movement did not precisely balance the gravitational forces, nothing could be held in orbit around the sun.

(4) If the universe were expanding at a rate of one-millionth more slowly, the temperature on earth would be 10,000°.

(5) If the average distance between stars (of thirty trillion miles) were altered only slightly, there would be extreme temperature variations on earth.

(6) Even a slight variation in the speed of light would alter the other constants and make life on earth impossible.

(7) If Jupiter were not in its current orbit, we would be bombarded by space material.

(8) If the thickness of the earth's crust were altered, volcanic and tectonic activity would make life impossible.

(9) If the rotation of the earth took longer than twenty-four hours, temperature variations would be too great between night and day. If it were shorter, atmospheric wind velocities would be too great.

(10) If the axial tilt of the earth were altered slightly, surface

temperatures would be too great for life on earth.

(11) If the lightning rate were greater, there would be too much fire and destruction. If less, there would be too little nitrogen (fertilizer) in the soil.

(12) If there were more seismic activity, much life would be lost. If less, nutrients on the ocean floor would not be recycled to the continents through tectonic uplift, etc.

In short, without intelligent advanced planning of all the factors in the universe, human life would never have emerged, nor would it be sustained.

Nobel Prize-winning atheist/agnostic Steven Weinberg even went so far as to say,

> It seems to me that if the word "God" is to be of any use, it should be taken to mean *an interested God, a creator and lawgiver who established not only the laws of nature* and the universe but also standards of good and evil, some personality that is concerned with our actions, something in short that is appropriate for us to worship. (*DFT*, 244, emphasis added)

The Origin of Human Beings (Anthrogeny)

The third area of origin is that of human beings, which, since the time of Darwin, has been hotly debated. Macroevolutionists, on the one hand, claim a common ancestry of all living things; creationists, on the other hand, insist on separate ancestry of all basic forms of life, including human life. The former views all living things as a tree, and the latter like a forest. The question, then, is: What does the scientific evidence indicate—is there evidence of a distinct origin of human life separate and above the level of animals?

Rational Evidence

One fundamental law of thought denied by macroevolution is that “an effect cannot be greater than its cause.” In popular language, “water does not rise any higher than its source.” Philosophically put, the effect cannot have any more than what the cause placed in it.
However, according to naturalistic evolution, not only did nothing produce something, and the nonliving produced the living, but with regard to human beings, the nonrational produced the rational. We know, though, that the rational does not emerge from the nonrational any more than being is caused by nonbeing.

Linguistic Evidence

Human language is another distinctive evidence of human creation by a rational Creator. Human language is unique—no animals speak it or can learn it. There are several things particular to language; Clifford Wilson and Donald McKeon list twelve of them in their excellent book ***The Language Gap***:

(1) Discreteness of sound/form;

(2) Symbolic nature of the units;

(3) Rule-governed system;

(4) Compositional;

(5) Complex;

(6) Displacing;

(7) Unbounded in scope (open-ended);

(8) Independent of stimulus control;

(9) Suitable for contextualized communication;

(10) Independent of need satisfaction;

(11) Spontaneously acquired; and

(12) Culturally transmitted. (***LG***, 147–53)

Look at the words of a scientist who unsuccessfully attempted to teach a chimpanzee how to speak a human language:

> Despite the frustrations of Project Nim, I knew that there could be no substitute for that intelligent bundle of playfulness and mischief, a creature more human than any other nonhuman I knew. One of the reasons this parting was so painful was that *there was no way to talk with him about it*. Nim and I were able to sign about simple events in his world and mine. But how could I explain why I and the other project members who came along to Oklahoma suddenly abandoned him? How could we explain that it was necessary to leave him forever in a totally new environment, with a totally new group of human and nonhuman primates? (ibid., 153)

Another scientist, who once believed chimps could learn to speak our language, eventually discarded his belief in the face of the experimental evidence:

> Chimps do not have any significant degree of human language and when, in two to five years, this fact becomes properly disseminated, it will be of interest to ask, Why were we so easily duped by the claim that they do? (ibid., 154)

Anthropological Evidence

Despite highly touted “missing links” between primates and humans, no undisputed examples have ever been produced (Gish, ***EFSN***, chapter 6). Some instances have turned out to be frauds, like Piltdown Man. The evidence for Nebraska Man was later discovered to be nothing but an extinct pig’s tooth! Neanderthal Man was as upright and human as we are; his bent-over posture was found to be the result of arthritis. The Peking-Man evidence has mysteriously disappeared, but since he died from sharp blows on the head, it is clear that he was not the ancestor of tool-making primates. Australopithecus is believed by many scientists to be an orangutan. So far as the actual, indisputable evidence goes, there is a big difference between human beings, who can produce pottery, culture, and religious practices, for instance, and primates, which can do none of these.

Further, similarity in structure between humans and primates is not a proof of common ancestry; it may very well be an indication of common design. Just as

human designers utilize many of the same basic patterns over and over in their various creations, it is not unusual that the Creator of the universe has made many similar structures. Consider the similarity of the following utensils in one's kitchen. Does their similarity prove that the canning kettle evolved from a teaspoon?

Genetic Evidence

Human genes are unique. Humans do not interbreed with animals; they reproduce only their kind. Although humans share a high percent of chromosome similarity with some primates, this similarity is no more a proof of common ancestry than this year's Chevrolet is proof that it evolved naturally from last year's model without some intelligent creation of a new one. Actually, the so-called "evolution" of the car is not really an evolution at all; rather, it is a better model for successive creation. Each new creation is the result of the direct intelligent intervention of the Creator, not of common ancestry by natural

processes.

The truth is that there is a huge discontinuity between human beings and their animal predecessors. Human life appeared abruptly and completely—characteristics of which are indications of direct intervention of a Creator. Purely natural causes are continuous and gradual, and they do not produce the rational from the nonrational. This gap is spanned only by an intelligent Creator.

A powerful argument for the creation of human beings comes from the genetic information in the human brain. Carl Sagan, who, as cited before, believed a "single message" from space would prove a highly intelligent cause, observed,

> The information content of the human brain expressed in bits is probably comparable to the total number of connections among the neurons—about a hundred trillion, 10^{14} bits. If written out in English, for instance, that information would fill some twenty million volumes, as many as in the world's largest libraries—the equivalent of twenty million books is inside the heads of every one of us. The brain is a very big place in a very small space.... *The neurochemistry of the brain is astonishingly busy, the circuitry of a machine more wonderful than any devised by humans*. (*C*, 278, emphasis added)

If a single message from space takes an intelligent Creator, how about twenty million volumes full of information? If ordinary machines need an intelligent cause, then how about one that is more wonderful than any devised by humans?

Of course, again, noncreationists often point to natural selection as a means by which simple information (life) can evolve into more complex information (life forms). This, however, is a highly dubious alternative to the intervention of an intelligent Creator for at least two reasons.

First, natural selection does not really produce new (higher) forms of life; it simply preserves old ones. Natural selection is a survival principle—the survival of the fittest. It does not create new forms, but only helps preserve old ones (Geisler and Anderson, ***OS***, 149). It is a survival—not an arrival—principle.

Second, the comparison between artificial selection, on which macro-evolution is based, and natural selection is erroneous. It is argued by evolutionists that if artificial selection can produce significant changes in a short time, then natural selection can produce even greater changes over long periods of time. This assumes that there is a significant similarity between artificial selection and natural selection; on the contrary, there is a significant difference between them at every major point (Matthews, "Introduction" to Darwin's ***OOS***, xi). For example, artificial selection (AS) has an aim in view, but natural selection

(NS) does not. Further, AS is an intelligently guided process, but NS is not. Also, in AS there are intelligent choices of breeds, which are then protected from destructive processes, whereas neither is true of NS. In addition, AS preserves desired freaks, while NS eliminates almost all freaks. Finally, AS continually interrupts the process to reach its goal, but NS does not. Thus, AS has preferential survival, as opposed to NS. So rather than being similar, artificial selection and natural selection are in the most crucial aspects exactly opposite. In chart form:

	THE CRUCIAL DIFFERENCES	
	Artificial selection	**Natural selection**
Goal	Aim (end) in view	No aim (end) in view
Process	Intelligently guided process	Blind process
Choices	Intelligent choice of breeds	No intelligent choice of breeds
Protection	Breeds guarded from destructive processes	Breeds not guarded from destructive processes
Freaks	Preserves desired freaks	Eliminates most freaks
Interruptions	Continued interruptions to reach desired goal	No continued interruptions to reach any goal
Survival	Preferential survival	Nonpreferential survival

Natural selection and artificial selection are radically disparate. Consequently, the comparison fails, and, with it, the crucial mechanism for Darwinian evolution. Natural selection fails because, as a purely natural process, it lacks intelligence to do what can be done by artificial (i.e., intelligent) selection. The only way natural selection can be made to work is to endow it with intelligent powers, which evolutionists often do.

For example, evolutionists frequently say things like the following about natural selection: It "designed" our survival (Sagan, ***BB***, 11). It "arranged" for the continuance of life (Sagan, ***C***, xiii). To claim that natural selection can "design" or "arrange" is to say that it has the power of intelligence. In fact, evolutionists endow natural selection not only with the powers of intelligence but also with the power of godhood; Charles Darwin himself referred to it as "my deity Natural Selection" (***LL***, Oct. 20, 1859). The co-inventor of natural selection with Charles Darwin, Alfred Wallace (1823–1913) said that natural selection is "a Mind not only adequate to direct and regulate all the forces at work in living organisms, but also the more fundamental forces of the whole material universe" (***WL*** [1910] as cited in Edwards, ed., ***EP***, 8.276).

In brief, in order to avoid the intelligent Creator of human life, naturalistic evolution postulates natural selection as a "supreme" intelligent "deity" that "guides" the process of evolution toward its eventual "goal" of producing life. In

fact, by attempting to avoid an intelligent Cause, they substitute one of their own.

Geological Evidence

It is frequently forgotten that the only real evidence for or against evolution is in the fossil record of the past. Every other argument for evolution is only ***what could have been***; only the fossil record contains ***what actually did happen***. Darwin recognized this as a problem as well, and he wrote in ***On the Origin of Species***,

> Why then is not every geological formation and every stratum full of such intermediate links? Geology assuredly does not reveal any such finely graduated organic chain, and this, perhaps, is the most obvious and gravest objection which can be urged against my theory. (280)

In the almost one hundred fifty years since Darwin wrote, the situation has only become worse for his theory. Noted Harvard paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould (1941–2002) has written,

> The extreme rarity of transitional forms in the fossil record persists as the trade secret of paleontology. The evolutionary trees that adorn our textbooks have data only at the tips and nodes of their branches; the rest is inference, however reasonable, not the evidence of fossils. (“*EEP*,” 14 in *NH*)

Niles Eldredge and Ian Tattersall agree, saying,

> Expectation colored perception to such an extent that the *most obvious single fact about biological evolution*, “non-change,” has seldom, if ever, been incorporated into anyone’s scientific notions of how life actually evolves. If ever there was a myth, it is that evolution is a process of constant change. (*MHE*, 8)

What does the fossil record suggest? Evolutionists like Stephen Jay Gould came to agree with what creationists from Louis Agassiz to Duane Gish have said all along, namely,

> The history of most fossil species includes two features particularly inconsistent with gradualism:
> (1) *Stasis*. Most species exhibit no directional change during their tenure on earth.

> They appear in the fossil record looking much the same as when they disappear; morphological change is usually limited and directionless. (2) *Sudden appearance*. In any local area, a species does not arise gradually by the steady transformation of its ancestors: it appears all at once and "fully formed" (Gould, "EEP" in *NH*, 13–14).

The fossil evidence clearly gives a picture of mature, fully functional creatures suddenly appearing and staying very much the same. There is no real indication that one form of life transforms into a completely different form. Some evolutionists, like Gould, have attempted to deal with the fossil evidence by introducing the idea of punctuated equilibrium. These scientists say that the jumps in the fossil record reflect real catastrophes that brought on major changes in the existing species. Therefore, in this view, evolution is not gradual, but rather punctuated by sudden leaps from one stage to the next. The theory has been criticized because its adherents cannot produce any evidence for a mechanism of secondary causes that makes these sudden advances possible. Their viewpoint, then, appears to be based solely on the absence of transitional fossils. However, Darwin understood such suddenness to be evidence of creation. Therefore, punctuated equilibrium is not an explanation but a description—a description of the evidence, which is best explained by Creation, not evolution.

SUMMARY

Christians believe in the Creation of the universe, of life, and of human beings. Science (as ordinarily conceived) does not deal with the ***origin*** of things but simply with their ***operation***. Nevertheless, even though the study of origins cannot be done in an empirical way, it can be approached as a forensic science; that is, scientists can attempt to reconstruct the past on the basis of similarities in the present. This is done by way of the principles of causality and uniformity (analogy). When the principle of causality is applied to the scientific evidence that the universe had a beginning, it is concluded that there was a cause of the universe's coming into existence.

Further, when by analogy with the present it is asked what kind of cause best explains the vast amount of intelligent information (specified complexity) in even a single-celled animal, the answer is: an intelligent Cause. Similarly, when

we analyze the great gap between animals and human beings, whose brains contain some twenty million volumes of genetic information, it is reasonable to postulate an intelligent Cause for the first human.

Thus, in many crucial ways, the present scientific evidence supports the reality of Creation as presented in the Bible. Since science is limited and progressive, we should not expect complete agreement in every detail with the biblical presentation. However, the amount of present agreement is striking, and it strongly supports the biblical teaching that God created the universe (Gen. 1:1), every living thing (1:21), and human beings (in His image—1:27).

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APPENDIX SEVEN

PNEUMATOLOGY

The person and work of the blessed third person of the Trinity is found throughout the Bible and in different places in this work. A brief outline pulling the various parts together will help us to better see the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit.

THE DEITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

That the Holy Spirit is God, equal in power, attributes, and glory with the Father and the Son, is clear from many verses of Scripture (see chapter 12).
The deity of the Holy Spirit is indicated by His (1) possessing the names of God, (2) having the attributes of God, (3) performing the acts of God, and (4) association with God in benedictions and baptismal formulas.

The Holy Spirit Is Given the Names of Deity

The Holy Spirit is referred to as “God” or “Lord” (Acts 5:3–4), “God’s Spirit” (1 Cor. 3:16), “Lord” (1 Cor. 12:4–6), and “eternal Spirit” (Heb. 9:14).

The Holy Spirit Possesses the Attributes of Deity

The Holy Spirit has attributes of God such as life (Rom. 8:2), truth (John 16:13), love (Rom. 15:30), holiness (Eph. 4:30), eternality (Heb. 9:14), omnipresence (Ps. 139:7), and omniscience (1 Cor. 2:11).

The Holy Spirit Performs Acts of Deity

The divine works of the Holy Spirit include the act of Creation (Gen. 1:2; Job 33:4; Ps. 104:30), the acts of redemption (Isa. 63:10–11; Eph. 4:30; 1 Cor. 12:13), the performance of miracles (Gal. 3:2–5; Heb. 2:4), and the bestowal of supernatural gifts (Acts 2:4; 1 Cor. 12:11).

The Holy Spirit Is Associated With God in Prayers and Benedictions

Jude 1:20 exhorts readers to "build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit." The benediction of 2 Corinthians 13:14 contains all three members of the Godhead: "May the grace of ***the Lord Jesus Christ***, and the love of ***God*** [***the Father***], and the fellowship of ***the Holy Spirit*** be with you all" (emphasis added). The baptismal formula of Matthew 28:19 also contains the Holy Spirit, along with the other members of the Trinity, all under one "name" (essence).

THE PERSONHOOD OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

All the elements of personhood are attributed to the Holy Spirit in Scripture: He has a mind (John 14:26; 1 Cor. 2:11), He has will (1 Cor. 12:11), and He has feeling (Eph. 4:30).

Further, personal pronouns (“He” and “His”) are attributed to the Holy Spirit: “But when ***he***, the Spirit of truth, comes, ***he*** will guide you into all truth, will not speak on ***his*** own; ***he*** will speak only what ***he*** hears, and ***he*** will tell you what is yet to come” (John 16:13, emphais added; cf. John 14:26).
The Holy Spirit also does things that only a person can do, such as ***teach, command*** (Acts 16:6), ***know*** and ***search*** the mind (1 Cor. 2:11), and ***pray*** (Rom. 8:26).

THE PROCESSION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

There is an order in the Trinity, and each member has a specific role to play. With regard to salvation, the Father plans and sends; the Son is sent and accomplishes; and the Holy Spirit convicts unbelievers and applies salvation to believers.

Procession From the Father

The Holy Spirit was sent by the Father. Jesus said, “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever.” He added, “The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (John 14:16, 26).

Procession From the Son

Although the Eastern and Western churches split long ago on this matter, the Bible indicates that the Holy Spirit also proceeds from the Son. Jesus said clearly, “When the Counselor comes, whom ***I will send to you*** from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.” So the Holy Spirit is sent “from the Father” as well as from the Son.

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The work of the Holy Spirit can be placed in two broad categories: His work in Creation and His work in redemption.

His Work in Creation

Like the Son (John 1:3; Col. 1:16), the Holy Spirit was active in creating the world. In the very first verses of the Bible, "the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters" (Gen. 1:2). Likewise, Job declared: "The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life" (Job 33:4). The psalmist added, "When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth" (Ps. 104:30).

His Work in Redemption

The Holy Spirit has an active role in redemption (see Volume 3, chapter 9). He ***convicts*** unbelievers of sin (Gen. 6:3; John 16:8); He ***regenerates*** those dead in trespasses and sin (Eph. 2:1); He ***seals*** believers till the day of redemption (Eph. 4:30); He ***baptizes*** all believers into the spiritual body of Christ at the moment of salvation (1 Cor. 12:13), ***assuring*** us of salvation (Rom. 8:16); He performed ***miracles*** to confirm the truth of Christianity (Gal. 3:2–5; Heb. 2:4); He ***bestowed spiritual gifts*** on believers (Acts 2:4; 1 Cor. 12:11—see Volume 4, chapter 6). He ***reveals*** (1 Cor. 2:10) and ***teaches*** (Luke 12:12). He ***inspired*** the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20–21), and He is also ***enlightening*** believers to God's truth (Eph. 1:17–18) and ***witnessing*** to God's Word (1 John 5:9–10). He ***anoints*** believers for service (1 John 2:20) and ***fills*** those who yield to Him (Eph. 5:18). Of course, the Holy Spirit ***indwells*** all believers forever (John 14:16–17). Many other acts are attributed to the Holy Spirit. He ***searches*** (1 Cor. 2:10), ***knows*** (1 Cor. 2:11), ***speaks*** (2 Peter 1:20), ***invites*** to salvation (Rev. 22:17), ***testifies*** (Acts 20:23), ***commands*** (Acts 16:6), ***calls*** to missions (Acts 13:2), ***moves*** (Gen. 1:2), ***helps*** (John 14:26), ***renews*** (Ps. 104:30), ***sanctifies*** (Heb. 9:14), ***intercedes*** (Rom. 8:26), ***unifies*** (Eph. 4:3), ***glorifies*** Christ (John 16:14),

orders the affairs of the church (1 Cor. 14:32–33); and ***guides*** (Acts 8:29). In general, the Holy Spirit ***applies*** the salvation the Father ***provided*** and the Son ***achieved*** (see Volume 3, chapter 9).

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[1] Some theologians believe that goodness is an attribute of God and that love is an activity flowing from His goodness. However, the Bible does say, "God ***is*** love" (1 John 4:16). At any rate, if love is defined as willing the good of another, then it is appropriate to treat love and goodness together.

[2] For a full treatment of univocal, equivocal, and analogical language, see Volume 1, chapter 9.

[1] While the doctrine of the Trinity is not explicitly taught in the Old Testament, as it is in the New (Matt. 3:15–17; 28:18–20; 2 Cor. 13:14), nonetheless, it is implicitly contained in the fact that two or more persons are identified as God and sometimes even speak to each other (e.g., Ps. 45:6; 110:1; Zech. 1:12; cf. Isa. 63:7–10).

[2] God cannot be self-caused, because a cause is prior to its effect in being, if not in time. Nothing can be prior to itself.

[3] Emphasis in all of the following citations is added.

[4] Elsewhere, in ***On the Power of God***, Aquinas has a much more extensive treatment of simplicity, but there he simply summarizes his arguments.

[5] Space does not permit further elaboration here. It suffices to note that Plantinga nowhere gives a compelling argument for the existence of properties in a platonic sense, nor does he offer a refutation of the arguments for analogy (again, see Volume 1, chapter 9, for a defense of analogous language).

[1] In fact, God is not looking "down," but "within," since He knows all things as they preexist in Him, their ultimate Cause. All effects preexist in their cause; hence, God knows the future as it preexists in Himself. He does not have to "wait" for it to happen to know it.

[2] William Craig wrote, "We have thus concluded to a personal Creator of the universe who exists changelessly and independently prior to creation and in time subsequent to creation" (***KCA***). However, if this means God is temporal in His Being after Creation, then it is difficult to make any sense of it. How can a God who is changeless in His Being change in His Being? If it simply means that God is nontemporal in His essence but can create a temporal world that is related to Him after it is created, then this is what Aquinas meant.

[1] Free will is a gift of God: He gives the ***fact*** of freedom to His moral creatures, and they in turn perform the ***acts*** of freedom. While the acts are ours, the power to perform those acts comes from God, "for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Phil. 2:13—see further discussion on sovereignty and free will in Volume 3). The ***Westminster Confession of Faith*** (1646) states,

"Although in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the first cause, all things come to pass immutably and infallibly, yet by the same providence he ordereth them to fall out, according to the nature of ***second causes***, either necessarily, ***freely***, or contingently."

2 For a solid treatment of the exchange between Gregory and Theopompus, see Mozley, ***IG***, 63–72. Unfortunately, Gregory's treatise is only available in Syriac and Latin. Mozley provides a brief but incomplete English translation.

3 When Luther says "part," he means nature.

4 Patripassianism is a theological heresy that arose during the third century. This false belief stated that when Christ suffered, the Father suffered as well.

5 For other verses affirming that Jesus actually suffered, see Matt. 17:12; Acts 3:18; 26:23; Heb. 2:10; 5:7–8.

1 However, some make the unlikely suggestion that it means "the Destroyer" (from ***shadad***) or "the God of the Mountains" (from Akkadian, ***Sadu***; cf. Ps. 121:1–2) or "God of the breasts," that is, Bountiful Provider (***TDOT***).

1 The effect preexists in God (its Cause) in two ways. As efficient Cause, He cannot produce what He does not possess; He cannot share what He does not have to share. Further, as the ultimate exemplar Cause of everything, God contains the idea or pattern of all that comes from Him. Thus, all of creation preexisted in the mind of the Creator before He made it.

2 Dates vary as to the early Fathers. I have chosen to use those dates found in ***Merriam-Webster's Biographical Dictionary.*** Since all of these writings are from the early church Fathers, we have dispensed with the use of A.D. (***anno domini***, "the year of our Lord").

3 When Origen denied that God foreknew evil, he was not denying omniscience. He was simply noting that "in Scripture, words like ***foreknew*** and ***predestined*** do not apply equally to both good and evil. For the careful student of the Bible will realize that these words are used only of the good. When God speaks of evil people, he says that he ***never knew*** them.... They are not said to be foreknown, not because there is anything which can escape God's knowledge, which is present everywhere and nowhere absent, but because everything which is evil is considered to be unworthy of his knowledge or of his foreknowledge" (***CER***, 4.86, 88, 90, in ibid., 6:235).

4 Jerome appears to be the only major orthodox Father from the Middle Ages charged with diminishing God's omniscience, claiming that it is "unworthy of the divine majesty to let it down to this, that it should know how many gnats are born or die every moment, number of cinches and fleas on earth" (see Turretin, ***IET***, 207).

5 Mark Chavalas distinguishes the exercise of divine will and kinds of causation: “Many think of divine will and natural causation in exclusive terms. They cannot exist together. But to seek a divine origin for an event because of the inability of our present understanding to provide a satisfactory natural explanation is a fallacy. This is a determination to be made from the other side of omniscience. To see a divine effect does not mean the termination of natural causes. Explanations of an event in natural and unnatural terms are not exclusive but compatible. In the ancient Near East, as well as in Israel, kings imputed victory to the gods without denying that human agents took part. Divine causation in Scripture was not usually those events that interrupted the sequence of natural causes but those that usually exhibited how God was at work in them. But one needs to find a balance in order to understand how to interpret an event historically” (“The Historian, the Believer, and the Study of the Supposed Conflict of Faith and Reason” in ***JETS*** 36:2 [June 1993]: 145–62).

6 Calvin here seems to share the perspective of Strong, Shedd, and Turretin regarding the logical relation of God’s decree and foreknowledge.

7 God knows Himself entirely and adequately. He also knows other things entirely; excellently, as they are in Himself and in His understanding; adequately, as they are in their proper natures.

8 Barr says, “The error that arises, when the ‘meaning’ of a word (understood as the total series of relations in which it is used in the literature) is read into a particular case as its sense and implication there, may be called ‘illegitimate identity transfer’ ” (***SBL***, 218).

9 Edwards defined freedom thus: “The plain and obvious meaning of the words ***Freedom*** and Liberty, in common speech, is ***power, opportunity or advantage, that any one has, to do as he pleases***” (***JES***, 279; cf. 311, emphasis added). Of course, he goes on to argue that it is God alone who gives the desire to do good to His creatures. So fallen humans are not free to do what they ***decide*** (with the power of contrary choice), but only what they ***desire*** as God gives the desire to do good or to do evil, as their own fallen nature demands. Edwards had no explanation as to why unfallen creatures, such as Lucifer and Adam, could desire to choose evil, since God surely did not give them this desire and they had no fallen nature. (See Volume 3, chapter 3.)

1 “Dysteleology” is the study of purposelessness (or lack of apparent design) in nature.

2 Vestigial organs are organs with no apparent purpose.

3 For example, the tonsils may be more important at an earlier stage in the person’s development, as, for example, in early childhood, to help fight off diseases. The appendix may aid in digestion or in also fighting off diseases. The “third eyelid,” or nictitating membrane, is used in humans to collect foreign material that gets in the eye. The so-called “tail” or coccyx is necessary for sitting with comfort. The endocrine

glands are now known to be of great importance as producers of hormones. The thymus has been found to be involved in protecting the body against disease. The muscle of the outer ear is helpful in colder climates to protect against freezing.

1 ‘The Hebrew words translated “majestic” include ***gaavah*** (from ***gaah:*** “majesty,” “pride,” “rise up,” “be exalted,” “highly”); ***gaon*** (“exaltation,” “eminence,” “excellent,” “glory,” “pomp,” “majestic,” “pride”); ***gueth*** (“majesty,” “excellent,” “proud”); ***gedullah*** (“greatness,” “dignity,” “majesty”); ***hadar*** (“honor,” “splendor,” “dignity,” “majestic,” “majesty,” “ornament”); ***hod*** (“splendor,” “majesty,” “beauty,” “glory,” “honor,” “natural color,” “vigor”); ***seeth*** (“exaltation,” “dignity,” “high position,” “lifted up,” “majestic,” “raises”); ***adar*** (“wide,” “great,” “glorious,” “majestic”); and ***addir*** (“majestic,” “glorious,” “magnificent,” “master,” “mighty,” “powerful,” “stately”).

2 2These include ***yophi*** (“beauty”); ***tsebi*** (“beauty,” “honor,” “glory” [of the Lord—Isa. 4:2; 28:5]); ***tob*** (“pleasant,” “agreeable,” “good”); ***tipharah*** (“beauty,” “glory”); and ***naem*** (“pleasant,” “delightful,” “lovely” [of the Lord]—Ps. 27:4).

3 These include ***horaios*** (“seasonable,” “timely,” “beautiful”); ***kalos*** (“beautiful,” “good”); ***asteios*** (“courteous,” “elegant,” “beautiful,” “lovely”); and ***euprepeia*** (“goodly appearance,” “beautiful”).

4 See Mortimer J. Adler, ***SGI***, chapters 15–17.

5 Eastern Orthodoxy, in contrast to Western Christianity, has been content with mystery. While the West has had more of a ***rational*** approach, the East has been more ***mystical***. While the West has focused on the ***rationality*** of the faith, the East has emphasized the ***mystery*** of the faith (see Norman Geisler and Ralph McKenzie, ***Roman Catholics and Evangelicals*** [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1995], appendix A).

1 While even the unsaved will live forever, their existence is never called “immortal” (see John 5:28–29). Even though they will also live forever (Luke 20:36), angels are not called “immortal,” since as applied to human beings the word encompasses a resurrected body, and angels have no body (Matt. 22:30; Heb. 1:14; Luke 24:39).

1 ‘Finite beings are complex, not simple. So they can differ, even though they are all of the same basic kind, namely, finite.

2 Quotations in this section are from the ASV, since by translating LORD (YHWH) as “Jehovah,” it helps to emphasize Deity and to make distinctions between members of the Trinity.

3 Of course, many critics reject the reliability of the Gospels. However, the overwhelming evidence for the gospel record has already been provided (in Volume 1, chapter 26).

[4] The terms “begotten” and “generated,” as used in an eternal and uncreated sense of the Son, are orthodox, but they are unfortunate expressions, since they may leave the impression that the Son was of a different substance from the Father (a heresy called subordinationism) or that the Son was a created (non-eternal) substance (a heresy called arianism). In truth, the Son is of the ***same*** substance (***homoousion***), not a ***similar*** substance (***homoiousion***), as the Father, namely, the eternal, uncreated, and identical substance. He differs in function, not in essence, from the Father. As seen above, the biblical term “firstborn” (Col. 1:15) was given to show His priority over ***creation*** (Col. 1:17) and that He was ***Creator*** of all things (Col. 1:16), not that He was the first ***creature*** made.

[5] There is a state where ***different*** drops of water are in various stages of solid, liquid, and gas at the same time. But this would not illustrate trinitarianism, where ***one and the same*** drop would have to be in all three states at the same time.

[6] This usage led to confusion, since Tatian, Origen, and the anathamas appended to the Nicene Creed of 325 used it to mean “substance,” akin to the Greek word ***ousia***. Hence, when Eastern theologians used ***hypostasis*** of the three persons in the Trinity, they were suspected of tritheism. However, due to the influence of the Capadocian Fathers, the usage was clarified, and from the Council of Constantinople (381) on, the standard usage was to speak of “three ***hypostases*** in one ***ousia*** [substance])” (Cross, ***ODCC***, 685).

[7] Nestorians have three persons in the Trinity, but modalists have only one. Nestorians have two separated persons in the Son, one in each nature, while modalists have only one person in God, who is performing three roles.

[1] For a theistic response to neotheism, see Norman Geisler, et al., ***BG***, chapters 8, and 14.

1 See also extensive citations from Calvin on God’s redemptive love for all persons in Volume 3, chapter 12.

2 For a more complete response to the doctrine of limited atonement, see Volume 3.

[1] See “Response to Objection Three” below.

[1] ‘This is really a misstatement of the first law, which says more properly: “The amount of actual energy in the universe [however it got here] remains constant.”

2 The other kinds of pantheism are (1) Emanational (Plotinus); (2) Developmental (Hegel); (3) Modal (Spinoza); (4) Multilevel (Radhakrishna); and (5) Permeational (Zen Buddhism).

1 ***Bara*** does not always mean “to make something out of nothing” (see Gen. 2:3; Ps. 104:30; Isa. 41:20). However, used in the context of the original events of Creation, described in Genesis 1, it bears this meaning (cf. Col. 1:16; 2 Cor. 4:6).

2 This is what pantheists claim. See Volume 1, chapter 2.

3 “Essence” means “nature” or “substance,” namely, what something is by its very nature, what is necessary to the kind of thing it is. “Essence” is what something is, whereas “accident” is what it merely ***has*** but does not have to possess by nature.

1 ‘Some have argued that angels can marry based on Genesis 6:1–2, where the “sons of God” (which are angels in Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7 NKJV) married the daughters of men. The Greek Old Testament (LXX) translates this as “angels,” and the New Testament seems to refer to these as angels as well (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6–7). However, there are other possible interpretations of the Genesis 6 passage (such as “sons of God” are believers or great ones in the earth). Further, even if this is a reference to angels, it may be pointing to fallen angels who possess human beings, who then intermarry. One of these interpretations seems best in view of the unequivocal statements of Matthew 22:30 and Luke 20:35–36 that angels do not marry.

2 The fact that humans are lower than angels makes it all the more amazing that God has chosen believers to judge angels (1 Cor. 6:3).

3 Rulers and authorities sometimes refer to human authorities (see Luke 12:11; 20:20; Titus 3:1), behind which there are evil spirits.

4 For a discussion on Satan, demons, and their activity, see Volume 3, chapter 6.

5 The first heaven includes the sky and atmosphere; the second heaven is the cosmos; the third heaven is the Throne of God.

6 It is possible that angels are not really moving in space at high speeds but are moving into space from another dimension.

7 Thomas Aquinas—see below.

8 See Ron Rhodes, ***Angels Among Us***, and Richard Abanes, ***Journey Into the Light: Exploring Near-Death Experiences***.

1 Of course, God also occasionally acts supernaturally through miracles (see Volume 1, chapter 3).

1 There is a difference between what pantheists and theists mean by “immanence.” For theists, God is in but not ***of*** the world. For pantheists, God is the world. The theistic God is not the world, and He is not “in” the world in the sense of being identified with it; He is present to it and the sustaining Cause of it. As mentioned before, the theistic God is as different from the world as an artist is from his painting.

1 In other words, a particular final cause may fail to occur, but God's ***ultimate*** final purpose will not be frustrated. This can be seen in the book of Jonah, where a particular cause, e.g., Jonah's going to Nineveh, initially fails to occur. Nonetheless, the ultimate final cause, e.g., Jonah's preaching at Nineveh, does not fail. And, if Jonah had failed to go, God would have found someone else.

2 God's mind is the exemplar Cause after which all created things are patterned, and He is the efficient Cause of their coming to be, so they preexisted in His power insofar as He had the power to bring them into existence. See Volume 1, chapter 10, for an explanation of causes.

1 Non-Christian forms of theism may differ in some respects and to the degree they deemphasize or deny certain attributes of God, especially His omnibenevolence.

2 See Henry Wilder Foote, ***Thomas Jefferson: Champion of Religious Freedom, Advocate of Christian Morals*** (Boston; The Beacon Press, 1947), 10.

3 For an evaluation of this view, see Norman L. Geisler, "Process Theology and Inerrancy" in ***Challenges to Inerrancy***, Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest, eds. (Chicago: Moody, 1984).

4 In the culture of that day, one's outer garment was also used for basic shelter, since it could be wrapped around a person to protect him from the basic elements.

5 For an excellent treatment of this topic, see Cal Beisner, ***Where Garden Meets Wilderness*** (Eerdmans, 1997).

6 In other words, as has been demonstrated, a particular cause may fail to occur, but God's ultimate purpose will not be frustrated.

1 Some scholars take this as a dual fulfillment because verse 16 is held to imply that the Assyrian invasion (732 B.C.) would occur after the child was born and before he left infancy. There is, however, at least one other way to understand this—see John Walvoord, ***The Bible Knowledge Commentary***, Volume 1, 1048.

* Implied

† Offered to be touched

1 Many Christians exempt people's souls from this process, claiming they were directly created.

1 See article on "Genealogies, Open or Closed" in Geisler, ***Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics.***

2 See Robert C. Newman and Herman Eckelmann Jr., ***Genesis One and the Origin of the Earth***, 128–29.

3 Ibid.

4 This view appears to charge God with deception, since He is alleged to make the world look old when it actually is not. Further, it is contrary to common sense and the scientific arguments for an old universe.

1 Uniformity should not be confused with uniformitarianism, which makes the unjustifiable assumption that all events must have natural causes.

2 This section follows the excellent book by Charles Thaxton, et al., called ***The Mystery of Life's Origin.***

n See Ron Rhodes, ***Angels Among Us***, and Richard Abanes, ***Journey Into the Light: Exploring Near-Death Experiences***.

n Edwards defined freedom thus: "The plain and obvious meaning of the words ***Freedom*** and Liberty, in common speech, is ***power, opportunity or advantage, that any one has, to do as he pleases***" (***JES***, 279; cf. 311, emphasis added). Of course, he goes on to argue that it is God alone who gives the desire to do good to His creatures. So fallen humans are not free to do what they ***decide*** (with the power of contrary choice), but only what they ***desire*** as God gives the desire to do good or to do evil, as their own fallen nature demands. Edwards had no explanation as to why unfallen creatures, such as Lucifer and Adam, could desire to choose evil, since God surely did not give them this desire and they had no fallen nature. (See Volume 3, chapter 3.)

n This usage led to confusion, since Tatian, Origen, and the anathamas appended to the Nicene Creed of 325 used it to mean "substance," akin to the Greek word ***ousia***. Hence, when Eastern theologians used ***hypostasis*** of the three persons in the Trinity, they were suspected of tritheism. However, due to the influence of the Capadocian Fathers, the usage was clarified, and from the Council of Constantinople (381) on, the standard usage was to speak of "three ***hypostases*** in one ***ousia*** [substance])" (Cross, ***ODCC***, 685).

n Mark Chavalas distinguishes the exercise of divine will and kinds of causation: "Many think of divine will and natural causation in exclusive terms. They cannot exist together. But to seek a divine origin for an event because of the inability of our present understanding to provide a satisfactory natural explanation is a fallacy. This is a determination to be made from the other side of omniscience. To see a divine effect does not mean the termination of

natural causes. Explanations of an event in natural and unnatural terms are not exclusive but compatible. In the ancient Near East, as well as in Israel, kings imputed victory to the gods without denying that human agents took part. Divine causation in Scripture was not usually those events that interrupted the sequence of natural causes but those that usually exhibited how God was at work in them. But one needs to find a balance in order to understand how to interpret an event historically" ("The Historian, the Believer, and the Study of the Supposed Conflict of Faith and Reason" in ***JETS*** 36:2 [June 1993]: 145–62).

n William Craig wrote, "We have thus concluded to a personal Creator of the universe who exists changelessly and independently prior to creation and in time subsequent to creation" (***KCA***). However, if this means God is temporal in His Being after Creation, then it is difficult to make any sense of it. How can a God who is changeless in His Being change in His Being? If it simply means that God is nontemporal in His essence but can create a temporal world that is related to Him after it is created, then this is what Aquinas meant.

n Edwards defined freedom thus: "The plain and obvious meaning of the words ***Freedom*** and Liberty, in common speech, is ***power, opportunity or advantage, that any one has, to do as he pleases***" (***JES***, 279; cf. 311, emphasis added). Of course, he goes on to argue that it is God alone who gives the desire to do good to His creatures. So fallen humans are not free to do what they ***decide*** (with the power of contrary choice), but only what they ***desire*** as God gives the desire to do good or to do evil, as their own fallen nature demands. Edwards had no explanation as to why unfallen creatures, such as Lucifer and Adam, could desire to choose evil, since God surely did not give them this desire and they had no fallen nature. (See Volume 3, chapter 3.)

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n This section follows the excellent book by

Charles Thaxton, et al., called ***The Mystery of Life's Origin.***

n Free will is a gift of God: He gives the ***fact*** of freedom to His moral creatures, and they in turn perform the ***acts*** of freedom. While the acts are ours, the power to perform those acts comes from God, "for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Phil. 2:13—see further discussion on sovereignty and free will in Volume 3). The ***Westminster Confession of Faith*** (1646) states, "Although in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the first cause, all things come to pass immutably and infallibly, yet by the same providence he ordereth them to fall out, according to the nature of ***second causes***, either necessarily, ***freely***, or contingently."

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GEISLER

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

VOLUME TWO

GOD

CREATION

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

DR. NORMAN GEISLER

VOLUME THREE

SIN

SALVATION

BETHANY HOUSE
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Three persons deserve special recognition for the final state of this volume.

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Likewise, my assistant, Mike Jackson, has done voluminous research for citations from the great teachers of the church.

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VOLUME THREE

PART ONE: HUMANITY AND SIN

PART TWO: SALVATION

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SYNOPSIS FOR VOLUME THREE

In Volume 1 we discussed Introduction to Theology (*Prolegomena*) and the Bible (*Bibliology*). These serve as the method and basis for doing systematic theology.

In Volume 2 we focused on Theology proper, that is, on the attributes and activities of God. In the first half, attention was centered on God Himself—His attributes and His characteristics, both nonmoral (metaphysical) and moral. After we addressed who God *is*, in the second half we discussed what God *does* (in relation to His creation).

PART ONE: HUMANITY AND SIN (ANTHROPOLOGY AND HAMARTIOLOGY)

Volume 3 also is comprised of two parts. Part 1 deals with the doctrine of sin, known as *hamartiology* (from the Greek words *hamartios*, "sin," and *logos*, "study of"). First, a brief but necessary discussion of human beings covers the origin (chapter 1) and nature (chapter 2) of humanity. (This discipline is called *anthropology*, from the Greek words *anthropos*, "human being," and *logos*, "study of.") Then, we will examine the origin of sin (chapter 3), followed by the nature of sin (chapter 4), the effects of sin (chapter 5), and finally, the defeat of sin (chapter 6).

PART TWO: SALVATION (SOTERIOLOGY)

Part 2 discusses the doctrine of salvation, called *soteriology* (from the Greek words *soterios*, "bringing salvation," and *logos*, "study of"). Here we will cover the origin of salvation (chapter 7), followed by the theories of salvation (chapter 8), the nature of salvation (chapter 9), the evidence of salvation (chapter 10), and the assurance of salvation (chapter 11). Next, we will study the extent and exclusivity of salvation in regard to the theories of limited atonement (chapter 12), universalism (chapter 13), and pluralism (chapter 14). Then, we will consider the results of salvation in relation to infants and the heathen (chapter 15). Last, we will examine the condition of salvation (chapter 16) and the content of salvation (chapter 17).

PART ONE

HUMANITY AND SIN

(ANTHROPOLOGY AND HAMARTIOLOGY)

CHAPTER ONE

THE ORIGIN OF HUMAN BEINGS

As discussed in Volume 2, all evangelical theologians believe in the creation of the first human beings by God. With this in view, the focus here is on the original created conditions of Adam and Eve in which temptation and the Fall occurred. All of this will set the stage for a treatment of the origin of the soul in each human being after Adam, and it will serve as background for understanding the inherent and inherited depravity of each person born since Creation.

THE ORIGINAL CREATED CONDITIONS

God is absolutely perfect,[1] and it follows, therefore, that His creation was also perfect. Moses declared, “He is the Rock, his works are perfect” (Deut. 32:4). David added, “As for God, his way is perfect” (2 Sam. 22:31). Jesus said, “Your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). *Nothing less than the perfect can come from an absolutely perfect Being*, and it befits the perfect Being to make only perfect beings, for the effects bear the image of their Cause.[2]

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR THE ORIGINAL

STATE OF INNOCENCE AND PERFECTION

According to Genesis 1–2, Adam and Eve were created with complete innocence. They had no evil in their natures *or* their environment. They "were not ashamed" (Gen. 2:25 NASB), and they did not yet know "good and evil" (3:5). In short, they were not only guiltless of any sin but also innocent of sin.

Further, the very temptation to "be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5) implies they did not know evil before they fell. Indeed, when they ate the forbidden fruit, "the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves" (3:7). According to the New Testament, by disobedience Adam and Eve *became* sinful (Rom. 5:12; 1 Tim. 2:14) and brought condemnation on themselves and their posterity: "The result of one trespass was condemnation for all men" (Rom. 5:18).[3] *Before* this, they were flawless.

A State of Virtue and Uprightness

Not only were Adam and Eve innocent (without evil), they were morally virtuous by virtue of their created state, for God endowed them with moral perfection. Solomon wrote, "This only have I found: *God made mankind upright*, but men have gone in search of many schemes" (Eccl. 7:29).[4] The Hebrew word for "upright" is *yashar*, meaning "straightness," "uprightness," "honesty," or "integrity"; it is the same word used in connection with "righteous" (Deut. 32:4 NASB), "blameless" (Job 1:1), and "pure" (Job 8:6). Consequently, *yashar* does not merely denote the absence of evil but also the presence of good—it is not simply the lack of vice but the presence of virtue. There are two basic views as to the origin of this created state of purity.

The Supernatural View

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) held that this original status was a *supernaturally* created state of grace that Adam had before the Fall and then lost by his sin:

> The history [of Genesis 1–3] leads us to suppose that Adam's sin, with relation to the forbidden fruit, was the *first* sin he committed. Which could not have been had he not always, till then, been perfectly righteous, righteous from the first moment of his existence; and consequently, created or brought into existence righteous. [Further], in a moral agent, subject to moral obligations, it is the same thing, to be perfectly *innocent* as to be perfectly *righteous*. It must be the same, because there can no more be a medium between sin and righteousness, or between being right and being wrong, in a moral sense, than there can be

a medium between being straight and being crooked, in a natural sense. (*WJE*, 1.178)

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) and Catholics following him have held the same view, viz., that original righteousness was not natural but supernatural. One Catholic scholar affirmed that it was necessary for God to give Adam this supernatural righteousness at creation "in order to provide a remedy for this disease or languor of human nature, which arises from the nature of material organization" (cited by Shedd, *HCC*, 1.143).

Noted Reformed theologian William G. T. Shedd (1820–1894) criticized this view as "a relic of the Gnostic idea of matter" (ibid., 1.147) and rejected it because: "If so, then God creates man in a sinful state" (ibid., 1.148).[5]

The Natural View

Shedd argued that this created state of perfection was *natural*, viz., the very created nature God gave Adam was a morally upright and perfect one. He noted that the same word (Heb: *yashar*) is used by God of Job: "This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil" (Job 1:1).[6]

> Original righteousness enters into the very idea of man as coming from the hands of the Creator. It is part of his created endowment, and does not require to be superadded. The work of the Creator is perfect, and needs no improvement, (op. cit., 1.145)

In short, according to the natural view, since God is perfect, He cannot make an imperfect creature. Hence, the natural state of Adam and Eve, from the moment of Creation, must have been perfect.

A Perfect Environment

Not only was Adam given a perfect nature, but he also had a perfect environment. There was no sin in Eden, a paradise of goodness. God had made it (Gen. 2:8ff.), and everything God made was "very good" (Gen. 1:31).

There was no moral (or metaphysical) imperfection in Eden; it was flawless in every way. There was no tendency toward evil from within Adam, and there was nothing evil about his created environment around him. Creation was not subject to corruption, as it was after the Fall (Rom. 8:22). There was no human death (Rom. 5:12), and both internal and external natures were absolutely perfect.

A State of Dominion

In the original created state, humankind was not a servant of nature but

master over it. Man did not serve under its strong hand; rather, it served his, for nature was subject to humanity. God said to them, “Fill the earth and *subdue it. Rule over* the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground” (Gen. 1:28; cf. Psa. 8).

A State of Moral Responsibility

All of this is not to say that Adam had no moral accountability to anyone over him. He did, for “the LORD God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die’ ” (Gen. 2:16–17). God had given an order, and Adam had a responsibility to obey His Creator. As we know, at this Adam failed miserably (Gen. 3:1ff.; cf. Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Tim. 2:14).

Adam was free in that his actions were self-determined;[7] God specifically said, “*You are free*” (Gen. 2:16). When Adam chose to disobey, God blamed him, asking, “Have *you* eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you *should not* eat?” (3:11 AMP). The emphasized words clearly point to a self-determined act (cf. v. 13). *You* did it, God said. Your “self” is responsible, He maintained. No one else made Adam and Eve commit sin, including the devil, who tempted them. Such is the self-determining nature of freedom.[8]

The Presence of the Tempter

Of course, these perfect persons in a perfect paradise were not without an imperfect intruder. Satan, a fallen archangel of God, had rebelled against his Creator, sweeping with him a third of all the angels (Rev. 12:4, 9). By clever deception, the great deceiver led Eve and then, through her, Adam into disobedience against God (Rom. 5:19; 1 Tim. 2:14). By a free and uncoerced choice of their wills, the perfect pair in the perfect paradise fell into imperfection —and their world with them. Their disobedience led to death and destruction (Rom. 5:12–21; 8:20–23).

It is noteworthy that Adam and Eve were not enticed to lie, cheat, steal, or curse. Indeed, their moral nature was perfect; thus, they were not vulnerable to these kinds of temptations. *The command of God for them not to eat the forbidden fruit was not a command to stay away from what was intrinsically evil.* With this, they had no problem, for their upright and virtuous state protected

them from it. *What they were vulnerable to was a test as to whether they would obey God simply because He said it*.

"Hath God said?" was the snare they faced from the devil (Gen. 3:1 KJV). Their moral responsibility to God was with regard to an object that was morally neutral. God could have said, for instance, "Don't pick the daisies." Again, the issue was not that the sin was inherent in the substance in which they partook; the temptation to sin was in the enticement to defy God, and subsequently to be conscious of the evil of choosing against Him. *No evil from within or from without drew them to their transgression*. Only a raw act of freedom, wrongly exercised, carried out their disobedience and sealed their doom.

Herein, perhaps, lies the solution to a thorny problem: If Adam and Eve had committed some other sin before eating the forbidden fruit, would it have precipitated the Fall? The answer may very well be that it was impossible for them to sin on another issue, since they were created morally perfect. Surely Satan would have so tempted them if he could have, but there is no indication that he did. Most likely, only disobedience to God's specific command would precipitate the Fall and plunge the whole creation into death and disaster.

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE ORIGINAL STATE OF INNOCENCE AND PERFECTION

The perfect condition of the original state of creation is derived from the nature of God as an absolutely perfect Being. The argument goes as follows:

(1) God is an absolutely perfect Being.
(2) An absolutely perfect Being cannot produce an imperfect creation.
(3) Therefore, the original creation God made was perfect.

God Is an Absolutely Perfect Being

Since this point has been established elsewhere,[9] only the outline will be restated here. The biblical basis for God's moral perfection is found in numerous passages.

"He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he" (Deut. 32:4). "As for God, his way is perfect.… It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way

perfect" (2 Sam. 22:31, 33). "Do you know how the clouds hang poised, those wonders of him who is perfect in knowledge?" (Job 37:16). "His way is perfect; the word of the LORD is flawless" (Ps. 18:30). "The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul" (Ps. 19:7). "O LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you and praise your name, for in perfect faithfulness you have done marvelous things, things planned long ago" (Isa. 25:1).

"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). "When perfection comes, the imperfect disappears" (1 Cor. 13:10). "We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ" (Col. 1:28). "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows" (James 1:17). "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear" (1 John 4:18).

The theological basis for God's perfection can be supported by other reasoning as well. For one thing, our knowledge of the imperfect implies a Perfect; because we cannot know what is not perfect unless we know what is Perfect, there must be a Perfect (God). Just as we cannot know a circle is flawed unless we have an idea of a flawless one, moral imperfections cannot be detected unless we possess some concept of moral perfection.

Furthermore, granted that God is a moral Being, it follows from three of His metaphysical attributes that He must be morally perfect. The reasoning goes like this:

(1) God's nature is morally perfect.
(2) God is infinite, unchangeable (immutable), and necessary by nature.[10]
(3) Therefore, God is infinitely, unchangeably, and necessarily morally perfect.

An Absolutely Perfect Being Cannot Produce an Imperfect Creation

Again, this premise is based on the principles of analogy and causality, which have been defended earlier.[11] Briefly, the effect must resemble the cause in its actuality, but not in its potentiality.[12] Thus, if the Creator makes something with moral perfection, He too must have the same characteristic, for a cause cannot give a perfection it doesn't possess, and it cannot share with others what it does not have to share.

However, unlike the *Cause* of all things, the *effect* must be limited—it must

have potentiality to be and/or not to be something other than it is, either accidentally or substantially.[13] Thus, while the effect is similar to the Cause in its *actuality*, it must be dissimilar in its *potentiality* and limitations, since God is Pure Actuality.[14] From this it follows that if creatures were given perfection in a limited way, then their Cause (God) must have perfection in an unlimited way; if creatures are relatively perfect, then God must be absolutely perfect, and so on. Whatever perfection creatures have, the Creator must have it absolutely, infinitely, and immutably.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR THE ORIGINAL STATE OF INNOCENCE AND PERFECTION

Early Church Fathers

Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)

Irenaeus contended that God did not bestow absolute perfection upon humanity—only God is *absolutely* perfect. Adam was *finitely* perfect, yet he was untested. Hence,

> If … anyone says, "What then? Could not God have exhibited man as perfect from the beginning?" let him know that, inasmuch as God is indeed always the same and unbegotten as respects Himself, all things are possible to Him. But created things must be inferior to Him who created them, from the very fact of their later origin; for it was not possible for things recently created to have been uncreated. But inasmuch as they are not uncreated, for this very reason do they come short of the [absolutely] perfect. (*AH*, I.4.38.2)
>
> God had power at the beginning to grant [absolute] perfection to man; but as the latter was only recently created, he could not possibly have received it, or even if he had received it, could he have contained it, or containing it, could he have retained it. (ibid.)

Theophilus (c. 130–190)

> God having thus completed the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and all that are in them, on the sixth day, rested on the seventh day from all His works which He made.… And after the formation of man, God chose out for him a region among the places of the East, excellent for light, brilliant with a very bright atmosphere, [abundant] in the finest plants; and in this He placed man. (*TA* in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, II.2.19)
>
> Scripture thus relates the words of the sacred history: "And God planted Paradise, eastward, in Eden; and there He put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground made God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of Paradise" (*TA* in ibid., II.2.20).

Medieval Fathers

The great theologians of the Middle Ages concurred on Adam's perfection from the moment of his creation. Augustine is a case in point.

Augustine (354–430)

> Man's nature, indeed, was created at first faultless and without any sin; but that nature of man in which every one is born from Adam, now wants the Physician, because it is not sound. (*ONG*, 3)
>
> Accordingly we say that there is no unchangeable good but the one, true, blessed God; that the things which He made are indeed good because from Him, yet mutable because made not out of Him, but out of nothing. (*CG*, 12.1)

Anselm (1033–1109)

> Man being made holy was placed in paradise … as it were, in the place of God, between God and the devil, to conquer the devil by not yielding to his temptation, and so to vindicate the honor of God and put the devil to shame, because that man, though weaker and dwelling upon earth, should not sin though tempted by the devil. (*CDH*, I.XXII)

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)

> This is clear also from the very rectitude of the first state, by virtue of which, while the soul remained subject to God, the lower powers in man were subject to the higher, and were no impediment to their action. And from what has preceded it is clear that as regards its proper object the intellect is always true.… Therefore, it is clear that the rectitude of the first state was incompatible with any deception of the intellect. (*ST*, 1a.94.4)
>
> Paradise was a fitting abode for man as regards the incorruptibility of the first state. Now this incorruptibility was man's, not by nature, but by a supernatural gift of God. Therefore that this might be attributed to the grace of God, and not to human nature, God made man outside of paradise, and afterwards placed him in paradise to live during the whole of his animal life; and, having attained to the spiritual life, to be transferred thence to heaven. (ibid., 1a.102.4)

Reformation Leaders

Martin Luther (1483–1546)

> The image of God in which Adam was made was something most beautiful and noble. The leprosy of sin adhered neither to his reason nor to his will, but, within and without, all his senses were pure. His intellect was very clear, his memory very good, and his will very sincere. His conscience was clean and secure, without any fear of death and without care. To these inner perfections came also that beautiful and superb strength of the body and all its members, by which he surpassed all the other animate creatures in nature. For I fully believe that before he sinned, the eyes of Adam were so clear and their vision so acute that he excelled the lynx and the eagle. Stronger than they, Adam handled lions and bears, whose strength is very great, as we handle little dogs. (*WLS*, 878)

If we want to speak about outstanding philosophers, let us speak about our first parents while they were pure and unstained by sin. For they had the most perfect knowledge of God. And indeed, how could they be ignorant of Him whose image they had and felt in themselves? (ibid., 1046–47)

John Calvin (1509–1564)

Our definition of the image seems not to be complete until it appears more clearly what the faculties are in which man excels, and in which he is to be regarded as a mirror of the divine glory. This, however, cannot be better known than from the remedy provided for the corruption of nature. It cannot be doubted that when Adam lost his first estate he became alienated from God. Wherefore, although we grant that the image of God was not utterly effaced and destroyed in him, it was, however, so corrupted, that anything which remains is fearful deformity; and, therefore, our deliverance begins with that renovation which we obtain from Christ, who is, therefore, called the second Adam, because he restores us to true and substantial integrity. (*ICR*, I.XV.V)

Post-Reformation Teachers

Jacob Arminius (1560–1609)

Man, having been previously placed in a state of integrity, walked with unstumbling feet in the way of God's commandments; by this foul deed he impinged or offended against the law itself, and fell from his state of innocence (Rom. 5:15–18).… Man perpetrated this crime, after he had been placed in a state of innocence and adorned by God with such excellent endowments as those of "the knowledge of God" and "righteousness and true holiness" [Gen. 1:26–27; Col. 3:10; Eph. 4:24] (*WJA*, I.485).

"So many facilities existed for not sinning, especially in the act itself, yet man did not abstain from this sin" [Gen. 2:16–17] (ibid.).

Charles Hodge (1797–1878)

In the moral image of God, or original righteousness, are included (1) the perfect harmony and due subordination of all that constitutes his reason; his affections and appetites to his will; the body was the obedient organ of the soul. There was neither rebellion of the sensuous part of his nature against the rational, nor was there any disproportion between them needing to be controlled or balanced by extra gifts or influence. (2) But besides this equilibrium and harmony in the original constitution of man, his moral perfection in which he resembled God, included knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. (*ST*, II.99)

Schubert Ogden (b. 1928)

To some extent, of course, Protestant theology has always been critical of this distinction as understood and employed by Catholic theologians. Lutheran and Reformed orthodoxy alike rejected the doctrine that "original righteousness" is a *donum superadditum*, on the ground that its implication that our natural state was imperfect clearly conflicts with Gen. 1:31 (Schmid: 158; Heppe: 190–191). And yet [Catholic theologians'] own understanding that God's original gifts to human beings were natural

did not preclude speaking of God's revelation in Jesus Christ as supernatural. For even these natural gifts themselves must be called supernatural, insofar as they are "above the nature corrupted by sin and are not restored except by supernatural grace" [Heppe: 191] (*OT*, 33).

THREE VIEWS ON THE ORIGIN OF THE HUMAN SOUL

Three primary views on the origin of the soul have been held by Christians. One, the *preexistence* view, has subsequently been declared heretical, since it contradicts the clear teaching of Scripture about the creation of human beings.[15] The preexistence view has two forms: platonic (uncreated) and Christian (created). The former serves as a backdrop for understanding the latter.

Two Forms of the Preexistence View

The Uncreated-Preexistence View

According to Plato (c. 427–347 B.C.), human souls are not only intrinsically immortal but they are also eternal (see *P*); they were never created but are part of the eternal world that exists outside of God (the Demiurgos). Just like Plato's proposed world of eternal Forms (Ideas), there are also eternal souls that exist by virtue of the World Soul, which animates all things. Before birth, allegedly, these souls enter a body (in a woman's womb) and become incarnate in human flesh. Thus, human beings essentially are eternal souls in temporal bodies.

So goes the uncreated-preexistence view, and the problems with it fall into three categories: (1) It isn't biblical, (2) it isn't scientific, and (3) it isn't philosophically sound.

First, the Bible clearly declares that human beings were created, body and soul.[16] If they were brought into being at a point in time, then they have not existed from eternity.

Second, the scientific evidence points to individual human life beginning at conception.[17]

Third, an infinite number of moments is impossible, since the present moment is the end of all moments before it, and there cannot be an end of an infinite series of moments (see Craig, *KCA*). Thus, no human (temporal) being can be eternal.

The Created-Preexistence View

The created-preexistence view, maintained by some early Christians, borrowed heavily from Plato. Origen (c. 185–c. 254) and even Augustine (earlier in his life) believed that the soul existed before birth, but that rather than having existed without creation from eternity, it was created by God from eternity. By insisting on creation, adherents to the created-preexistence view hoped to preserve the Christian dimension of the platonic view, but it was condemned as heresy nonetheless. Augustine rightly reversed this erroneous allegiance with preincarnationism in his *Retractions*; the Bible declares that human beings had a beginning (cf. Gen. 1:27; Matt. 19:4).

The Creation View: The Soul Is Created Directly by God

Having addressed the two untenable forms of the preexistence view, there are still two other basic perspectives, embraced by orthodox theologians, on the origin of the human soul after the original creation. The first is creationism, examined here, and the second is traducianism, which we will address next.

The essence of creationism, in regard to the human soul, is that God directly creates a new individual soul for everyone born into this world. While the *body* of each new human being is generated by his or her parents through a natural process, the *soul* is supernaturally created by God.

Various Christian writers have placed the moment of this direct creation of the soul at different points in the development of the human body. There are several main subviews.

Creation of the Soul at Conception

Most evangelical Christians who hold the creationist view maintain that the creation of the soul by God occurs at the moment of conception. There is both biblical and scientific evidence in favor.[18]

The Biblical Evidence

David wrote, “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother *conceived* me” (Ps. 51:5). Jesus was the God-man from the moment of conception, for the angel said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is *conceived* in her is from the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 1:20).

The Scientific Evidence

Modern science has provided a window to the womb. As a result, the evidence is now clearer than ever that an individual human life (soul) begins at the very moment of conception (fertilization).

First, it is a genetic fact that a fertilized human ovum is 100 percent human. From that very moment, all genetic information is present, and no more is added from the point of conception until death.

Second, all physical characteristics for life are contained in the genetic code present at conception.

Third, the sex of the individual child is determined at the moment of conception.

Fourth, a female ovum has twenty-three chromosomes; a male sperm has twenty-three chromosomes; a regular human being has forty-six chromosomes. At the very moment of conception, when male sperm and female ovum unite, a new tiny forty-six-chromosome human being emerges.

Fifth, from conception until death, nothing is added except food, air, and water.

Sixth, and finally, world-famous geneticist Jerome LeJeune (b. 1925) declares:

> To accept the fact that after fertilization has taken place a new human has come into being is no longer a matter of taste or opinion. The human nature of the human being from conception to old age is not a metaphysical contention, it is plain experimental evidence. (As cited in Geisler and Beckwith, *MLD*, 16)

Creation of the Soul at Implantation

Other Christian writers maintain that the soul is created at implantation of the fertilized egg in the uterus. The basis for this is alleged to be in the fact that identical twinning can occur up to the embryo stage (two weeks, or fourteen days, after conception); thus, it seems implausible to speak of an individual human being where there is still the possibility of two. In such a case we would have to assume, for example, that the original individual (zygote) dies when it becomes the two twins. Further, it is argued that experiments on sheep and mice, which, like humans, have intrauterine pregnancies, show that there is not one individual being before the completion of implantation into the uterus.[19]

However, there are good reasons to reject this conclusion.[20]

For one thing, at best, this argument shows only that *individual* human life begins two weeks after conception, not that *actual* human life begins then.

Indeed, it is acknowledged that there is a *living human nature* from the very moment of conception.

In addition, if human life begins from conception, it is moot to debate when a continuous individual (person) begins. Human life has sanctity whether or not it is yet individuated (cf. Gen. 1:27; 9:6).

Further, as even proponents of this position agree, this argument is ultimately philosophical, not factual, and, therefore, it should not be used as a basis for treating a conceptus[21] with anything but full rights as a human being.

Finally, the later zygotic split (into twins) could be a nonsexual form of "parenting" akin to cloning.[22] Consequently, it does not logically follow that a zygote prior to twinning is not fully human simply because identical twins result from a zygotic split.

Creation of the Soul After Implantation

Thomas Aquinas, following the lead of Aristotle (384–322 B.C.), placed the creation of the human soul well after conception. He argued that while the *animal soul* was generated by the parents, nonetheless, the *rational soul*,[23] in which is found one's humanness, was not created until forty days after conception for boys and ninety days for girls (*CSPL*, Dist. III, Art. II).

This view was based on an outdated aristotelian model of biology that has no basis in either science or Scripture. It is an embarrassment both to Roman Catholics and to the pro-life movement in general, since if it were true, a fertilized ovum, initially, would not be truly human, and hence subject to abortion for the first few weeks after conception. Most Catholic theologians are convinced that Aquinas would have repudiated the after-implantation view if he would have been made aware of the scientific facts available today (see Heaney, "AHC" in *HLR*, 63–74).

Creation of the Soul at Animation

Some theologians have speculated that God does not create a human soul until just before the baby starts moving in the mother's womb. This, however, is based on outdated scientific theory as well as an inadequate understanding of *soul*. (*Soul* was thought to be "the principle of self-motion"; thus, when life began to move in the womb, the mother assumed that God had given a life [soul] to it.)

Creation of the Soul at Birth

Finally, some Christians have argued for the view that individual human souls are created at birth. For this they offer two main arguments.

First, human life is biblically designated from the point of birth (cf. Gen. 5:1ff.).

Second, Adam was not human until he began to breathe, as Genesis 2:7 declares: "The LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, *and [then] man became a living soul*" (KJV).

Responding in reverse order, Adam was a unique case, since he was directly created by God. Therefore, the fact that he did not become human until he breathed is not decisive for determining when individual human life begins, for several reasons.

First, Adam wasn't conceived and born like other humans; again, he was directly created.

Second, the fact that Adam was not human until he began to breathe no more proves when individual human life begins today than does the fact that he was created as an adult prove that individual human life does not begin until we are adults.

Third, *breath* in Genesis 2:7 (Heb: *ruach*) denotes the origin of "life" (cf. Job 33:4). This indicates, then, that life began *when* God gave human life to Adam, not simply *because* Adam began breathing. Human life was later given to his posterity at fertilization or conception (Gen. 4:1).

Fourth, other animals breathe but are not people (Gen. 7:21–22). Obviously, breath, in and of itself, did not make Adam human.

Fifth, medically, many who at some point in life stop breathing later revive (or, they live by the aid of a machine). The unborn human cannot be seen (without instruments) in the womb, and hence is not a part of the *social* scene until birth.

Sixth, if "breath" is equated with "the presence of human life," then the loss of breath would mean the loss of humanness. However, God's Word teaches that human beings continue to exist after they stop breathing (Phil. 1:23; 2 Cor. 5:6–8; Rev. 6:9).

Seventh, and finally, the Scriptures speak of human life in the womb long before breathing begins, namely, from the point of conception (Ps. 51:5; Matt. 1:20).

As to the other argument (that human life is designated from birth in the Bible [Gen. 5:1ff.]), it should be noted that the verses on *breath* do not speak of the

beginning of human life but simply of the initial "coming out" event (when the human being begins to breathe). These passages speak about the beginning of *observable* life, not the beginning of life itself. Even in biblical times, people knew the baby was alive in the womb (cf. Luke 1:44). Birth was not seen as the beginning of human life but simply as the beginning or emergence—the human debut—of life into the naturally visible world.

The Traducian View: The Soul Is Created Indirectly Through Parents

The word *traducian* comes from the Latin *tradux*, meaning "branch of a vine." As applied to the origin of the soul, it means that each new human being is a branch off of his or her parents; that is to say, in the traducian model both soul and body are generated by father and mother.

In response to the creation view (which says that God creates each new life directly in the womb), traducianists observe, first of all, that creation was completed on the sixth day (Gen. 2:2; Deut. 4:32; Matt. 13:35) and that God is resting and has not created since (Heb. 4:4).

Further, traducianists note that the scientific evidence for how an individual human life (soul) begins is clear: It comes from the sperm and ovum of its parents and is first conceived in the womb as a fully individual person.

Finally, traducianists point out that the creationist view does not explain the inheritance of original sin.[24] Certainly a perfect God would not create a fallen soul, nor can we accept the gnostic[25] idea that the contact of a pure soul with the material body (in the womb) precipitates its fall. The most reasonable explanation is that *both fallen soul and body* are naturally generated from one's parents.

SUMMARY AND CONTRAST OF THE THREE BASIC VIEWS

While *both creationists and traducianists believe that God creates all souls,* creationists claim He does it directly in the womb, and traducianists insist He does it indirectly through parents. Specifically, creationism holds that while each new human body is generated by parents, each new human soul is directly created by God.

The preexistence view, stemming from Plato, asserts that all souls existed

before the world began—they are eternal and uncreated. In a variant of this ideological model, some early Christian thinkers believed each soul was created by God before the world began and then later, before birth, came into a body. However, unlike the platonic and other non-Christian views, Origen and the early Augustine,[26] for example, did not believe there was a reincarnation of the soul after death (see Geisler and Amano, *RS*). The three main views can be summarized as follows:

THREE VIEWS ON THE ORIGIN OF THE HUMAN SOUL

	Preexistence	**Creationism**	**Traducianism**
Time of Creation	From eternity (Plato) Before the world (Origen)	(1) At conception (2) At implantation (3) After implantation[27] (4) At animation (5) At birth	Originally in Adam, instrumentally through parents
God's Role	None (Plato) He created all souls (Origen).	He creates each soul.	He creates body and soul through parents.
Parents' Role	No role in the creation of the soul Efficient cause of the body[28]	Occasional cause of the soul Efficient cause of the body	Instrumental cause of both soul and body
Nature of Man	Man *is* a soul. Man *has* a body.	Man *is* a soul. Man *has* a body.	Man is a unity of soul/body.[29]
Nature of Human Soul	Simple/Indivisible (unregenerable)	Simple/Indivisible (unregenerable)	Unified (regenerable)
Image of God	In soul only	In soul only	In soul and body[30]

Immortality	Soul only	Soul only	Soul and body[31]
Christian Proponents	Justin Martyr Origen Early Augustine	Thomas Aquinas Charles Hodge	W. G. T. Shedd Later Augustine Lewis S. Chafer

EVIDENCE FOR THE TRADUCIAN VIEW

The evidence for the traducian view of the origin of the soul is biblical, theological, and scientific. The heart of the traducian view is that human life (soul) can be divided and passed on to others.

The Biblical Evidence for Traducianism[32]

First, from the beginning, male and female were considered one species, two sharing human life (Gen. 1:26).

Second, both male and female, not just male, were broadly called "Adam" (5:1–2).

Third, Eve was made from Adam, not separately (2:21–22).

Fourth, creation was complete from the beginning (2:1–3), and God has rested from creating ever since (Heb. 4:4).

Fifth, the Bible speaks of the unity of male and female (1 Cor. 11:8), one coming from the other.

Sixth, Eve is called "the mother of all the living" (Gen. 3:20), a title most appropriate if all other human life came from her.

Seventh, Adam had children in his image (5:3; cf. 1:26), which makes sense if his life was truly transmitted to them by natural generation.

Eighth, *flesh* (Gk: *sarx*) can mean "whole person with body" (John 3:6; cf. 1:14; Acts 2:17; Rom. 3:20) rather than just the transmission of a physical body (as is contended by the creationist view of the origin of the soul).

Ninth, likewise, in Romans 1:3, *flesh*, which comes from physical generation, refers to one's whole humanity, not just to the body.

Tenth, Acts 17:26 KJV says that all who are God's offspring (image) are made of "one blood," which is accomplished by natural processes.

Eleventh, Hebrews 7:10 teaches that Levi was in Abraham's loins and came by physical transmission from him.[33]

Twelfth, Psalm 139:13–16 reveals that our personal substance, which is more

than physical, was made in the womb by a natural, God-ordained process.

Thirteenth, the body in the womb is referred to as a person in many passages (e.g., Job 10:10; Ps. 22:9–10; Jer. 1:5). In addition, *person* is more than the physical aspect of humanity.[34]

Fourteenth, Romans 5:12 says we all sinned "through one man" [Adam]. This implies that sin, which is possible only for a person, can be transmitted by natural processes.

Fifteenth, 1 Corinthians 15:22–27 affirms that all humans were "in Adam."

Sixteenth, Ephesians 2:3 makes plain that we were all born with a sinful nature, and mere bodies without souls cannot sin.

Seventeenth, Psalm 51:5 declares that we were conceived in sin, something not possible unless there is a human soul at conception.

Eighteenth, and finally, Jesus is said to be from the "loins" of David (1 Kings 8:19 KJV), indicating His genetic connection through His mother.[35]

The Theological Evidence for Traducianism

There are several theological truths that are best explained by the traducian view of the human soul's origin.

First, the Bible speaks of the imputation (attribution) of sins from Adam to his entire posterity (Rom. 5:13, 18). It is extremely difficult to interpret this in any actual sense of the term unless sin is transmitted through natural processes.[36]

Second, the fact that we are born with a natural inclination to sin (Eph. 2:3; John 3:6) favors the traducian view.

Third, the universality of sin supports traducianism, for if sin is not inherited by all at birth, then why are all people born in sin?

Fourth, and finally, the soul/body unity of human nature[37] favors traducianism, since it makes sense that soul and body, together, are transmitted from parent to child.

The Scientific Evidence for Traducianism

Remembering that *soul* (Heb: *nephesh* and Gk: *psuche*) means "life," and that a human life is a human soul, the scientific evidence that human life (the soul) begins at conception is strong.[38]

First, it is a scientific fact that individual human life (with unique DNA) is

passed on by natural generation, from parents to child.

Second, cloning produces the same kind of life *without* a new creation. Hence, the possibility of human cloning argues in favor of traducianism.

Third, by analogy, human souls, like animal souls,[39] are passed on from parents to offspring.

Fourth, and finally, because humans are a psychosomatic (soul/body) unity,[40] the body is only part of, not the whole, person. Again, it makes sense that both are passed on together, from parents to child.

ANSWERING OBJECTIONS TO THE TRADUCIAN VIEW

Many arguments have been set against the traducian paradigm. However, as will be seen, none of them provides a definitive refutation.

Objection One—Based on God as the Father of Spirits

This objection is based on Hebrews 12:9, which says, "How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live!" This phrase, "Father of our spirits," is taken to mean that God directly fathers (creates) all human spirits.[41]

Response to Objection One

In reply, the text does not say that God created our spirit at conception or that He fathered all human spirits directly (rather than indirectly, through our parents). God is also said (in Genesis) to be the Creator of all animals, yet He created only the first pair directly—the rest came about by a divinely given process of natural conception.

Further, even if the term *Father* implies creation, it does not indicate how or when God produced us. He certainly could have fathered us through an indirect process of human generation.

Also, the term *Father* in Hebrews 12:9 may not be a reference to the generation of human beings, but instead may describe the care given to them by God after they are conceived. This fits the immediate context of God, our Father, disciplining us, His children (cf. 12:3ff.).

Objection Two—Based on God Making Souls

According to this argument, Isaiah affirmed that God made souls, saying, "I will not accuse forever, nor will I always be angry, for then the spirit of man would grow faint before me—the breath of man [soul] that I have created" (Isa. 57:16).

Response to Objection Two

As with Objection One, the passage does not say why, how, or when God created all souls. There is no question that He is the ultimate *efficient* Cause of all souls;[42] the issue is whether He used *intermediate* (or *instrumental*) causes (such as parents) to create them.

In addition, the word *soul* (Heb: *nephesh* and Gk: *psuche*) is often biblically used of the whole person,[43] including the body, which we know is generated through natural processes.

Finally, the word *made* (Heb: *asah*), instead of *create* (Heb: *bara*), is used in this verse; *asah* seldom means "to create from nothing."

Objection Three—Based on God Creating People Since Adam

It is also objected that the Bible presents God as having created people since Adam. Zechariah affirms that "the LORD … stretches out the heavens, [He] lays the foundation of the earth, and [He] *forms the spirit of man within him*" (Zech. 12:1). Malachi challenges, "Have we not all one Father? *Did not one God create us*?" (Mal. 2:10).

Response to Objection Three

Once more, it does not say how God did it. The word *create* sometimes can even refer to "a natural process in the present" (e.g., Ps. 104:30), and it does not always mean "to create something from nothing." Even in Genesis, when God *created* Adam (1:27), He used dust to do part of it (2:7).

Objection Four—Based on the Dependence of All Creation Upon God's Necessity

Thomas Aquinas opposed traducianism on the grounds that only God can create and that all creative acts are direct and immediate (see *ST*, la.44.1).[44] No creature can create, because every creature depends, for its existence, on a Cause that is not a creature. Every contingent being, for its existence, at every moment of its existence, is dependent on the necessary Being, for the contingent being never ceases to be a contingent being.[45] Thus, for Aquinas, parents cannot possibly be the cause of the existence of their children.

Response to Objection Four

Traducianism does not hold that the parents are the *efficient* cause of their child's existence but only the *instrumental* cause. The parents cause the *becoming* of their child; only God can cause his or her *being*. However, as instrumental causes, the parents do *pass on* to their posterity the soul, which only God can and did create, and which only God can and does sustain in existence. The question is not about the *origin* and *sustenance* of a human soul, which, clearly, only God can perform and uphold. Rather, the question pertains to the *transmission* of the soul, which, as instrumental causes, parents facilitate.

THE HISTORICAL TESTIMONY ON THE ORIGIN OF THE SOUL

Long before Christian theologians philosophized on the soul, two brilliant ancient thinkers, Plato and Aristotle, provided a foundation for the divergent perspectives among Christians, depending on whether they followed Plato's dualistic preexistence view,[46] as Augustine did, or Aristotle's hylomorphic view,[47] as Aquinas did.

Ancient Greek Philosophers

Aristotle (*384–322* B.C.)

> The question might also be raised about the parts of the soul: What is the separate role of each in relation to the body? For, if the whole soul holds together the whole body, we should expect each part of the soul to hold together a part of the body. But this seems an impossibility; it is difficult even to imagine what sort of bodily part [that] mind will hold together, or how it will do this. (*C*, I.5)

“The soul, therefore, is the primary act of a physical body potentially possessing life” (*DA*, II.1.412). “The soul is that whereby we primarily live and perceive and move and understand” (ibid., II.2.414).

Plato (*c. 427–347* B.C.)

> Our soul also exists before we were born; and if these do not exist, would the argument thus be saying otherwise? Then is it so, and is it equally necessary these things exist and our souls also did before we were born. (*P*, 4.76d)
>
> “So answer,” [Socrates] said, “what makes the body to be alive?”
>
> “The soul,” [Cebes] said.
>
> “Then is this always the case?”
>
> “Of course,” he said.
>
> “Then the soul that takes possession of it, does it always come bringing life to that?”
>
> “It does,” he said.
>
> “And first is there anything opposite to life or not?”
>
> “There is,” he said.
>
> “What?”
>
> “Death.”
>
> “Then will the soul ever accept the opposite to what it always brings, as out of the previous agreement?”[48]
>
> “Most certainly not,” said Cebes.
>
> “Then does the soul not accept death?”
>
> “No.”
>
> “So the soul is immortal.”
>
> “Immortal.”
>
> “Well,” he said; “then shall we say this is demonstrated; how does it seem?”
>
> “And most sufficiently, Socrates” (ibid., 13.105e).

Hence, “If the immortal is also indestructible, it is impossible for the soul, when death comes upon it, to perish; for out of what was said before it will not accept death, nor will it be dead” (ibid., 13.106b).

> [Socrates asked,] “When did our souls acquire this knowledge of them?[49] For it was not after being born as humans.”
>
> [Simmias answered,] “Definitely not.”
>
> “Then previously.”
>
> “Yes.”
>
> “Then, Simmias, souls existed previously, before they were born in human form, without bodies, and they had wisdom.”
>
> “Unless we receive this knowledge when born, Socrates; for this time still remains” (ibid., 4.72e–77d).

Early Church Fathers

Tertullian (c. 155–c. 225)

> We have already decided one point in our controversy with Hermogenes, as we said at the beginning of this treatise, when we claimed the soul to be formed by the breathing of God, and not out of matter. We relied even there on the clear direction of the inspired statement which informs us how that "the Lord God breathed on man's face the breath of life, so that man became a living soul"—by that inspiration of God, of course. On this point, therefore, nothing further need be investigated or advanced by us. (*TS* in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, III.1.9.3–4)

Further,

> When we acknowledge that the soul originates in the breath of God, it follows that we attribute a beginning to it. This Plato, indeed, refuses to assign to it, for he will have the soul to be unborn and unmade. We, however, from the very fact of its having had a beginning, as well as from the nature thereof, teach that it had both birth and creation. And when we ascribe both birth and creation to it, we have made no mistake: for being *born*, indeed, is one thing, and being *made* is another—the former being the term which is best suited to living beings.… Thus, the being made admits of being taken in the sense of being brought forth; inasmuch as everything which receives *being* or *existence*, in any way whatever, is in fact generated. For the maker may really be called the parent of the thing that is made: in this sense Plato also uses the phraseology. So far, therefore, as concerns our belief in the souls being made or born, the opinion of the philosopher is overthrown by the authority of prophecy even. (*TS* in ibid., III.1.9.3–4)
>
> It is essential to a firm faith to declare with Plato that the soul is simple; in other words, uniform and uncompounded; simply that is to say in respect of its substance.… If indeed the soul and the spirit are two, they may be divided; and thus, by the separation of the one, which departs from the one which remains, there would accrue the union and meeting together of life and of death. But such a union never will accrue: therefore, they are not two, and they cannot be divided; but divided they might have been, if they had been (two).… How much firmer ground have you for believing that the soul and the spirit are but one, since you assign to them no difference; so that the soul is itself the spirit, respiration being the function of that of which life also is! (*TS* in ibid., III.1.9.10)
>
> How, then, is a living being conceived? Is the substance of both body and soul formed together at one and the same time? Or does one of them precede the other in natural formation? We indeed maintain that both are conceived, and formed, and perfectly simultaneously, as well as born together; and that not a moment's interval occurs in their conception, so that a prior place can be assigned to either. (*TS* in ibid., III.1.9.27)
>
> We allow that life begins with conception, because we contend that the soul also begins from conception; life taking its commencement at the same moment and place that the soul does. Thus, then, the processes act together to produce separation by death. (*TS* in ibid.)
>
> Forasmuch, therefore, as these two different and separate substances, the clay and the breath, combined at the first creation in forming the individual man, they then both amalgamated and mixed their proper seminal rudiments in one, and ever afterwards communicated to the human race the normal mode of its propagation, so that even now the two substances, although diverse from each other, flow forth simultaneously in a united channel; and finding their way together into their appointed seed-plot, they fertilize with their combined vigor the human fruit out of their respective natures. And inherent in this human product is his own seed, according to the process which has been ordained for every creature endowed with the functions of generation. Accordingly from the one (primeval) man comes the entire outflow and redundance of men's souls—nature proving herself true to the commandment of

God, “Be fruitful, and multiply” (*TS* in ibid.).

Justin Martyr (c. 100–c. 165)

> We must now speak with respect to those who think meanly of the flesh, and say that it is not worthy of the resurrection nor of the heavenly economy, because, first, its substance is earth; and besides, because it is full of all wickedness, so that it forces the soul to sin along with it. But these persons seem to be ignorant of the whole work of God, both of the genesis and formation of man at the first, and why the things in the world were made. For does not the word say, “Let Us make man in our image, and after our likeness”? What kind of man? Manifestly He means fleshly man, for the word says, “And God took dust of the earth, and made man.” It is evident, therefore, that man made in the image of God was of flesh. Is it not, then, absurd to say that the flesh made by God in His own image is contemptible, and worth nothing? But that the flesh is with God a precious possession is manifest, first from its being formed by Him, if at least the image is valuable to the former and artist; and besides, its value can be gathered from the creation of the rest of the world. For that on account of which the rest is made, is the most precious of all to the maker. (*FLWJ* in ibid., 1.1.7)

Origen (c. 185–c. 254)

“The soul, when implanted in the body, moves all things in it, and exerts its force over everything on which it operates” (*DP* in ibid., IV.2.8.1).

> But with respect to the soul, whether it is derived from the seed by a process of traducianism, so that the reason or substance of it may be considered as placed in the seminal particles of the body themselves, or whether it has any other beginning; and this beginning, itself, whether it be by birth or not, or whether bestowed upon the body from without or no, is not distinguished with sufficient clearness in the teaching of the Church. (ibid., IV, preface, 5)

Medieval Fathers

Augustine (354–430)

> As for the opinion that new souls are created by inbreathing without being propagated, we certainly do not in the least object to its maintenance—only let it be by persons who have succeeded in discovering some new evidence, either in the canonical Scriptures, in the shape of unambiguous testimony towards the solution of a most knotty question, or else in their own reasonings, such as shall not be opposed to catholic [universal] truth, but not by such persons as this man has shown himself to be. If the doctrine of the propagation of souls is false, may its refutation not be the work of such disputants; and may the defense of the rival principle of the insufflation of new souls in every creative act, proceed from better hands. (*OSO*, 1.33)
>
> What shall I say, moreover, as to the [difficulty which besets the theory of the creation of each soul separately at the birth of the individual in connection with the] diversity of talent in different souls, and especially the absolute privation of reason in some? This is, indeed, not apparent in the first stages of infancy, but being developed continuously from the beginning of life, it becomes manifest in children, of whom some are so slow and defective in memory that they cannot learn even the letters of the alphabet, and some (commonly called idiots) so imbecile that they differ very little from the beasts of the field. Perhaps, I am told, in answer to this, that the bodies are the cause of these imperfections. (*L*,

166.6)

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)

"Now that it is actually such a body, it owes to some principle, which is called its act. Therefore the soul, which is the first principle of life, is not a body, but the act of a body" (*ST*, I.75.1).

> It is clear that the first thing by which the body lives is the soul. And as life appears through various operations in different degrees of living things, that whereby we primarily perform each of all these vital actions is the soul. For the soul is the primary principle of our nourishment, sensation, and local movement; and likewise of our understanding. Therefore this principle by which we primarily understand, whether it be called the intellect or the intellectual soul, is the form of the body. This is the demonstration used by Aristotle. [*De Anima*, ii.2] (ibid., I.76.1)

Reformation Leaders

John Calvin (1509–1564)

> We thus see that the impurity of parents is transmitted to their children, so that all, without exception, are originally depraved. The commencement of this depravity will not be found until we ascend to the first parent of all as the fountainhead. We must, therefore, hold it for certain, that, in regard to human nature, Adam was not merely a progenitor, but, as it were, a root, and that, accordingly, by his corruption, the whole human race was deservedly vitiated. This is plain from the contrast which the Apostle draws between Adam and Christ, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned; even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord" [Rom. 5:19–21] (*ICR*, I.2.1.6).
>
> To the understanding of this subject, there is no necessity for an anxious discussion (which in no small degree perplexed the ancient doctors) as to whether the soul of the child comes by transmission from the soul of the parent. It should be enough for us to know that Adam was made the depository of the endowments which God was pleased to bestow on human nature, and that, therefore, when he lost what he had received, he lost not only for himself but for us all. (ibid., I.2.1.7)
>
> The children, being vitiated in their parents, conveyed the taint to the grandchildren; in other words, corruption commencing in Adam, is, by perpetual descent, conveyed from those preceding to those coming after them. The cause of the contagion is neither in the substance of the flesh nor the soul, but God was pleased to ordain that those gifts which he had bestowed on the first man, that man should lose as well for his descendants as for himself, (ibid.)

Post-Reformation Theologians

Jacob Arminius (1560–1609)

> [The soul's] origin … is from nothing, created by infusion, and infused by creation, a body being duly prepared for its reception, that it might fashion matter as with form, and, being united to the body by a native bond, might, with it, compose one … production. Created, I say, by God in time, as he still daily creates a new soul in each body.

> [The soul's] substance … is simple, immaterial, and immortal. Simple, I say, not with respect to God; for it consists of act and power (or capability), of being and essence, of subject and accidents; but it is simple with respect to material and compound things. It is immaterial, because it can subsist by itself, and, when separated from the body, can operate alone. It is immortal, not indeed from itself, but by the sustaining grace of God. (*WJA*, II.26.63)

William G. T. Shedd (1820–1894)

The body is of a different nature and substance from the soul: Genesis 2:7, "God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul," a breath, or soul of life. According to this statement, man is composed of a material part, resulting from the vivification of the dust of the ground by creative energy, and of an immaterial part resulting from the spiration or inbreathing of God. The Creator first enlivens inorganic matter into a body, and then creates a rational spirit which he infuses into it. (*DT*, II.II.5)

Shedd maintained that "the 'soul of life' in the instance of the man is a higher principle, the rational soul, which was inbreathed by the Creator, and made in his image" (ibid., II.II.6). However, with regard to Adam's posterity, Shedd defended traducianism, asserting:

> There are three principal supports of Traducianism: (1) Scripture; (2) Systematic Theology; [and] (3) Physiology. The preponderance of the Biblical representations favor it. The Bible teaches that man is a species, and the idea of species implies propagation of the entire individual out of it. (ibid., II.18)

Karl Barth (1886–1968)

> The Early Church and its theology, while rightly insisting on the gulf between Creator and creature, thought that the problem of the origin of the soul, and therefore of human life, could be solved in various ways between which we do not need to choose. Some, following Plato, and within the Church (Origen), talked of the pre-existence of created souls. These [souls] were … represented as a kingdom of spirits which had to relate themselves to the material bodies allotted to them.…
>
> The theory of a pre-temporal or at least pre-historical fall, championed in modern times by Julius Miller, might conceivably be adapted to this view—or it was assumed that when God created the first man they were all breathed into him and therefore created with and included in Adam, to be later distributed among his posterity. On both views it was possible to hold the particular doctrine of the migration of souls (metempsychosis or reincarnation), i.e., that the same souls could enter into many associations with different bodies.
>
> Partly in opposition to the doctrine of pre-existence, yet inevitably connected with it, and represented particularly by Tertullian in earlier days, and later (surprisingly enough) by Luther and Lutheran theology, was the traducianist doctrine that the soul originates in the act of conception [generated by the father and mother]. A soul-seed, distinct from the body-seed, is supposed to be detached from the soul of the parents, thus becoming the independent soul of the child. The doctrine prevailing in the Roman Church, which again surprisingly was followed in traditional Reformed theology, is creationism. On this view each individual soul originates in a divine creative act, an immediate *ex nihilo* ["out of nothing"]. This creative act is supposed (cf. F. Diekamp, *Kath. Dogmatik, Vol. II*, 1930, P, 119f.) to take place at the moment of conception when the parents create the requisite physiological conditions for the existence of a human being in this act. The parents are, of course, only

> *causae secundae*, God Himself Being the *causa prima*. And simultaneously God in heaven, this time as the *causa unica*, creates the soul and associates it with this new human body. (*CD*, III.II.573)

CONCLUSION

The original created conditions were perfect, but they included a perfection called free will, and, while good in itself, free will made evil possible. Originally, both body and soul were created by God. As to the dispute concerning how individual souls have come into being after Adam, it appears that traducianism, rather than direct creationism, better fits all the data. Indeed, as we have seen, it is difficult to comprehend how each human being could be born in sin unless fallen souls are generated from parents, for surely God does not create a fallen soul each time a human is conceived.

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CHAPTER TWO

THE NATURE OF HUMAN BEINGS

For our comprehension of the doctrines of sin and salvation, the nature of human beings is of utmost importance, second only to the nature of the God from whom they come.[1] Human nature will be discussed both in its original created state and in its subsequent fallen condition.

VARIOUS BIBLICAL TERMS USED TO DESCRIBE HUMAN BEINGS

Humans are described by many different words in Scripture. Some refer to the spiritual dimension, others to the physical dimension, and some to both.

Terms Used of the Immaterial Dimension of Human Beings

Humans have an inner (immaterial) dimension and an outer (material) dimension. The former is often called *soul* (or *spirit*),[2] and the latter is usually called *body*.

Soul

Unlike its popular English usage, the term *soul* (Heb: *nephesh* and Gk:

psuche) is often biblically used of more than the spiritual dimension of human beings; sometimes the body is included (e.g., Gen. 2:7; Ps. 16:10).

However, there are also scriptural references to the soul as being distinguished from the body. Genesis 35:18 (KJV) speaks of the soul leaving the body at death: "And it came to pass, as [Rachel's] soul was in departing, (for she died) that she called his name Benoni."

First Thessalonians 5:23 differentiates soul from body, saying, "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Revelation 6:9 speaks of souls totally separated from their bodies in heaven: "When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained."

Basically, the word *soul* means "life"; it refers to the principle of life in a human being, or to that which animates the body. Sometimes the word even refers to a dead body (e.g., Lev. 19:28; 21:1; 23:4) in the way we may speak of a departed loved one as "that poor soul." The primary meaning of *soul* can most often be captured best by translating it *as person*, which *usually* is embodied but is *sometimes* disembodied.

Spirit

The word *spirit* (Heb: *ruach* and Gk: *pneuma*) almost always refers to "the immaterial dimension of a human being." It is often used interchangeably with the word *soul*, as is indicated by many verses (e.g., cf. Luke 1:46). The body without *the soul* is dead (James 2:26); at death, Jesus "bowed his head and gave up his *spirit*" (John 19:30).

Spirit is immaterial, for Jesus said to His disciples, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself. Touch me and see; a ghost [spirit] does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have" (Luke 24:38–39). Indeed, the invisible God "is spirit" and must be worshiped "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24).

Heart

The term *heart* (Heb: *leb* and Gk: *kardia*) has a broader meaning than is commonly thought, sometimes even including the mind. Proverbs, for instance, speaks of a person who "thinks in his heart" (23:7 AMP). Essentially, *heart* refers to the whole inner person; it is the heart from which true faith springs, for in order to be saved one must "believe in [his] heart" (Rom. 10:9).[3] The heart is

the instrument with which we are to worship God, since we are exhorted: “Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (Deut. 6:5).

The heart is also the seat of evil, for Jesus confirmed that “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matt. 12:34 NKJV). The prophet said, “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure” (Jer. 17:9). In short, for better or for worse, the heart reflects the whole inner being.

Mind

The mind (Gk: *nous*) refers to the immaterial dimension of a human being by which he or she thinks and imagines. Jesus included it in the great commandment, saying, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and *with all your mind* and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30). Paul included the mind in that which needs renewal by God’s sanctifying power, declaring, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the *renewing of your mind*” (Rom. 12:2). This is because “the mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so” (Rom. 8:6–7). Hence, “we demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we *take captive every thought* to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5).

Inward Man

The spiritual dimension of human beings is also called the *inward man:* “Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day” (2 Cor. 4:16 KJV). The inward man is related to the “things which are not seen,” the things that are “eternal” and never pass away (v. 18).

Terms Used of the Material Dimension of Human Beings

Body

The biblical word *body* (Heb: *basar* and Gk: *soma*) is normally used of the outer (material) aspect of human nature. Jesus said, “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28). The body, then, can decay and be destroyed; in fact, it is the body that is called “dead” when the spirit leaves it (James 2:26). However, the body is reconstructable by God, and it *will* be

resurrected from the dead:

> The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.… The perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. (1 Cor. 15:42–44, 53)

Flesh

The word *flesh* (Heb: *basar* and Gk: *sarx*),[4] when referring to a physical human being, nearly always includes the outer dimension, made of matter. Again, Jesus said, "Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; *a ghost does not have flesh and bones*, as you see I have" (Luke 24:39). The same word is also used of the resurrection body in Acts 2:31: "Seeing what was ahead, [David] spoke of the resurrection of the Christ [in Ps. 16], that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body [flesh] see decay."[5]

Earthen Vessel

Paul demonstrates an analogy between an earthenware pot and the human body: "We have this treasure [the light of Christ] in *jars of clay* to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us" (2 Cor. 4:7). *Earthen vessel* (KJV) is an appropriate illustration of the human body, since it is an outer structure containing something else (a soul) inside. The same is true of the following example, a figure of speech presenting the body as a *tent* or *house*.

Earthly Tent

Paul, as a tentmaker, understood the purpose of the human body: "Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands" (2 Cor. 5:1). Indeed, when Jesus assumed a body in the Incarnation, He *dwelled* (lit. "pitched his tent") in our midst: "The Word became flesh and *made his dwelling* among us" (John 1:14). In the same way, the body is the material shell that in this world houses the presence of the immaterial soul.

Outward Man

If the soul is the "inner man," then the body is the "outer man." Again, Paul wrote, "Though our outward man perish, yet the inward [man] is renewed day by day" (2 Cor. 4:16 KJV). The outward person is visible, material, and tangible; as we have seen, it is subject to decay and destruction, since it can "perish."

Concluding this brief biblical description of the two basic dimensions of a human being, we now turn to the manner in which the body and soul relate.

There are many views on this topic, several of which have been held by Christians.

VARIOUS PERSPECTIVES ON HUMAN NATURE: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOUL AND BODY

There is an important debate among Christians over the relationship between the two human dimensions. Of course, in the broader (non-Christian) spectrum, there are even more perspectives. We will survey them now.

Anthropological Materialism[6]

Materialism affirms that humans have a material body but denies that they have an immaterial soul. Materialism maintains that *only the body exists; what we call a rational soul does not*. Therefore, according to materialism, the body is to the mind (soul) what the brain is to a dream; mind is simply a manifestation of matter. (Thomas Hobbes [1588–1679], for example, was an adherent.)

Anthropological Epiphenomenalism

One modified form of materialism is called epiphenomenalism. The French thinker Pierre-Jean Georges Cabanis (1757–1808) proposed that the soul is only a silhouette of the body; that is, the body is to the soul what a tree is to its shadow. Mind is just a dependent by-product of matter; it is merely a sign of matter rather than something separate from it or a cause of it. *Soul is like an image in a mirror; it only reflects the body*. Thus, while the soul is not the equivalent of the body, it is reducible to the body.

Anthropological Idealism

On the other end of the non-theistic spectrum from materialism is idealism, which affirms that humans have a soul but not a body. English Bishop George Berkeley (1685–1753) embraced this perspective, claiming that *while the soul exists, the body does not*. Allegedly, the body is to the soul what a mirage is to a

mind. The body is merely an illusion; it simply does not exist. Only the mind exists.

Anthropological Monism (The Double-Aspect View)

Benedict Spinoza (1632–1677) held the double-aspect view (also called "anthropological monism"), according to which *soul and body are two sides (inner and outer) of the same thing*. The soul and body are both of one substance; that is, the soul is to body what one side of a plate is to the other, namely, just another aspect of the same entity. Though Spinoza was a pantheist,[7] holding that all things are of the same substance, there have also been Christians who embraced anthropological monism. Creatures, supposedly, differ from God only as modes or moments of one and the same *thing*.

Anthropological Dualism/Dichotomy[8]

According to dualism, *soul and body are separate and parallel entities*; like railroad tracks, they run side by side but never intersect with each other. The problem with dualism is the lack of any contact, unity, or interaction with soul and body, which, in actuality, appears to occur. This view has been attributed to Plato (c. 427–347 B.C.) and some of his followers, though Plato himself likened the relation of a soul to a body as that of a rider to a horse, claiming that the soul influences the body but not the reverse. Indeed, Plato held a form of occasionalism,[9] meaning that on the occasion of a sensory experience, the mind recollects what it had known in a previous life, where it beheld the true *Ideas* of all things. Like anthropological monism, different elements of dualism also have been espoused by some Christians.[10]

Anthropological Interactionism

René Descartes (1596–1650) asserted that *body and soul are two different substances:* The intellectual soul (mind) is a thinking, non-extended entity, and the physical body is a non-thinking, spatially extended entity. These two different substances, soul and body, only interact with each other as two boxers interact with each other, though not necessarily in an antagonistic way. Opponents have described interactionism as the "ghost in a machine" view.

Anthropological Occasionalism (Recollectionism)

Augustine (354–430) maintained a platonic dualism of soul and body, but he added a dimension to Plato's paradigm, wherein *the rational soul relates to the body by direct divine action*. The body connects to the mind the way a reminder does to our memory, meaning that on the occasion of the physical reminder (sensory perception), God causes ideas in our minds. According to occasionalism, the body, which is lower, cannot directly impact the soul, which is higher. This view is also called "illuminationism," since God is said to illumine the mind (or soul) as to what is going on in the body.

Anthropological Pre-Established Harmony

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716) attempted to explain the relationship between soul and body alternatively. He saw a pre-established harmony between them, like two clocks wound up by God to run parallel to each other. Therefore, *mind and body*, while not directly aware of each other, *are synchronized by God*. God is the Super Monad who keeps all created monads properly related to each other, including their souls to their bodies.[11]

Anthropological Hylomorphism

The term *hylomorphism* comes from two Greek words;[12] the theory proposes that *there is a form/matter unity between the soul and the body*, just as there is a unity between the shape (form) of a statue and the rock (material) out of which it is made. Hylomorphism asserts that the soul (mind) is to the body (matter) what ideas are to words: They form a unity, one being the inner and the other the outer dimension of their holistic oneness. The soul animates the body and forms one hylomorphic (form/matter) substance called a human being. The Greek philosopher Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) and the Christian thinker Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) embraced this view.

OUTLINE OF THE BASIC SOUL/BODY VIEWS

View	Primary Proponent	Soul/Body	Illustration (Soul/Body As …)	Explanation
Materialism	Thomas	Body only	As dream to brain	Only body exists; mind (soul) is nothing

	Hobbes			but a manifestation of matter.
Epiphenomenalism	Pierre-Jean Georges Cabanis	Soul is a by-product of body.	As shadow to tree	Body causes mind; mind is only a sign (not a cause) of matter.
Idealism	George Berkeley	Soul only	As mind to mirage	Only mind (soul) exists; body is merely an illusion.
Monism (Double-Aspect View)	Benedict Spinoza	Two aspects of the same thing	As inner to outer	Mind (soul) and body are two sides of same substance.
Dualism (Dichotomy or Parallelism)	Plato	Two different but parallel realities	As railroad tracks	Soul and body never interact; they only exist simultaneously.
Interactionism	René Descartes	Two different substances mutually interacting	As two boxers	Mind and body interact with each other.
Occasionalism (Recollectionism)	Augustine	Two different substances coordinated by God	As memory to reminder	God causes ideas in the mind on the occasion of sensory perception.
Pre-Established Harmony	Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz	Two different, synchronized substances	As two clocks	Mind and body are synchronized by God.
Hylomorphism	Thomas Aquinas	Soul animates body	As ideas to words	Mind and body are a holistic unity.

Of these diverse anthropological views, the biblical data surveyed above (see sections under “Various Biblical Terms Used to Describe Human Beings”) exclude those that deny one of the two basic dimensions of human beings. For example, this eliminates both materialism and epiphenomenalism, which deny any real immaterial soul, and idealism, which rejects any real material body. As parallelism, pre-established harmony, interactionism, and occasionalism are all forms of dualism, they are treated under “Dualism (Dichotomy)” below. The other three perspectives are anthropological monism, trichotomy, and hylomorphism.[13]

We will now examine in more detail six primary categories of models for the relationship between body and soul:

(1) materialism/epiphenomenalism;

(2) idealism;
(3) monism;
(4) dualism/dichotomy (including parallelism, pre-established harmony, interactionism, and occasionalism);
(5) trichotomy; and
(6) hylomorphism.

AN EXAMINATION OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL MATERIALISM[14]

Anthropological materialism is without either biblical or philosophical foundation.

Biblical Arguments Against Anthropological Materialism

The Bible not only affirms that both soul and body exist, but it also distinguishes them in several ways.

First, even in this life they are distinct: The body will perish, but the soul does not (e.g., 2 Cor. 4:16; 5:1); the soul leaves the body at death (Gen. 35:18 KJV).

Second, Scripture describes the soul (or spirit) as being consciously separated from the body after death.[15]

Third, and finally, the Bible everywhere refers to the body and the material world as things that are tangibly existent, apart from the mind.

Philosophical Arguments Against Anthropological Materialism

Materialism Is Self-Defeating

As former atheist C. S. Lewis (1898–1963) observed, the materialist view (that matter exists but mind does not) is clearly self-defeating, for the *theory* of materialism is not made up of matter: The *theory* about matter has no matter in it. The *idea* that all is made of molecules does not itself consist of molecules—the *thought* about all matter must itself stand over and above the matter it is talking about.[16]

If the thought about matter is part of matter, then it cannot be a thought about

all matter, since being a part of matter it cannot transcend itself to make a pronouncement about *all* matter. The only way that mind (or its thoughts) can transcend matter is if the mind is more than matter. And if it is more than matter, then matter is not all that exists.

Modified Materialism Is Also Self-Defeating

As previously implied, some materialists are not strict materialists. Epiphenomenalists, for instance, admit that mind is more than matter but deny that mind can exist independently of matter, arguing that mind is simply the reflection of matter and is therefore reducible to it. They insist that mind is only more than matter in the way that the whole is more than the sum of its parts. Even so, the "whole" ceases to exist when the parts do; when the body expires, so also does the soul. Basically, though epiphenomenalists allow for mind being more than matter, they maintain that mind is merely a silhouette that ceases to exist when a human's material parts dissolve.

Although this materialistic argument is apparently less self-defeating than the first one, it is nonetheless wrong. Epiphenomenalism affirms that mind is ultimately dependent on matter, but the statement "Mind is dependent on matter" does not claim to depend upon matter for its truth—in fact, *it claims to be a truth about all matter and mind*. No truth about *all* mind and matter can be dependent for its truth upon matter, for one cannot stand outside of all matter to make an affirmation about all matter and yet simultaneously claim he is really standing inside matter while being dependent only upon it and nothing else. If my mind is completely *dependent on* (and is only a reflection of) matter, then it can't make statements from a vantage point that is *independent of* matter, and if its statements are not from a vantage point that is independent of matter, then they are not really statements about *all* matter: One must step *beyond* something to see *all* of it (implying, of course, that mind, after all, is beyond matter).

In short, epiphenomenalism claims to have a transcendent[17] basis of knowledge with only an immanent[18] basis of operation. What epiphenomenalism tries to do is transcend matter (with mind) to make truth statements about all mind and matter to prove that mind is within (and, therefore, dependent upon) matter. In order for epiphenomenalism to succeed in this (and not be self-defeating), mind would have to be independent of matter. If mind to body, though, is only like a shadow to a tree (as epiphenomenalism argues), how can a mere reflection (which allegedly depends for its existence on the matter that projects it) be independent of its source?

According to epiphenomenalism, mind is not independent from matter. If this is *correct*, then epiphenomenalism's "truth statements" are untrue, having no basis. If this is *incorrect*, then epiphenomenalism's fundamental foundation crumbles. Either way, it is self-defeating.

A Transcendental Argument Against Materialism

Materialists attempt to reduce everything to matter, to the exclusion of mind.[19] This is self-defeating because whatever analysis I make of matter, there is always an "I" that stands outside the object of my analysis. Even when I analyze myself, there is an "I" that transcends the "me." I can never capture my transcendental "I" (*ego*); I can only catch it, as it were, out of "the corner of my eye." If I attempt to put my "I" in the test tube of analysis, it then becomes a "me" at which the elusive "I" is looking. There is always more than "me"; there is the "I" that is not merely "me." Contrary to materialism, then, everything is not ultimately reducible to the "I." Mind is prior to and independent of matter.

The Universe Has a Non-Material Origin

As was demonstrated earlier,[20] there is a supernatural, immaterial Cause of the universe. Since scientific evidence shows that the whole material universe came into existence *out of nothing*,[21] the Cause of the universe cannot be a *material something*; hence, there is more than matter. As the materialist Karl Marx (1818–1883) put it, either matter produced mind or mind produced matter. Since matter was produced, it must have been Mind that produced it. Consequently, the more-than-matter that exists is mind.

The Moral Lawgiver Is Not Material

Another way to demonstrate that all is not matter is known as the moral argument for God's existence.[22] It can be put this way:

(1) There is an objective moral law.[23]
(2) Moral law is prescriptive (tells us what we *ought* to do and what *not* to do).
(3) What is prescriptive is not part of the descriptive material world.
(4) Thus, there is an objective reality that is not material; that is, more than matter exists.[24]

AN EXAMINATION OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL IDEALISM

Anthropological idealism also is opposed by both biblical and philosophical evidence.

Biblical Arguments Against Anthropological Idealism

First, the Bible unequivocally teaches that God created a material universe (Gen. 1–2) and that matter is truly different from God, who is purely Spirit (John 4:24).

Second, matter is finite and destructible (1 Cor. 15:42), whereas God is infinite and indestructible (1 Tim. 6:16).

Third, and finally, the human soul, as already stated, is set out as different from the body (e.g., Luke 24:39) in that the two are separated at death (e.g., James 2:26).

Philosophical Arguments Offered for Anthropological Idealism

George Berkeley insisted that only minds and ideas exist, for supposedly *to be* is either "to perceive" (Lat: *esse est percipi*) or "to be perceived" (Lat: *esse est percipere*). Idealism alleges, for several reasons, that no "matter" exists.[25]

First of all, there is said to be no way to separate *being* from *being perceived*.

In addition, the arguments against existence of secondary qualities (like color) also apply to primary ones (like number and extension). For example, says idealism, *extension* cannot be known apart from color and bulk; *number* is based on unity, which cannot be perceived; *figure* changes with one's perspective; *motion* is relative.

Also, *things* (matter) cannot be known apart from thought; therefore, they exist only in thought.

Furthermore, belief in *matter* charges God with a useless creation, since we are able to have an idea of it without its existing.

In short, idealism maintains that it is impossible to conceive of anything existing outside of a mind. To "conceive of something" is a *power of mind* to form an idea *in the mind* (not outside of it). Nothing can be *conceived* as existing *unconceived*. That is, nothing can be thought to exist apart from one's thought.

Response to the Philosophical Arguments for Anthropological Idealism

Although Berkeley was a Christian theist, his anthropological idealism is contrary to the entire classical theistic position. Several criticisms are worthy of note.

Idealism's Basic Assumption Begs the Question[26]

The fundamental premise of idealism is that only minds and ideas exist; once this is granted, everything else in the theory follows. However, there is no compelling reason to grant it. Indeed, it begs the entire question by assuming, *to begin with* (a priori), that only minds and ideas exist. We certainly receive no surprise, then, in discovering Berkeley's *conclusion* that there is nothing else. The existence of extra-mental and non-mental reality is not eliminated by any of the arguments.

Idealism's Basic Premises Fail

Berkeley's arguments for idealism, at root, are based on the mistaken notion that "knowing" involves *a sensing of ideas* rather than *a sensing of things through ideas*. This again begs the question, for if ideas are not the *formal* object of knowledge but instead are merely the *instruments* through which knowledge of the external world is conveyed to us,[27] then idealism collapses.

Idealism Is Contrary to Experience

To speak, as Berkeley did, of bodies, matter, and nature—which we all experience—as mere ideas that God regularly excites in us, is possible but not really credible. When one eats food, he is not eating the idea of food or having the idea of eating the idea of food. Furthermore, it undermines the Resurrection to imply that God only raised up a cluster of ideas.

Idealism Charges God With Deception

Berkeley, in arguing that there is no external world, charged God with deception. Certainly God is *powerful* enough to create the ideas of things in us that do not exist; even so, God is not merely all-powerful—He is also all-perfect, and He cannot deceive. To have created in every human being the vivid perception that there is an extra-mental, material world, if there wasn't one, would be dishonest.[28]

AN EXAMINATION OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL MONISM

Unlike either materialism or idealism, *anthropological monism*,[29] which is the first of four views that have been held by some professed Christians and cults (the other three are examined below), does not deny either mind or matter.[30] Rather, it *affirms both while identifying them as one*. As mentioned previously, Benedict Spinoza held this view (see *E*), as do Jehovah's Witnesses.

Many arguments have been offered in favor of this view, both biblical and philosophical.

Biblical Arguments Given for Anthropological Monism

The basic arguments from Scripture for anthropological monism are (1) from the nature of human beings and (2) from the alleged oneness of soul and body. Monism maintains that humans have only one nature—a *human* nature: "From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth" (Acts 17:26). This original man's nature is shared equally by all human beings; consequently, it must be one nature, not many.

Another argument has been offered from 2 Corinthians 5:1, which appears to affirm that a person's resurrection body is received at the moment of physical death:[31] "Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands."

Response to the Biblical Arguments Given for Anthropological Monism

The biblical data put forward for monism—such as Acts 17:26—can also be interpreted another way.[32] Scripture demonstrates the *unity* of the two human dimensions, but not their *identity*. For example, there is a *unity* between the words of this sentence and the idea expressed in it, but the words and the idea are not *identical*.

Further, it is true that we have one nature, but it has two dimensions, as was shown above. The two dimensions cannot be identical, because one is material, and the other is immaterial; one is perishable, and the other is imperishable.

As to the use of 2 Corinthians 5:1 on the behalf of monism, there are at least two other interpretations.

First, some hold that there is an intermediate spiritual body provided at death so that the soul is never disembodied (e.g., see Chafer, *ST*, 2.506–07).

Second, others point out that Paul (in 2 Cor. 5:1) does not teach that a person receives the eternal body at the instant of death but merely that he anticipates the final resurrection. This view fits better with Paul's statements about the final resurrection body in 1 Corinthians 15:42–44.[33]

Third, monism contradicts clear biblical references to a disembodied state (soul/spirit being separated from the body at death).[34] Thus, in 2 Corinthians 5:1, Paul is simply speaking in the knowledge that after death there is the ultimate anticipation of the permanent resurrection body. This correlates, also, with what he says regarding death and the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:50–54.[35]

Philosophical Arguments for and Against Anthropological Monism

The Parmenidean Paradox

On the level of being, the ancient Greek philosopher Parmenides (fl. c. 485 B.C.) gave a powerful argument for *metaphysical*[36] monism, namely, that all being is one. It runs like this:

(1) It is impossible for there to be two things (beings), for to be two things they must differ.
(2) Things can only differ by either being or nonbeing, but to differ by *nonbeing* (or, to differ by nothing) is not to differ at all.
(3) To differ by *being* is not possible, since being is the only thing that all beings have in common.
(4) Things cannot differ by what they have in common; that is, they cannot differ by the very respect in which they are identical.

Response

We have seen[37] that this argument, unassailable as it may seem, actually begs the question, since it assumes what is to be proven, which is that all things are *identical* in their being (monism). If, on the other hand, we posit and then demonstrate that all things are *similar* in their being, monism does not follow. Only by assuming that being is univocal (entirely the same) rather than

analogical (similar) does monism follow.[38] If the term *being* is predicated of (ascribed to) God in an analogous (similar) way, then all things are not identical; the argument for *metaphysical* monism does not stand.

Anthropological monism, being a subspecies of metaphysical monism, suffers the same fate. Unless one assumes that the terms *body* and *soul* are univocal (identical) in regard to the same human being, it does not follow that body and soul are the same. There can be different truths about one and the same thing without these different truths being the same. For instance, one and the same rock can be both round (which is not necessarily material in itself) and hard (which applies only to material things). Likewise, one and the same human essence can be both material and immaterial without having two different essences, provided that one is the form (soul) and the other is the matter (body).

The Attack on Anthropological Dualism

Another argument given for anthropological monism is that the dualist (dichotomist) view, which monism opposes, is Greek (rather than Hebrew) in origin; that is, anthropological dualism (see below) finds its roots in Hellenic philosophy, not Jewish theology.

Response

In reply, there are several serious problems with this contention.

First, this is a classic case of *poisoning the well*. The issue is not whether dualism comes from Greek philosophy (it does); a view should not be judged false (or true, for that matter) by its *cultural origin* but instead by the *evidence for and against it*.

Second, it is unhelpful and incorrect to administer the broad label of *Greek* to dualism, as though *being Greek* means "being a dualist." Aristotle, for instance, was Greek, and he rejected anthropological dualism. It is more precise to call dualism *platonic*. Nevertheless, even if the specific dualism being evaluated is platonic, it should not be rejected simply because Plato embraced it. Christians (even many anthropological monists) hold to a great number of Plato's ideas, including the objectivity of morality, meaning, and truth, as well as belief in God and an afterlife. Plato, like any other person, did not *create* the ideas but rather *discovered* them.

Third, this argument for monism is based on a false disjunction. Specifically, it fails to note that not all non-monisms are dualisms. Aristotle and Aquinas, for example, were opposed to platonic dualism, but they did not hold to

anthropological monism; instead, they embraced hylomorphism, a unity (rather than identity) of soul and body.

Other Evidence Against Anthropological Monism

In addition to the failure of the philosophical arguments for monism, there are many arguments against it.[39]

First, monism denies that there are two dimensions in the human nature, which the Bible affirms.[40]

Second, monism does not explain scriptural texts where the soul (or spirit) survives death in a disembodied state.[41] If soul and body *were* one and the same, then the soul would die when the body does. It doesn't.

Third, monism does not account for Jesus being spiritually alive between His death and resurrection (Luke 24:46; John 19:30). He is the second person of the Godhead; He didn't go out of existence.

Fourth, monism necessitates either annihilationism[42] or immediate resurrection at the point of death—both are unorthodox and unacceptable. If body and soul are one, as monism claims, then either (1) both go out of existence, together, at death (which is annihilationism), or else (2) a new body is given to the soul at the instant of death (which is immediate resurrection). As for the first, annihilationism is plainly unscriptural,[43] and regarding the second, the giving of new bodies to the souls of believers at the instant of death would make their resurrection a *past* event, a view the New Testament condemns as heretical (cf. 2 Tim. 2:18). There can be no resurrection of the body while it is still in the grave, since resurrection involves the dead body being raised up (John 5:28–29), just as Jesus was, in the same body, crucifixion scars and all (Luke 24:39; John 20:27). Further, the resurrection of the body is set forth (e.g., in 1 Thess. 4:13–18) as a *future* event that will take place when Jesus returns to earth.

Fifth, monism is contrary to our consciousness of having two dimensions, a body and a mind (soul). My thoughts are clearly different from my body.

Sixth, and finally, all the arguments and texts used to show a so-called *identity* between body and soul can be explained instead as references to psychosomatic *unity*.[44]

AN EXAMINATION OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL

DUALISM (DICHOTOMY)

Anthropological dualism, springing from Plato, is the view affirming that soul and body are of two different substances—a human being *is* a soul and merely *has* a body. The primary analogy is the soul as being to the body what a rider is to a horse; other *non-Christian* dualists spoke of the soul as being like a bird in a cage or a person in prison—when the soul is released from the body (at death), it is permanently freed from the shackles of earthly incarceration.

Although *Christian* dualists hold that the soul will be reunited with the resurrection body, they nevertheless maintain a psychosomatic dualism, which is evident in the occasionalism (recollectionism) of Augustine and many in the Reformed tradition to this date.[45]

Two Arguments Offered for Anthropological Dualism (Dichotomy)

The Argument From the Soul Surviving Death

Against monists, dualists point out that since the soul survives death, it cannot be the same substance as the body. If it were, it would die with the body, but it does not, as both sides admit. The problem with this argument is that it is a false disjunction, wrongly assuming that if a view is not dualistic, then it must be monistic.[46] As already observed, there is at least one other tenable alternative, namely, a soul/body unity (without identity) known as anthropological hylomorphism (see below).

The Argument That Interchangeability of "Soul" and "Spirit" Proves Their Identity

Against trichotomists,[47] who hold that a human being is tripartite ("having three parts"), dualists (dichotomists) argue that since *soul* and *spirit* are used interchangeably in many passages,[48] a human being has only two parts (body and soul/spirit); *soul* and *spirit* must refer to one and the same thing.

Further, dualists observe, *soul* and *spirit* are also used synonymously in poetic parallel (cf. Luke 1:46–47), and they often have the same functions (e.g., sighing, grieving, and refreshing).[49]

In response, it should be noted that if this argument is correct, *at best* it would only prove that trichotomy is wrong, not that dualism is right. In addition, once again, these same functions can also be explained by hylomorphism (see below).

Other Evidence Against Anthropological Dualism (Dichotomy)

In addition to the failure of these arguments to support dualism, there are several noteworthy reasons to reject it, including the following.

First, dualism denies biblical teaching on the essential unity of the human being.[50]

Second, dualism confuses *dimensions* with *parts*. Just as a work of art has two dimensions—the form and the medium—human nature has both inner (soul) and outer (body).

Third, dualism denigrates the body by excluding it from the image of God, whereas the Bible presents the body as part of His likeness.[51]

Fourth, dualism leads to untenable asceticism and otherworldliness, since it proposes that the essence of humanity is purely spiritual and excludes the material.

Fifth, and finally, platonic dualism's representation of human nature, even without its reincarnational (rebirth) and soteriological (salvific) aspects, is not biblical (see Ladd, "GVHVM" in *PNTT*).[52]

AN EXAMINATION OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL TRICHOTOMY

The third view held by Christians is called trichotomy, which insists that a human being is tripartite: body, soul, and spirit. It has origins in Plato and Plotinus (205–270) and was adopted by the early Christian father Tertullian (c. 155–c. 225). In one popular version of the trichotomist perspective, a human being is said to be *self-conscious* by virtue of her soul, *world-conscious* through her body, and *God-conscious* in her spirit.

Arguments Offered for Anthropological Trichotomy

The biblical basis for trichotomy is sought in passages where soul and spirit appear to be clearly differentiated, such as the following.

Hebrews 4:12

"The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword,

it penetrates even to *dividing soul and spirit*, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." Trichotomists reason that if the soul and spirit can be divided, then they cannot be one and the same (synonymous).

In response, many expositors take this apparent contrast between soul and spirit to be a figure of speech describing the power of the Word of God. It is so powerful that it can, as it were, divide the indivisible. In this sense, rather than being a proof of trichotomy, Hebrews 4:12 actually is evidence for the unity (but not identity) of human nature.

1 Thessalonians 5:23

Here the apostle prays, "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole *spirit, soul and body* be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Trichotomists argue that all three being listed separately, in the same passage, reveals that the soul and the spirit cannot be one.

Opponents make three points in response.

First, the emphasis in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 is on the wholeness of human nature, since it refers to all these dimensions as being part of one *whole*.

Second, the words *soul* and *spirit* could still be interchangeable. For instance, both could be listed for completeness, in case some of those in the reading audience believed that part of the human being was omitted because the particular word (*soul* or *spirit*) was not used.

Third, and finally, there is no textual indication, in any event, that body, soul, and spirit are three separate *parts* of a human being. Perhaps they describe different aspects of one and the same human nature.[53]

Romans 8:16

In this passage the apostle Paul declares that "the Spirit himself testifies with *our spirit* that we are God's children." Proponents of trichotomy suggest that the word *spirit* distinguishes a unique part of a human being that has unshared reference to (connection with) God. They likewise insist that the word *soul* is never used in such a context.

In reply, opponents claim that even if this trichotomist observation *were* true, the logic would involve special pleading, since this supposed function or connection may be another aspect of what a *soul* does.[54] However, at best, this trichotomist point is a traditionally weak argument from silence.[55] Furthermore, there *are* texts that use the word *soul* in reference to God. Jesus, for example,

commanded us to love God "with all your … soul" (Matt. 22:37), and Mary proclaimed, "My soul glorifies the Lord" (Luke 1:46).

1 Corinthians 15:44

Paul writes, "[The body] is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body." Nowhere in Scripture is the resurrection body described as *soulish* (rather than *spiritual*). Trichotomists, accordingly, insist that the spirit is uniquely and exclusively adapted to the glorified body in which we will see God.

In response, critics of trichotomy are quick to point out that the term *spiritual body* means "a body dominated by the Holy Spirit"; that is to say, the spiritual body is a body with a supernatural source of energy (rather than a natural source, as our earthly body has). The same word *spiritual* (Gk: *pneumatikos*), for instance, is also used of the Rock (Christ) that supernaturally provided water for Israel in the desert (1 Cor. 10:4; cf. Ex. 32:5–6).

Mark 10:45

Some trichotomists interpret Jesus' statement that "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life [Gk: *psuche, soul*] as a ransom for many" as evidence for their view; they allege that Jesus does not say He will give His *spirit* (Gk: *pneuma*) because the spirit does not die.

In response, it is noteworthy that when Jesus died, the gospel account says, "He gave up His *spirit*" (John 19:30). Further, if *soul* is only a reference to a *part* of Christ's humanity that was given for our sins, then trichotomy involves a heresy, for, in such a case, Jesus would not have given His full humanity to redeem our transgressions.

In addition, no distinction is made in Mark 10:45 between soul and spirit. Jesus was not saying here that His *soul*, exclusively, was going to be offered as the ransom; rather the one term, *soul*, which often stands for the whole person,[56] says it all.

1 Corinthians 6:19

Since Paul contends, "The spirit belongs to God," and the soul is said to be man's possession ("my life," 1 Kings 19:4), trichotomists argue that soul and spirit are distinct.

In reply, this too is a false disjunction. *All* belongs to God (1 Chron. 29:14; James 1:17), including the body, as 1 Corinthians 6 itself affirms (v. 20). Consequently, this argument is a distinction without an actual difference.

AN EXAMINATION OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL HYLOMORPHISM (SOUL/BODY UNITY)

The fourth and final view maintained by Christians is called *hylomorphism*,[57] which, as stated previously, holds that there is a form/matter unity between soul and body. The roots of the view are found in the beliefs of Aristotle, though it has earlier basis in the Old Testament, and it was later corroborated by Thomas Aquinas. The evidence for hylomorphism can be divided into biblical and philosophical.

The Biblical Basis for Anthropological Hylomorphism

Human beings are described as a soul/body unity from the very beginning. As we have seen, Genesis says, "The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and *the man became a living being [soul]*" (2:7). That is, the whole unity of dust (matter) and breath (life) was a vital being.

Furthermore, the word *soul* means "person," and it often includes the body. For instance, in Psalm 16:10, David records, "Thou wilt not leave my *soul* in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see *corruption*" (KJV). Obviously, *soul* here includes the body, which, as prophesied (regarding Jesus Christ), did not see corruption but was resurrected (cf. Acts 2:30–31).

Also, as we have seen, the word *soul* sometimes even refers to a dead body (e.g., Lev. 19:28; 21:1; 23:4).

In addition, if both soul and body were not created as a unity, then the murder of a body would not be wrong. But it is, for God said, "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man" (Gen. 9:6). This, again, implies that the image of God includes the body, otherwise the prohibition against murdering a body would not apply.

Even more, the Bible declares that a soul without a body is naked and incomplete (2 Cor. 5:1–4). This would not be so unless there was a powerful unity between them.

Finally, resurrection makes no sense unless we are incomplete without a body, and God's Word declares that all human beings, saved and lost, *will* be resurrected (John 5:25–29). Without the body we are unwhole, lacking in our very nature as a human being.

The Philosophical/Psychological Basis for Anthropological Hylomorphism

In addition to the biblical data, there are psychological and philosophical reasons to support the form/matter unity of soul and body. Consider the following arguments.

The Analogy With Animals

Higher forms of animals do have a soul; the same Hebrew word used for the soul of humans (*nephesh*) is also used of animals. Indeed, even the word *spirit* is used of an animal (see Eccl. 3:21). Therefore, while animals are alive, there is a form/matter unity between their soul and their body. The same is true of human beings, the only difference being that the *human* soul survives death and lives on consciously between death and resurrection (e.g., Phil. 1:23; 2 Cor. 5:8; Rev. 6:9).

The Psychosomatical Interpenetration

What is more, there is clearly an interpenetration of the soul and body, which befits a form/matter unity. *Interpenetration* means that the soul influences the body *and* vice versa.[58] For example, grief in the soul affects the body, and pain in the body affects the mind. This psychosomatic affiliation indicates not identity but unity.

An Objection to Anthropological Hylomorphism

Like all other views, hylomorphism is subject to criticism. The primary opposition has to do with the disembodied intermediate state (between death and resurrection).

The Objection Stated—Regarding the Survival of the Soul

This argument contends that if the soul and body are a unity in this life, then it would seem that the soul could not exist in a disembodied state. If embodiment is a necessary vehicle for the soul, how can it survive alone?

Response

In reply, as already established, soul and body are a *unity*, not an *identity*. If they were identical, then of course one could not survive without the other.

Again, by way of analogy, the soul is to the body what thought in the mind is to words on paper; the concept remains when the material perishes.[59]

The Bible informs us that the soul *does* survive when the body dies. To be sure, the soul is incomplete without the body, and it does await the resurrection of the body, when it will once again be complete (2 Cor. 5:1), but survival as a soul without a body is not impossible or contradictory. Both God and angels are purely spiritual (John 4:24; Heb. 1:14), yet they exist without physical form. It is assumed, then, that in the intermediate, disembodied state between death and resurrection, human beings will exist as angels presently do.[60]

George Eldon Ladd (1911–1982) wrote a masterful analysis of the contrast between the dualist view and the hylomorphic (unity) view of soul and body; this is summarized in the following chart (with the change of one word—*Greek* to *Platonic*).[61]

Two Contrasting Views of Human Nature: Platonic vs. Christian[62]

Platonic View of Human Nature	Christian View of Human Nature
Dualistic	Unity
Is a Soul (Soul is complete without body)	Is a Soul/Body (Soul is not complete without body)
Matter is not good	Matter is good
Reincarnation into another body	Resurrection in the same body
Body is prison/tomb	Body is expression of the soul
Body is the enemy of soul	Body is the friend of soul
Soul is simple	Soul is composed
Soul is indestructible	Soul is destructible
Salvation from the body	Salvation in the body
Salvation is by knowledge	Salvation is by faith
Soul is divine	Soul is human
Soul is eternal	Soul had a beginning
Soul preexisted	Soul was created
Earth is an alien place	Earth is a friendly place
Humans have three parts (body, soul, and spirit)[63]	Humans have two dimensions (inner and outer)

Sin results from body burdening soul	Sin results from rebellion of will
Redemption of soul	Redemption of whole person
God is known by fleeing the world	God is known in and through the world
Salvation is by human effort	Salvation is by divine visitation
Reality is in the invisible realm	Reality includes the visible realm[64]

THE HISTORICAL TESTIMONY ON THE NATURE OF HUMAN BEINGS

Early Fathers

Theophilus (c. 130–190)

> Someone will say to us, "Was man made by nature mortal?" Certainly not. "Was he, then, immortal?" Neither do we affirm this. But one will say, "Was he, then, nothing?" Not even this hits the mark. He was by nature neither mortal nor immortal. For if [God] had made him immortal from the beginning, He would have made him God. Again, if He had made him mortal, God would seem to be the cause of his death. Neither, then, immortal nor yet mortal did He make him, but … capable of both; so that if he should incline to the things of immortality, keeping the commandment of God, he should receive as reward from Him immortality … but if, on the other hand, he should turn to the things of death, disobeying God, he should himself be the cause of death to himself.
>
> For God made man free, and with power over himself. That, then, which man brought upon himself through carelessness and disobedience, this God now vouchsafes to him as a gift through His own philanthropy and pity, when men obey Him. For as man, disobeying, drew death upon himself; so, obeying the will of God, he who desires is able to procure for himself life everlasting. For God has given us a law and holy commandments; and everyone who keeps these can be saved, and, obtaining the resurrection, can inherit incorruption. (*TA*, xxvii in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, II.2.27)

Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)

> If some had been made by nature bad, and others good, these latter would not be deserving of praise for being good, for such were they created; nor would the former be reprehensible, for thus they were made [originally]. But since all men are of the same nature, able both to hold fast and to do what is good—and, on the other hand, having also the power to cast it from them and not to do it—some do justly receive praise even among men who are under the control of good laws (and much more from God), and obtain deserved testimony of their choice of good in general, and of persevering therein; but the others are blamed, and receive a just condemnation, because of their rejection of what is fair and good. And therefore the prophets used to exhort men to what was good, to act justly and to work righteousness … because it is in our power so to do, and because by excessive negligence we might

become forgetful, and thus stand in need of that good counsel which the good God has given us to know by means of the prophets. (*AH* in ibid., 1.4.37.2)

Tertullian (c. 155–c. 225)

We have assigned, then, to the soul both … freedom of the will … and its dominion over the works of nature, and its occasional gift of divination, independently of that endowment of prophecy which accrues to it expressly from the grace of God. (*TS* in ibid., III.1.9.22)

"That position of Plato's is also quite in keeping with the faith, in which he divides the soul into two parts—the rational and the irrational" (*TS*, III.XVI in ibid., 194).

Come now, you who deny the salvation of the flesh, and who, whenever there occurs the specific mention of *body* in a case of this sort, interpret it as meaning anything rather than the substance of the flesh, (tell me) how is it that the apostle has given certain distinct names to all (our faculties), and has comprised them all in one prayer for their safety, desiring that our "spirit and soul and body may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord and Savior (Jesus) Christ"?[65] Now he has here propounded the soul and body as two separate and distinct things. For … the soul has a kind of body of a quality all its own, just as the spirit has. (*FBAM*, III.XV in ibid., 462–63)

Clement of Alexandria (150–c. 215)

There are other things, in which there is a power of will, and which have a free choice of doing what they will. These, as I have said, do not remain always in that order in which they were created: but according as their will leads them, and the judgment of their mind inclines them, they effect either good or evil; and therefore He hath proposed rewards to those who do well, and penalties to those who do evil. (*ROC* in ibid., VIII.3.24)

Medieval Fathers

Augustine (354–430)

If, again, we were so to define man as to say, Man is a rational substance consisting of mind and body, then without doubt man has a soul that is not body, and a body that is not soul. (*OT*, 15.7)

It is with reference to the [human] nature, then, and not to the wickedness of the devil, that we are to understand these words, "This is the beginning of God's handiwork"; for, without doubt, wickedness can be a flaw or vice only where the nature previously was not vitiated. Vice, too, is so contrary to nature that it cannot but damage it. And therefore departure from God would be no vice, unless in a nature whose property it was to abide with God.

So even the wicked will is a strong proof of the goodness of the nature. But God, as He is the supremely good Creator of good natures, so is He of evil wills the most just Ruler; so that, while they make an ill use of good natures, He makes a good use even of evil wills. Accordingly, He caused the devil (good by God's creation, wicked by his own will) to be cast down from his high position, and to

become the mockery of His angels—that is, He caused his temptations to benefit those whom he wishes to injure by them. And because God, when He created him, was certainly not ignorant of his future malignity, and foresaw the good which He Himself would bring out of his evil, therefore says the psalm, "This leviathan whom Thou hast made to be a sport therein,"[66] that we may see that, even while God in His goodness created him good, He yet had already foreseen and arranged how He would make use of him when he became wicked. (*CG*, 11.17)

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)

The state of the human soul may be distinguished in two ways. First, from a diversity of mode in its natural existence; and in this point the state of the separate soul is distinguished from the state of the soul joined to the body. Secondly, the state of the soul is distinguished in relation to integrity and corruption, the state of natural existence remaining the same: and thus the state of innocence is distinct from the state of man after sin. For man's soul, in the state of innocence, was adapted to perfect and govern the body; wherefore the first man is said to have been made into a "living soul"; that is, a soul giving life to the body—namely animal life. But he was endowed with integrity as to this life, in that the body was entirely subject to the soul, hindering it in no way.…

Since the soul is adapted to perfect and govern the body, as regards animal life, it is fitting that it should have that mode of understanding which is by turning to phantasms. Therefore this mode of understanding was becoming to the soul of the first man also. (*ST*, I.94.4)

In the natural order, perfection comes before imperfection, as act precedes potentiality; for whatever is in potentiality is made actual only by something actual. And since God created things not only for their own existence, but also that they might be the principles of other things; so creatures were produced in their perfect state to be the principles as regards others. Now man can be the principle of another man, not only by generation of the body, but also by instruction and government. Hence, as the first man was produced in his perfect state, as regards his body, for the work of generation, so also was his soul established in a perfect state to instruct and govern others, (ibid., I.94.3)

Some virtues of their very nature do not involve imperfection, such as charity and justice; and these virtues did exist in the primitive state absolutely, both in habit and in act. But other virtues are of such a nature as to imply imperfection either in their act, or on the part of the matter. If such imperfection be consistent with the perfection of the primitive state, such virtues necessarily existed in that state; as faith, which is of things not seen, and hope which is of things not yet possessed. For the perfection of that state did not extend to the vision of the Divine Essence, and the possession of God with the enjoyment of final beatitude.

Hence faith and hope could exist in the primitive state, both as to habit and as to act. But any virtue which implies imperfection incompatible with the perfection of the primitive state, could exist in that state as a habit, but not as to the act; for instance, penance, which is sorrow for sin committed; and mercy, which is sorrow for others' unhappiness; because sorrow, guilt, and happiness are incompatible with the perfection of the primitive state.

Wherefore such virtues existed as habits in the first man, but not as to their acts; for he was so disposed that he would repent, if there had been a sin to repent for; and had he seen unhappiness in his neighbor, he would have done his best to remedy it. (ibid., I.95.3)

Reformation Leaders

John Calvin (1509–1564)

In general, they[67] are wont to place under the free will of man only intermediate things, viz., those which pertain not to the kingdom of God, while they refer true righteousness to the special grace of God and spiritual regeneration. The author of [*On the Calling of the Gentiles*], wishing to show this, describes the will as threefold, viz., sensitive, animal, and spiritual. The two former, he says, are free to man, but the last is the work of the Holy Spirit. (*ICR*, I.2.2.5)

Therefore, God has provided the soul of man with intellect, by which he might discern good from evil, just from unjust, and might know what to follow or to shun, reason going before with her lamp; whence philosophers, in reference to her directing power, have called her "*to hegemonikon*." To this God has joined will, to which choice belongs. Man excelled in these noble endowments in his primitive condition, when reason, intelligence, prudence, and judgement, not only sufficed for the government of his earthly life, but also enabled him to rise up to God and eternal happiness. Thereafter choice was added to direct the appetites, and temper all the organic motions; the will being thus perfectly submissive to the authority of reason, (ibid., I.XV)

Calvin continued, "In this upright state, man possessed freedom of will, by which, if he chose, he was able to obtain" (ibid.).

Philip Melanchthon (1497–1560)

Originally man was thus created, to be God's image; that is, his understanding [*verstand*] was endowed with a great light. He knew about number, he had knowledge of God and the divine laws, and he could distinguish virtue and vice. With this light his heart, his heart's desire, and his will were without hypocrisy. His heart was created full of the love of God, free of all evil desires. His will was free, so that he could choose to keep God's law, and his heart and external members could be fully obedient without any hindrance. It was also possible for his understanding and will to choose something else, as happened later.

Accordingly, when free will is mentioned, we mean understanding and will, heart and will; and they belong together, without hypocrisy. Man was created wise and upright, and before the Fall he had a free, unimpeded will. However, as Adam and Eve fell into sin and incurred God's wrath, God withdrew from them and man's natural powers became very weak. The light in his understanding became very dim, although some remained, for man can still use numbers and make distinctions between good and evil works and the teachings of the law. God wants all men to recognize sin; he wants to punish us by means of our own conscience; and he wants all men to maintain external discipline. For that reason knowledge remains in this corrupted nature, although it is dim and full of doubt and uncertainty about God, not knowing whether God wants to be man's judge or helper, or whether God wants to receive and listen to men.…

Further, all good virtues toward God in the heart and will were also lost—love of God, trust in God, and true fear of God. God is not received where the Holy Spirit has not first enlightened and kindled the understanding, will, and heart. Without the Holy Spirit man cannot of his own powers perform virtuous works, such as true faith, love of God, and true fear of God. And therefore the miserable human heart stands like a desolate, deserted, old and decaying house, God no longer dwelling within and winds blowing through. That is, all sorts of conflicting tendencies and lusts drive the heart to the manifold sins of uncontrolled love, hate, envy, and pride. The devils also spread their poisons.

When we speak about this great ruin of human powers, we are talking about free will, for man's will and heart are wretchedly imprisoned, impaired, and ruined, so that inwardly man's heart and will are unlike the divine law, offensive and hostile to it, and man cannot by his own inward natural powers be obedient. This is said about true inner obedience, without hypocrisy.

> Now to speak of the movement and motion of external members of the body. Although the heart and the inner will, as we ourselves are aware, neither hear nor inwardly obey the law without hypocrisy, nevertheless God has left the understanding free to govern in that it can move and control the external members of the body. The understanding may say to one who is sick with a fever and very thirsty that he should hold his hand and not drink, and he restrains his hand from seizing the mug. Even in this corrupted nature God has allowed such freedom with regard to external motions of the body. He wants all men to have external morality [*zucht*], and thereby learn the distinction between powers that are free and powers that are bound; thus we can think in some degree that God acts freely and is not a prisoner or a bound Lord, as the Stoics have pictured him with regard to his created nature.[68] (*OCD*, 51–52)

Post-Reformation Theologians

Jacob Arminius (1560–1609)

> [The soul's] faculties, which are two, the understanding and the will, as in fact the object of the soul is two-fold. For the understanding apprehends eternity and truth both universal and particular, by a natural and necessary, and therefore by a uniform act. But the will has an inclination to good. Yet this is either according to the mode of its nature, to universal good and to that which is the chief good; or according to the mode of liberty, to all other [kinds of] good. (*WJA*, II.63)

Karl Barth (1886–1968)

> In these circumstances how can we possibly reach a doctrine of man in the sense of a doctrine of his creaturely essence, of his human nature as such? For what we recognize to be human nature is nothing other than the disgrace which covers his nature; his inhumanity, perversion and corruption. If we try to deny this or to tone it down, we have not yet understood the full import of the truth that for the reconciliation of man with God nothing more nor less was needed than the death of the Son of God, and for the manifestation of this reconciliation nothing more nor less than the resurrection of the Son of Man, Jesus Christ. But if we know man only in the corruption and distortion of his being, how can we even begin to answer the question about his creaturely nature? (*CD*, II)

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834)

"Fullness of experience in the sphere of faith is due to the individual development, in virtue of this original perfection of human nature, of each life brought into existence by procreation" (*OCF*, 247).

William G. T. Shedd (1820–1894)

"Man is a species, and the idea of a species implies the propagation of the entire individual out of it.… Individuals are not propagated in parts" (*DT*, 2.19).

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE ELEMENTS OF HUMAN NATURE

There is some truth in all of the Christian anthropological views. *Monists* are right in claiming that human nature is one. *Dualists* are correct in that there are two dimensions to human nature (inner and outer). Trichotomists are on the right track in that human beings do operate in three directions (self-consciousness, world-consciousness, and God-consciousness). And hylomorphists are correct in their insistence that the oneness of human nature is that of a unity (not an identity) of form and matter.

VARIOUS ELEMENTS OF HUMAN PERSONHOOD

Human beings, like God and angels, are not androids, or automations of human form. They are persons, with intellect (mind), emotion (feeling), will (choice), and conscience (moral capacity). The Bible spells out all of these aspects of human personhood.

Intellect (Mind)

Human beings were created with self-reflective minds that have the power of syllogistic reasoning.[69] Solomon urged: "Buy the truth and do not sell it; get wisdom, discipline and understanding" (Prov. 23:23). The power of human reasoning also places people above the "unreasoning animals" (Jude 1:10).

While intellect enables humans to worship God (Matt. 22:37), its inventiveness also makes it capable of great evil (Eccl. 7:25). However, by redemption the mind is "renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator" (Col. 3:10; cf. Rom. 12:2).

Emotion (Feeling)

In addition to rational thinking, human beings are capable of deep emotions and feelings, such as joy and sorrow. Unlike the mythical androids, humans are more than minds and wills—they have heart.

Will (Choice)

Unlike animals, human beings were created with the moral capacity (see below) to know right from wrong and the will to choose one over the other. This responsibility was entailed in God's command to Adam: "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die" (Gen. 2:16–17). The original state of the will is discussed earlier[70] and the fallen state later.[71]

Conscience (Moral Capacity)

Human beings are unique from all other creatures on earth in that within their very natures they have a God-given moral capacity called conscience. Even in our fallen state, God holds us responsible for avoiding evil. Paul states:

> All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law.… (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.) (Rom. 2:12–15)

Of course, a fallen conscience is fallible. It reflects an innate capacity to know right from wrong, but it does not guarantee that it will always be accurate; it can be distorted (Rom. 2:15) by culture and choices and, at times, even "seared" by intense evil (1 Tim. 4:2).

There is, nonetheless, an objective moral law,[72] even though our fallen understanding of it is obscured by sin. God's moral law is reflective of His very nature: It is prescriptive ("You ought not …"), perfect (Ps. 19:7), objective (not subjective), and universal (for all persons everywhere—cf. Rom. 2:15).

The evidence for this objective moral law is found in:

(1) the universality of basic moral beliefs;
(2) the unavoidability of making moral judgments;
(3) the inescapability of there being a perfect standard by which we measure the imperfections in the world (we can't know injustice unless we know what is just);
(4) the impossibility of making judgments about the progress (or regress) of the human race unless there is an external objective moral standard by which we measure the human race;
(5) the fact that we make excuses for ourselves when we break the moral law;
(6) the moral guilt we suffer from breaking the moral law;

(7) the fact that the moral law, like the laws of mathematics, is discovered and not invented;
(8) the reality that we sometimes act from a sense of duty (e.g., to save a life), even when our strongest instinct to survive tells us not to risk our lives or safety to do so;
(9) the truth that we find some things in all cultures (like genocide or rape) that we perceive are wrong and evil;
(10) the fact that some things we do (such as kill, cheat, steal, or be disloyal), we do not want others to do to us.

Of course, humans have other abilities as well; one is the capacity to laugh (risibility). However, risibility flows from rationality, which gives us the ability to perceive the incongruous—which is at the heart of what is humorous.

Then, in addition, there is the ability to enjoy music and art, which also is only possible for rational beings. The inherent capacity to appreciate and savor beauty is a God-given part of human nature that is part of His universal revelation to all human beings.[73]

CONCLUSION

Human beings are reducible neither to pure matter nor to pure spirit. They have two dimensions: body and soul. Nevertheless, these two aspects form one nature composed of form and matter, and they are a form/body unity, not an identity. The soul survives the dissolution of the body and is conscious, albeit incompletely (apart from the body), between death and resurrection.

In addition to being one in nature (soul/body) and two in dimension (inner and outer), human beings are three in direction: They have self-consciousness, world-consciousness, and God-consciousness. Only one of these dimensions—world-consciousness—is lost in the intermediate state between death and resurrection.[74] The resurrection will restore the wholeness and completeness of a human being as created by God—in unity.

The human person embodied in flesh possesses intellect, emotion, will, and conscience. That is, he or she is capable of thinking, feeling, and choosing, and also has the moral capacity to know right from wrong. As such, humans are morally responsible to the Moral Lawgiver—God, the Creator.

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CHAPTER THREE

THE ORIGIN OF SIN

GOD'S PERMISSION OF SIN

The origin of sin is a difficulty for any worldview, but it is a particularly acute problem for Christian theology. The three basic perspectives on evil bring the issue into focus: Atheism affirms evil but denies God; pantheism affirms God but denies evil; and theism affirms both God and evil, which appear to be incompatible. Herein lies the dilemma.[1]

To make the predicament worse, among those paradigms that, like theism, acknowledge both God and evil—deism, finite godism, and panentheism (process theology)—theism is the only one that maintains belief in an infinitely powerful God who can and does perform miracles.[2] Hence, according to theism, He alone could intervene and destroy evil, yet He has not and does not. We see, then, that theism faces the greatest difficulty: It posits a God who both could and should be able to prevent and/or destroy evil; however, evil is still with us. Why?

A further issue relates to the very origin of evil itself. According to theism, God is absolutely perfect, and He freely created the world; knowing that evil would arise, He made the world anyway. If God is perfect, and if the world He made is not eternal but was made perfect, from whence did evil come?

The response of theism consists in pointing out several basic facts. God cannot produce or promote evil; He can only permit it. Nevertheless, since He is all-powerful,[3] He can both defeat evil and also bring about a greater good when He allows it.

God Cannot *Produce* Sin

God is absolutely perfect (cf. Deut. 32:4; 2 Sam. 22:31; Ps. 18:30), and, as such, He cannot either perform or produce sin. Jesus declared, "Your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48).[4] An absolutely flawless Being cannot act in any way that is flawed; the world God made, and everything in it, was "very good" (Gen. 1:31).[5]

God Cannot *Promote* Sin

Furthermore, God cannot encourage sin; He is completely holy and cannot endorse sin in any way.[6] The prophet wrote, "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong" (Hab. 1:13). Indeed, God cannot entice us to sin: "When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone" (James 1:13).

In the Lord's Prayer, the phrase "lead me not into temptation" doesn't imply that God does the tempting *unless* we ask Him not to do so. Indeed, it is a prayer that God *not allow* us to be led into temptation. He provides the deliverance from sin, as the phrase "deliver us from evil" affirms (Matt. 6:13 KJV).[7]

God Can *Permit* Sin

Though He cannot produce or promote sin, God can and does permit it. In allowing sin to occur, He accomplishes His own higher purpose.[8] For example, God allowed Joseph's brothers, by selling him into slavery, to sin in order to save Israel and keep His promise to bring the Messiah through His chosen people to provide salvation for the world (Gen. 12:3). Joseph recognized this when he said to his brothers, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives" (Gen. 50:20).

When parents allow a teenage driver to use the family car, they are permitting the potential for evil (calamity), but it is necessary to allow for the possibility of wrongdoing or accident for the greater good of the adolescent learning responsibility and driving skills. God, our heavenly Father, also gives us freedom —permitting the potential for us to produce evil—so that we can grow and learn

responsibility. When we choose wrongly and fail, we endure the consequences of our error; God uses our failures to strengthen us and to bring us from immaturity and incompleteness into spiritual adulthood. The writer of Hebrews saw this: "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it" (12:11).

God Can Produce a Greater Good by Allowing Sin

The apostle Paul realized that God permits evil to produce superior results:

> We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. (Rom. 5:3–5)

James had the same insight:

> Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. (James 1:2–4)

THE ORIGIN OF SIN BY CREATURES

According to Scripture, the origin of sin is found in free will.[9] God gave us the power of choice, which in itself is a good thing. Tragically, human beings misuse their God-given freedom.

The Origin of Sin in Heaven by Angels

Actually, evil originated in heaven before it did on earth. Evil was born in the breast of an archangel in the presence of God. This is a tremendous mystery, but it is, nonetheless, the essence of Christian teaching on the source of evil.

Lucifer's Sin

The traditional name given to this archangel is taken from Isaiah 14:12:

> How art thou fallen from heaven, *O Lucifer*, son of the morning! … For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. (Isa. 14:12–14 KJV)

While most contemporary biblical scholars believe that this passage, in

context, refers to “the king of Babylon” (v. 4), the pride and fall of this man is an emulation of the choices of the first archangel, who rebelled against God by a similar but primeval hubris. Paul exhorted, “[An overseer] must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil” (1 Tim. 3:6).

Other Angels Also Rebelled

According to Revelation, other angels followed suit. A third of them rebelled with Lucifer and became demons (as he had become the devil). John wrote:

> Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth.… The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. (Rev. 12:3–9)

Clearly, then, sin was in the universe before it was in the world; there was sin in heaven before there was sin on earth. This is made evident by the presence of the tempter (Satan) in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:1ff.).

The Origin of Sin on Earth by Humans

The story of the sin of Adam and Eve is infamous. The perfect pair brought imperfection into their perfect paradise.

The Origin of Evil: The Six Causes

In order to enhance our understanding of the nature of human sin, an examination of the six types of causes will be helpful.[10] First set forth by Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) and later expanded by the scholastics,[11] the six causes are defined (and illustratively applied to the process of constructing a house) as follows:

- Efficient Cause—that *by which* something comes to be (the carpenter)
- Final Cause—that *for which* something comes to be (the dwelling in which to live)
- Formal Cause—that *of which* something comes to be (the house’s form or structure)
- Material Cause—that *out of which* something comes to be (the building materials)
- Exemplar Cause—that *after which* something comes to be (the blueprint)
- Instrumental Cause—that *through which* something comes to be (the

tools)

Applying these six causes to Adam and Eve's sin yields the following results:

- Efficient Cause—person (that *by which* sin came to be)
- Final Cause—pride (that *for which* sin came to be)
- Formal Cause—disobedience (that *of which* sin came to be)
- Material Cause—eating forbidden fruit (that *out of which* sin came to be)
- Exemplar Cause—none; it was the first human sin (that *after which* sin came to be)
- Instrumental Cause—power of free choice (that *through which* sin came to be)

THE NATURE OF HUMAN FREE WILL

There are three basic logical possibilities regarding the nature of human free choice: determinism, indeterminism, and self-determinism.

Determinism is the view that all human actions are caused by another, not by one's self. *Hard* determinism does not allow for any free choice at all. *Soft* determinism posits free choice but sees it as completely controlled by God's sovereign power.

Indeterminism is the position that human actions are not caused by anything. They are simply indeterminate.

Self-determinism is the doctrine that human free actions are self-caused, that is, caused by one's self.[12]

HUMAN FREE WILL: THREE VIEWS

	Determinism	**Indeterminism**	**Self-Determinism**
Cause	Choices are caused by another	Choices are uncaused	Choices are caused by self
Model	Puppet	Erratic electron	Free agent
Contrary act	Could not do otherwise	Could have been otherwise	Could have been otherwise

Illustration	Hard determinism: Being carried out (as against one's will) Soft determinism: Being forced out (as by a weapon)	Blown out (as by the wind)	Lured out (as by someone else)
Previous conditions	Causal	Non-causal	Non-causal
Future	Determined (like dominos)	Undetermined (like dice)	Determined by God, free for humankind (like foreseeing an accident)
All-Knowing Mind	Knows all future acts	Knows all except free acts	Knows all future acts

THE ORIGIN OF EARTHLY EVIL THROUGH HUMAN FREE WILL

Adam and Eve's disobedience raises significant questions about human free will. Were the original humans free? If so, of what did this freedom consist? Are we free in the same sense?[13] Is God free? If so, then why can't He sin? And if God is free but can't sin, then why can't we be free but not able to sin? In response to these queries, there are considerable theological differences. However, some answers do seem clear, and subsequently other solutions can be reasonably deduced from them.

Adam's Freedom Involved Self-Determination

First of all, Adam *was* free in the sense that his act was self-determined. Indeed, God said, "*You are free*" (Gen. 2:16). When Adam chose to disobey, God held him accountable, asking, "Have *you* eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?" (Gen. 3:11 NKJV). The emphasized words, as previously mentioned, specifically indicate a self-determined act on

Adam and Eve's part (cf. v. 13). *You* (your *self*) did it, God said.

Logically, there are only three possibilities. Either Adam's action was caused by another (which is determinism), was uncaused (which is indeterminism), or was caused by himself (which is self-determinism).

As for *determinism*, God did not cause Adam to sin, for, again, God can neither sin nor tempt anyone else to do so. Neither did Satan cause Adam to sin, for the tempter did only what his name implies, neither forcing him to do it nor doing it for him.

As for *indeterminism*, there was no evil (or lack of wholeness) in Adam's nature that gave rise to his sin, for he had none—God created him perfect.[14] And there are no uncaused actions', this would violate the principle of causality.

No event is without a cause, and there was nothing in heaven or on earth, outside of Adam, that caused his sin; *he must have caused it himself*; Adam's choice was *self-determined*. This is the heart of human freedom; namely, the ability to be the efficient cause of one's own moral actions.[15] Acts of which one is not the efficient cause, but rather which are forced, are not free moral acts.

Adam's Freedom Involved a Choice Regarding Evil

Further, Adam's act involved a decision between good and evil, and it was free in that he was free to do evil. Had he not been free to opt for evil over good, he could not have done so. He had the power to obey or disobey—whichever he chose.

Adam's Choice for Evil Could Have Been Avoided

In addition, evil was not inevitable for Adam. This is clear from the fact that God said Adam "should not" or "ought not" (cf. Gen. 2:17) to have sinned. *Ought* implies *can*—what one *should* do implies that he *is able* to do it. Furthermore, again, Adam's decision was something for which God held him responsible, punishing him for choosing wrongly. *There is no response-ability without the ability to respond*, and the consequences that followed the chosen evil indicate that it could have been avoided.

THE NATURE OF GOD'S FREE WILL

The original humans were free to sin or not to sin. God is free, yet He *cannot* sin (Hab. 1:13; Heb. 6:18). Indeed, as we have seen, God cannot even be tempted to sin (James 1:13)—He is absolutely impervious to evil. How, then, can God be free if there is no possibility that He can choose wrongly?

The answer is that God is free in the sense of having the power of self-determination,[16] but not in the libertarian sense of having the ability to choose to do other than good.[17] While humans have the ability to choose either good or evil, God, in His very essence, *is* all-goodness,[18] and, therefore, He can only *do* good, being subject to His own nature.

The Nature of Human Freedom in Heaven

It appears that regarding freedom and free will, the state of the perfected saints in heaven is similar to God's. While we are still in the world, human free choice involves not only self-determinism (to be the efficient cause of our own choices) but also the ability to do other than good (that is, evil). This sense of freedom, however, is only temporary; it is for the purpose of being tested:

> Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.… Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. (James 1:2–4, 12)

This is the reason that, before heaven, humans are not both free *and* unable to sin. When the test is over—when our earthly race is run—*then* free choice becomes what it, from all eternity, is for God: the self-determined ability to choose only the good.

Freedom to Do Only Good Is Not the Loss of True Freedom

It is important to note that heaven is not the *destruction* of true freedom but the *fulfillment* of it. On earth, we choose whether we want to do God's will or our own; once the choice is made, our destiny is sealed at death (Heb. 9:27). Then, if we have chosen God's will instead of our own, the freedom to do evil vanishes and we are free to do only the good. Since the freedom to do evil is also the freedom to destroy oneself, it is not perfect (complete) freedom. The essence of true freedom is self-determination; *true* freedom is the kind that God has (and, in eternity, believers will have), namely, the self-determined ability to choose only the good. Likewise, in hell,[19] evil persons no longer under the influence of

God's grace will be solidified in their will to do evil.

Heaven, then, is the *completion* of our freedom, not a *negation* of it. All true believers yearn to have the Lord's Prayer fulfilled: "Your will be done, [O God,] on earth as it is in heaven" and "lead us not into temptation" (see Matt. 6; Luke 11). Therefore, when God brings us to heaven, where this will be true, He will not have eliminated our freedom but instead fulfilled it. In summary, the loss of the ability to do evil is not an evil of any kind; it is, rather, a profound good.

The Christian concept of lifelong, monogamous marriage is an example of this. When a bride and groom pledge before God, for all time, "Forsaking all others, to you will I cling, until death do us part," they are making a free choice —to have, for life, intimate relations that they will share with no one else. In a way, it could be said that this limits their freedom, since they have now chosen, for the duration, to go in one direction and not in another. However, this decision does not *eradicate* their freedom; indeed, it is a *fulfillment* of their true God-given desire to have such a bond with one and only one person until heaven.

Likewise, in continuing the analogy, neither in marriage nor in heaven does the Lord give us "freedom" to break our vows; such would not be "freedom" at all but rather would bring the potential for (and reality of) evil (bondage to sin). We are free only to keep the covenant, as this is the greatest good both for us and for those to whom we pledge our love.

ANSWERING OBJECTIONS TO HUMAN FREE WILL

The difficulties that call for an answer in this context can be separated into several questions and responses.

Objection One—Based on Causality

If every action needs an efficient cause—as the principle of causality demands—then who, or what, caused Adam to sin? Each of the possible answers seems to have shortcomings.

Response to Objection One

We will scrutinize several potential responses to this objection.

The Devil Did Not Make Adam Sin

Since the time of Adam, people have used the widely popularized disclaimer "The devil made me do it." Some believers have been known to excuse their sin in this way, just as Adam blamed Eve, and Eve passed the buck to the evil one. But, as we have seen, Satan did not *make* Adam sin; he only *tempted* him. Adam was not forced but lured.[20] In the same way, the devil beguiled Judas to betray Christ: "The devil had already prompted[21] Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus" (John 13:2).

God Did Not Make Adam Sin

Likewise, God neither placed the desire in Adam's heart to disobey Him nor compelled him to sin.

Few venture intentionally or overtly into this arena, but some have a view of freedom that logically leads to it. If the sovereignty of God is truly as these people understand it—that is, if God is in direct sovereign *control* of all things, *including human choices*—then it would appear that God forced Adam to sin.

Indeed, following Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), some extreme Calvinists claim that free will is simply doing what we desire, and that *no one, ever*, desires to do *any* good unless God gives him the desire to do so. If this is the case, then it would seem that God is responsible for *all* human actions; no one can desire to do evil unless his evil nature gives him the desire to do it. But he could have done good if God had given him the desire.

Neither Lucifer nor Adam, before their respective falls, had an evil nature. From whence, then, the desire to sin? Even Edwards' defenders admit that this has not been solved within their theology. R. C. Sproul (b. 1939), for instance, calls this an "excruciating problem," adding: "One thing is absolutely unthinkable, that God could be the author or doer of sin."[22] Nonetheless, that is the apparent result of this determinist logic.

Therefore, this argument that God has kept all power in His own hands is fraught with serious implications. Most fundamentally, *determinism makes God responsible for evil*. Put bluntly, this means that when a murder occurs, it is God who is accountable for the death of the victim, and when an assault takes place, it is God who causes the attack.[23] Some ideas don't require refutation but, instead, simple clarification to see what doesn't hold up to scrutiny. God is absolutely good and, as such, He cannot do (or be responsible for) evil. Period.

An Imperfect Nature in Adam Did Not Make Him Sin

A second alternative is the argument that Adam was not perfect; his weak and imperfect nature caused him to sin.[24] However, here again, this is ultimately to lay blame at God's doorstep, since *weak* and *imperfect* would be how God made Adam. Unlike the previously addressed theories (both of which are determinist), the indeterminist blame is not direct but indirect; nonetheless, human sin would still be God's fault.

The Bible, by contrast, affirms that God made only good creatures. After almost every day of Creation Genesis says, "It was good" (1:4, 10, 18, 21, 25), and after the sixth day, "God saw *all* that he had made, and it was *very* good" (1:31). Solomon added, "This only have I found: God made mankind upright" (Eccl. 7:29). We are told explicitly that "every creature of God is good" (1 Tim. 4:4 KJV). Once again, an omnibenevolent (absolutely good) God cannot make an evil thing; only a perfect creature can come from the hands of a perfect Creator.[25]

Adam Sinned by His Own Free Will

The true answer is that Adam sinned by his own free choice.[26] The reasoning runs like this:

(1) One of the things God gave His good creatures was a good power called free will.
(2) Even *unbelievers* understand that freedom is good. What people march against freedom? One never sees a crowd carrying placards that say "Down With Liberty!" or "Back to Bondage!"
(3) Even if someone *did* speak against freedom, he would thereby be speaking *for* it, since he clearly values his freedom to express that idea.
(4) In short, free choice is an undeniable good.

Even so, the power of moral free choice entails the ability to either embrace God's designed good or to reject it—the latter is called evil. God revealed that freedom is good—so good, in fact, that He granted it to us—but freedom does make evil possible.[27] If God made free creatures, and if it is good for us to be free, then *the origin of evil is in the misuse of freedom*.

This is not difficult to comprehend. Most of us, for example, enjoy the freedom to drive a car, but many abuse this freedom and drive dangerously. We don't (and shouldn't) blame the government that licenses us to drive for all the

evil done with vehicles. Those whose reckless or malicious driving wounds or kills others are responsible for the results of their actions. Even though there is evil that results from misuse or malice, the government perceives that it is more beneficial to our society for its citizens to be able to utilize vehicles than it would be for us to have to walk everywhere, just as God has demonstrated that it is better for us to have the freedom to misuse our will than it would be for us not to have it at all.

While God is morally accountable for giving us the good thing called free will, He is not morally responsible for any evil we commit with our freedom. Again, Solomon said it succinctly: "God made mankind upright, but men have gone in search of many schemes" (Eccl. 7:29). In brief, God made the *fact* of freedom; we are responsible for the *acts* of freedom. The fact of freedom is good, even though some of the acts of freedom are evil. God is the cause of the former, and we are the cause of the latter.

Objection Two—Based on the Need for a Cause

The "self-determination solution" leads to another problem: If every event has a cause, then what caused Adam to exercise his freedom to sin? Free choice is an action, and every action, even the action of free will, needs an efficient cause. Tracing sin back to free choice does not completely solve the overall issue; it raises another one.

Response to Objection Two

This objection is based upon misunderstanding.

First, admittedly, every event does have a cause; that is, every *effect* has a cause. However, not every *cause* has a cause. For example, every painting has a painter, but every painter is not painted. If *every* cause had a cause, then God could not be the first, uncaused Cause that He is. It is absurd to ask, "Who made God?" for this is the same as the question "Who made the unmade Maker?" Further pursuing "Who caused Adam to sin?" is like insisting that there must be an answer to the question "Who is the bachelor's wife?" A bachelor does not have a wife any more than an uncaused Being has a cause.[28] Likewise, if Adam's choice for evil (his wrong use of free will) is the first cause of human sin, then no other cause should be sought.

Second, this objection wrongly assumes a false disjunction—that an action

must be either uncaused or caused by someone other than one's self, since every event is either caused or uncaused (there apparently being no other logical alternatives). This is not the case, for there is a third option: An action may be either

(1) uncaused,
(2) caused by someone (or something) else, *or*
(3) caused by me.[29]

It is the third alternative that is meant by *freedom* or *free will*; a free act is a self-determined act. As we have seen and will continue to see, there is great reason to support the last view.

Objection Three—Based on Alleged Logical Impossibility

Again, the answer to the second objection leads to another question: If Adam's free will was the cause of his disobedience to God, then what was the cause of his free will? If every effect needs a cause, and if our free will is an effect, then free will needs a cause. Thus, the question "Who (or what) caused Adam to sin?" still remains.

Response to Objection Three

First, it must be noted, again, that this question confuses the *fact* of freedom with the *acts* of freedom. God is the cause of the former, but Adam was the cause of the latter. God created the person, Adam, and the power of free will that Adam had, but it was Adam who exercised that power for evil.

Second, there is an important distinction overlooked by this objection; namely, that distinction between the person and his powers. Free will is a power that was given to Adam, the person. Adam, that person, was the efficient cause of his disobedience to God; the power he used to do it was the power of free will granted to him. It is meaningful to ask *who the person was that used the power of free will*, but it is meaningless to ask *who caused the person to do it*. Adam, the person himself, was the cause of his disobedience by means of the power of free will, which God gave him and which he abused.

Objection Four—Based on the Impossibility of Self-Causality

This leads to another issue. If the person (Adam) was the cause of the action, then it was an action caused by his self (i.e., it was a self-caused action). Opponents of self-determination argue that to be self-caused is a contradiction in terms, for nothing can cause itself. We cannot lift ourselves by our own bootstraps. A cause is always prior to its effect (in being, even if not in time), and we cannot be prior to ourselves. Thus, it would seem to follow that a self-caused action is rationally absurd.

Response to Objection Four

Here again there is a confusion: A self-caused *being* is impossible, for the reason just given, but there is nothing contradictory about a self-caused *action*. Certainly we cannot exist before we exist or be before we are, but we can and must *be* before we can *do*—that is, we must exist before we can act. Self-caused actions, then, are not impossible; if they were, then even God, who cannot do what is impossible (cf. Heb. 6:18), would not have been able to create the world (for there was no one or nothing else, except Him, to cause the world to exist before it existed). If the *act* of Creation was not self-caused, then God could not have performed it.

Likewise, if self-caused actions are not possible, then neither is there an explanation for Lucifer's sin. A sinless, perfect God could not have caused Lucifer to sin, and since Lucifer was the first being to sin, his action must have been self-caused; otherwise he would never have been able (i.e., had the freedom) to sin. Consequently, it follows that self-caused *actions* are possible, even though a self-caused *being* is impossible.

Perhaps the reason it seems to some that self-caused actions are not possible is the term *self-caused* itself. It is clearer to speak, for example, of my actions as *caused by myself* (as opposed to caused by another), or, better yet, actions *caused by my self* (that is, by me). Speaking this way eliminates the ambiguity of language that gives rise to the false belief that a self-caused action is impossible.

OTHER QUESTIONS ABOUT FREEDOM AND EVIL

There are, of course, other questions about free will, such as, "In what sense,

if any, are human beings free after the Fall?" "Do we still retain freedom in the self-determined sense?" "How about in the libertarian sense?" These issues will be addressed in chapter 5.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR ADAM'S FREE WILL

The origin of sin in a self-determined free choice of Adam (and Lucifer before him) has been a hallmark of Christian thought from the beginning. The following samples illustrate the point.[30]

Justin Martyr (c. 100–c. 165)

> God, wishing men and angels to follow His will, resolved to create them free to do righteousness. But if the word of God foretells that some angels and men shall certainly be punished, it did so because it foreknew that they would be unchangeably [wicked], but not because God created them so. (*DJ*, I.142)

Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)

> This expression, "How often would I have gathered thy children together and thou wouldst not" [Matt. 23:37], set forth the ancient law of human liberty, because God made man a free [agent] from the beginning, possessing his own soul to obey the behests of God voluntarily, and not by compulsion of God. For there is no coercion with God, but a good will [toward us] is present with Him continually. (*AH*, I.4.36.8)

Athenagoras (fl. second century)

> Just as with men who have freedom of choice as to both virtue and vice (for you would not either honor the good or punish the bad; unless vice and virtue were in their own power, and some are diligent in the matters entrusted to them, and others faithless), so is it among the angels. (*PC*, II.24)

Theophilus (c. 130–190)

> God made man free, and with power over himself.… God vouchsafes to him as a gift through His own philanthropy and pity, when men obey Him. For as man, disobeying, drew death on himself; so, obeying the will of God, he who desires is able to procure for himself life everlasting. (*TA*, II.27)

Tatian (120–173)

> Our free-will has destroyed us; we who were free have become slaves; we have been sold through

sin. Nothing evil has been created by God; we ourselves have manifested wickedness; but we, who have manifested it, are able again to reject it. (*ATG*, II.11)

Bardesanes (c. 154–222)

How is it that God did not so make us that we should not sin and incur condemnation? If man had been made so, he would not have belonged to himself but would have been the instrument of him that moved him.… And how, in that case, would a man differ from a harp, on which another plays; or from a ship, which another guides: where the praise and the blame reside in the hand of the performer or the steersman … they being only instruments made for the use of him in whom is the skill? (*E*, VII)

Clement of Alexandria (150–c. 215)

We, who have heard by the Scriptures that self-determining choice and refusal have been given by the Lord to men, rest in the infallible criterion of faith, manifesting a willing Spirit, since we have chosen life and believe God through His voice. (*S*, II.2.4)

Tertullian (c. 155–c. 225)

I find, then, that man was by God constituted free, master of his own will and power; indicating the presence of God's image and likeness in him by nothing so well as by this constitution of his nature.… Therefore, both the goodness and purpose of God are discovered in the gift to man of freedom in his will. (*FBAM*, III.2.5)

Novatian (c. 200–c. 258)

He also placed man at the head of the world, and man, too, made in the image of God, to whom He imparted mind, and reason, and foresight, that he might imitate God.… And when He had given him all things for his service, He willed that he alone should be free. And lest, again, an unbounded freedom should fall into peril, He laid down a command, in which man was taught that there was no evil in the fruit of the tree; but he was forewarned that evil would arise if perchance he should exercise his freewill in the contempt of the law that was given. (*CT*, V.1)

Origen (c. 185–c. 254)

"This also is clearly defined in the teaching of the church that every rational soul is possessed of free-will and volition" (*DP*, IV, preface). "There are, indeed, innumerable passages in the Scriptures which establish with exceeding clearness the existence of freedom of will" (ibid., IV.3.1).

Methodius (c. 260–311)

"Now those who decide that man is not possessed of free-will, and affirm that he is governed by the unavoidable necessities of fate … are guilty of impiety toward God Himself, making Him out to be the cause and author of human

evils" (*BTV*, VI.8.16).

"I say that man was made with free-will, not as if there were already existing some evil, which he had the power of choosing if he wished … but that the power of obeying and disobeying God is the only cause" (*CFW*, 362).

Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 315–c. 387)

> Know also that thou hast a soul self governed, the noblest work of God, made after the image of its Creator, immortal because of God that gives it immortality, a living being rational, imperishable, because of Him that bestowed these gifts: having free power to do what it willeth. (*CL*, II.VII.IV.18)

"The soul is self-governed: and though the Devil can suggest, he has not the power to compel against the will. He pictures to thee the thought of fornication: if thou wilt, thou rejectest" (ibid., 21).

Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–c. 395)

"Being the image and the likeness … of the Power which rules all things, man kept also in the matter of a free-will this likeness to Him whose will is over all" (*OV*, II.V.12).

Jerome (c. 340–420)

> It is in vain that you misrepresent me and try to convince the ignorant that I condemn free-will. Let him who condemns it be himself condemned. We have been created endowed with free-will.… It is true that freedom of the will brings with it freedom of decision. Still man does not act immediately on his free-will but requires God's aid who Himself needs no aid. (*LSJ*, II.VI.133.10)

John Chrysostom (347–407)

"God, having placed good and evil in our power, has given us full freedom of choice; he does not keep back the unwilling, but embraces the willing" (*HG*, 19.1).

> All is in God's power, but so that our free-will is not lost.… It depends therefore on us and on Him. We must first choose the good, and then He adds what belongs to Him. He does not precede our willing, that our free-will may not suffer. But when we have chosen, then He affords us much help.… It is ours to choose beforehand and to will, but God's to perfect and bring to the end. (*HEH*, 12)[31]

Early Augustine[32] *(354–430)*

> "Free will, naturally assigned by the creator to our rational soul, is such a neutral power, as can either incline toward faith, or turn toward unbelief" (*OSL*, 58). "In fact, sin is so much a voluntary evil

that it is not sin at all unless it is voluntary" (*OTR*, 14). "Either, then, will is itself the first cause of sin, or the first cause is without sin" (*OGFW*, 3.49).

Augustine added,

> Sin is indeed nowhere but in the will, since this consideration also would have helped me, that justice holds guilty those sinning by evil will alone, although they may have been unable to accomplish what they willed. (*TSAM*, 10.12)
>
> Every one also who does a thing unwillingly is compelled, and every one who is compelled, if he does a thing, does it only unwillingly. It follows that he that is willing is free from compulsion, even if any one thinks himself compelled. (ibid., 10.14)

Anselm (1033–1109)

> No one deserts uprightness except by willing to desert it. If "against one's will" means "unwillingly," then no one deserts uprightness against his will.… But a man cannot will against his will because he cannot will unwillingly to will. For everyone who wills, wills willingly. (*TFE*, 130)
>
> Although they [Adam and Eve] yielded themselves to sin, they could not abolish in themselves their natural freedom of choice. However, they could so affect their state that they were not able to use that freedom except by a different grace from that which they had before their fall. (ibid., 125)
>
> We ought not to say that they [Adam and Eve] had freedom for the purpose of receiving, from a giver, the uprightness which they didn't have, because we have to believe that they were created with upright wills—although we must not deny that they had freedom for receiving this same uprightness again, should they once desert it and were it returned to them by the one who originally gave it. (ibid., 126)
>
> Don't you see it follows from these considerations that no temptation can conquer an upright will? For if temptation can conquer the will, it has the power to conquer it, and conquers the will by its own power. But temptation cannot do this because the will can be overcome only by *its* own power. (ibid., 132)

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)

> Necessity comes from the agent when the latter so coerces something that he cannot do the contrary. … Such necessity by coercion is contrary to the will. [Thus,] something cannot be absolutely coerced or violent and simultaneously voluntary.… Consequently man does not choose necessarily but freely. (in Clark, *AR*, 291–92)

Therefore, "man has free choice, otherwise counsels, exhortations, precepts, prohibitions, rewards, and punishment would all be pointless." Consequently, a free choice "leaves intact the power of being able to decide otherwise" (ibid., 259).

With the exception of the later Augustine, this view of self-determined free will was the virtually unanimous view of the Fathers up to the time of the Reformation, and with the exception of Calvin and Luther, it has continued to be the consistent view since the time of the Reformation.[33]

CONCLUSION

The origin of evil is a problem for any worldview, but particularly so for theism, which must account for how evil arose in a universe where God and everything He made were perfectly good. The answer is found in one of God's good gifts: free will. While freedom is good in itself, it also allowed the potential for evil. Hence, free will made evil possible.

However, while God is responsible for the fact of freedom (which made evil *possible*), free creatures themselves (e.g., Lucifer and Adam) are responsible for their acts of freedom (which make evil *actual*). God gave them the power of choice, and instead of choosing to obey and follow the good, they disobeyed and exercised free choice for sin. Hence, evil arose from the free will of the good creatures that God made.

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE NATURE OF SIN

The originally created conditions were perfect, and a perfect God can make nothing less than a perfect world.[1] Eventually, however, by a misuse of free will,[2] sin entered the world and vitiated God's perfect creation. There followed a state of human sinfulness—in which we now find ourselves—that is humanly irreparable. Our imperfection is best understood in light of the ultimate Standard of perfection, which is God Himself. The vivid contrast reveals a deplorable picture of human depravity.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR THE NATURE OF HUMAN SINFULNESS

Sin is an ugly reality, especially as seen through God's eyes. In the famous Romans 3 passage (based on Psalm 14), Paul described man's total depravity, insisting,

> There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one. Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes. (vv. 10–18)

A horrid image, to say the least.

Two Basic Kinds of Sin

All sins can be placed into two broad categories: sins of commission and sins of omission. This means that some sins are doing what we should not do, and others are not doing what we should do.

Sins of Commission

Sins of commission, *doing* what we *should not* do, are described by the apostle John in this verse: "Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4). The law of Moses was recorded in the Old Testament, and its basic moral principles are repeated in the New Testament.

Sins of Omission

Sins of omission are *not doing* what we *should* do. As James put it, "Anyone … who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins" (James 4:17). Perhaps this latter category contains even more sins than the former.

Seven Detestable Sins

God singled out seven particular sins He cannot abide:

> There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: [1] haughty eyes, [2] a lying tongue, [3] hands that shed innocent blood, [4] a heart that devises wicked schemes, [5] feet that are quick to rush into evil, [6] a false witness who pours out lies and [7] a man who stirs up dissension among brothers. (Prov. 6:16–19)

Simply stated, these are pride, deceit, murder, plotting evil, quickness to do wrong, false testimony, and troublemaking.

The Chief Names for *Sin*

There are numerous biblical terms for *sin* in the Bible, many more than there are names for *good*. Each word adds to the overall picture of heinous action against a holy God.

Sin

The Hebrew word often translated *sin* is *chata*, meaning "to miss," "to forfeit," or "to lack." The use of *chata* in Psalm 51:4 captures the idea behind it. After committing adultery and planning a murder, David confessed to God: "Against you, You only, have I *sinned*, and done this evil in Your sight" (NKJV).

The basic Greek word for *sin* is *hamartia*, which means “to miss the mark” (“and so not share the prize”), “to err,” “to sin.” *Hamartia* is used in Romans 3:23: “For all have *sinned* and fall short of the glory of God.”

Trespass

The Hebrew root word for *trespass* is *maal*, which means “to cover up,” “to act covertly, that is, treacherously, grievously.” Numbers 31:16 declares: “Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit *trespass* against the LORD in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD” (KJV).

The Greek word for *trespass* is *paraptoma*, which means “to slip,” “to lapse,” “to fall,” “to stumble aside,” “to offend,” or “to sin.” Paul used *paraptoma* in Galatians 6:1: “Brothers, if someone is caught in a *sin*, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.”

Iniquity

Another term for violating God’s law is *iniquity*. The basic Hebrew word is *avon*, which means “perversity,” “fault,” “iniquity.” In Isaiah (53:11) God declares: “My righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their *iniquities*.”

The Greek word for *iniquity* is *adikia*, meaning “morally wrong,” “unjust,” “unrighteous.” James said, “The tongue also is a fire, a world of *evil* among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell” (James 3:6).

Evil

A common Hebrew word for *sin* is *ra*, which means “bad,” “harmful,” “wrong,” even “calamity.” For example, Isaiah spoke of the ability to “reject the wrong and choose the right” (Isa. 7:15).

Among the common Greek words for *evil* are *poneros*, meaning “evil in effect”—Jesus spoke of fallen human beings as *evil* (Matt. 7:11)—and *kakos*, denoting what is “evil in character.” Paul said, “When I want to do good, *evil* is right there with me” (Rom. 7:21). What the apostle meant is that there was a worthless, degenerate, depraved (evil) nature within him.

Wickedness

Another biblical term for *sin* is *wickedness*. In the Old Testament, *wickedness*

is often a translation of the Hebrew word *rasha*, which means "morally bad" or "ungodly." The psalmist said, "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the *wicked*" (Ps. 1:1). The New Testament Greek word *anomia* is also translated as *wickedness* (cf. Matt. 23:28; 24:12; Rom. 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:14).

Other Terms for Sin

There are many other scriptural names and descriptions of evil. In portraying the pagan world, Paul lists at least *forty-one* different designations and characterizations of sin in Romans 1:

> The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the *godlessness* [1] and *wickedness* [2] of men who *suppress the truth* [3] by their wickedness.… For although they knew God, they *neither glorified him* [4] as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became *futile* [5] and their *foolish* [6] hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for *images* [7] made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the *sinful desires* [8] of their hearts to *sexual impurity* [9] for the *degrading* [10] of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a *lie* [11], and *worshiped and served created things* [12] rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to *shameful lusts* [13]. Even their women exchanged natural relations for *unnatural* [14] ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with *lust* [15] for one another. Men committed *indecent acts* [16] with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their *perversion* [17]. Furthermore, since they *did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God* [18], he gave them over to a *depraved mind* [19], to do *what ought not to be done* [20]. They have become filled with *every kind of wickedness* [21], *evil* [22], *greed* [23] and *depravity* [24]. They are full of *envy* [25], *murder* [26], *strife* [27], *deceit* [28] and *malice* [29]. They are *gossips* [30], *slanderers* [31], *God-haters* [32], *insolent* [33], *arrogant* [34] and *boastful* [35]; they invent ways of doing *evil* [36]; they *disobey their parents* [37]; they are *senseless* [38], *faithless* [39], *heartless* [40], *ruthless* [41]. (vv. 18–31)

A more succinct but equally dreadful list (of fifteen different depictions of sin) is found in "the works of the flesh" of Galatians 5:

> The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: *sexual immorality* [1], *impurity* [2] and *debauchery* [3]; *idolatry* [4] and *witchcraft* [5]; *hatred* [6], *discord* [7], *jealousy* [8], *fits of rage* [9], *selfish ambition* [10], *dissensions* [11], *factions* [12] and *envy* [13]; *drunkenness* [14], *orgies* [15], and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. (vv. 19–21)

The Nature of Sin in Relation to God

As committed against God, sin is described in several ways. It is unbelief in Him, rebellion against Him, transgression against His law, and pride that exalts self above Him.

Sin As Unbelief

Paul bluntly declared, “Everything that does not come from faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23). Thus, according to Jesus, “Whoever believes in [me] is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son” (John 3:18). And so, “Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him” (Heb. 11:6).

Sin As Rebellion

Samuel forthrightly affirmed, “Rebellion [is as] the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness [is as] iniquity and idolatry” (1 Sam. 15:23 KJV). Solomon added, “An evil man is bent only on rebellion” (Prov. 17:11). Nehemiah described Israel in these words: “They became stiff-necked and in their rebellion appointed a leader in order to return to their slavery” (Neh. 9:17). God is King, and we, his subjects, have rebelled against His rule in our lives.

Sin As Transgression

As the Sovereign, God revealed inviolable guidelines by which His servants should live. However, Adam broke His law, as have all Adamites since. These transgressions are at the heart of sin; the Scriptures assert, “Death reigned from Adam to Moses,[3] even over them that had not sinned after the similitude [likeness] of Adam’s transgression, who is the figure of him [Jesus] that was to come” (Rom. 5:14 KJV). Indeed, “sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4 KJV). Again, even when David’s sin was clearly directed toward the wife and life of another, he nonetheless cried out to God in confession, “Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge” (Ps. 51:4).[4]

Sin As Pride

At the root of *all* sin is pride, which was the evil that prompted Lucifer’s rebellion against God. Thus Paul exhorted about elders: “He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited [proud] and fall under the same judgment as the devil” (1 Tim. 3:6). As the one who inspired the sin of the king of Tyre, Satan’s wickedness is emulated and described in these words: “Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor” (Ezek. 28:17). John lists pride as one of the three

basic sins, saying, “All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world” (1 John 2:16 KJV).[5]

The Degrees of Sin

Contrary to widely held opinion, not all sins are considered (by God) to be equal. Jesus said there were “*weightier matters* of the law” (Matt. 23:23 KJV), such as, for example, mercy and justice over tithing. He also declared our love for God to be a higher duty than our love for human beings, calling the former “the *first* and greatest commandment” (Matt. 22:38). He told Pilate that “the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a *greater sin*” (John 19:11).

The more severe eternal punishment for some is due to the heaviness of the sins they have committed (Rev. 20:12). John spoke of a sin so monstrous that God took the guilty person’s life (1 John 5:16). Paul said some were disciplined with death by God for partaking of the Lord’s table in an unworthy manner (1 Cor. 11:29–30), indicating that this is a particularly substantial sin. Not only are some sins greater, there is also a “greatest” sin, the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:32).[6]

The Metaphysical Nature of Sin

One of the difficulties regarding sin can be illustrated by the objection that if God created everything, and if sin is real, then God must have created sin. Since Christian theism denies the conclusion (that “God must have created sin”), it would seem necessary, then, for Christian theism to deny one or both of the two premises (that “God created everything” and that “sin is real”). However, we cannot deny that God created everything, since He alone existed before anything else did,[7] and everything else that exists He created.[8] As for the other premise, to deny that sin is real is to reduce it to a non-reality or illusion.[9] In short, to deny that God created everything is to admit materialism and reject theism, and to deny that sin exists (as a reality) is to reject theism and accept pantheism. Therefore, how can the conclusion (that “God must have created sin”) be incorrect?

Unsolvable as the dilemma seems, Christian theism gives a forthright answer. God *did* create every *thing* (substance), but sin is not a thing or substance: *Sin is a privation or lack in a good substance*, a distortion of something pure. Evil is

an ontological parasite—*it exists only in something good, as a corruption of its goodness*. For example, evil is like rot to a tree or rust to a car; both rot and rust corrupt the good substance (tree or car), but neither rot nor rust exists *in and of itself*.[10]

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE NATURE OF HUMAN SINFULNESS

From a theological standpoint, *sin is anything that falls short of God's perfect moral nature*. Paul wrote that "*all* have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). God said, "I am the LORD who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy" (Lev. 11:45). It is plain, then, that the ultimate objective standard is God's absolute moral perfection, and anything that falls short of it is sin.

As previously established, God possesses both nonmoral (metaphysical) and moral attributes.[11] The moral attributes are the final standard for what is right and wrong. Since God has at least six basic moral attributes—holiness, justice, perfection, jealousy, goodness (love), and truthfulness—a brief description of each is necessary so that it is clear what sin is and how it falls short of God's ultimate objective standard, which is His own moral nature.

God Is Holy

The biblical Hebrew words for *holy* are *godesh*, meaning "apartness" or "sacredness," and *gadosh*, which is translated "sacred" or "holy." The Greek word *hosios* means "righteous," "holy," or "pious." In the moral sense, that God is holy means He is totally and utterly set apart from all evil. His holiness is associated with His jealousy (Josh. 24:19), His exaltation (Ps. 99:9), His righteousness (Isa. 5:16; Luke 1:75), His almightiness (omnipotence—Rev. 4:8), His absolute uniqueness (Ex. 15:11), His moral purity (2 Cor. 7:1), and His being vexed by evil (Ps. 78:41).

God is holy by His very nature. Exodus 15:11 inquires: "Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you—majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?" In Leviticus 11:44–45 God affirms:

> I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because *I am holy*.… I am the LORD

who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because *I am holy*.

In Joshua 24:19 the people were told, "You are not able to serve the LORD. *He is a holy God*; he is a jealous God." First Samuel 2:2 confirms that "*there is no one holy like the* LORD; *there is no one besides you [God]; there is no Rock like our God*." First Samuel 6:20 adds, "*Who can stand in the presence of the* LORD, *this holy God*?" Psalm 78:41 laments that "again and again they put God to the test; *they vexed the Holy One of Israel*."

Numerous biblical passages speak of God as "*the Holy One*."[12] Isaiah the prophet said, "The LORD Almighty will be exalted by his justice, and *the holy God will show himself holy by his righteousness*" (Isa. 5:16). Paul exhorts:

> Since we have these promises, dear friends, *let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God*. (2 Cor. 7:1)

John informs us:

> Each of the four living creatures [around God's throne] had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying, "*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come*" (Rev. 4:8).

In addition to direct biblical references to God as holy, *the Godhead has a Holy Spirit*,[13] *God has a holy Name*,[14] *God makes the ground (where He stands) holy* (Ex. 3:5), and *God has holy ways* (Ps. 77:13).

God takes an unchangeable oath by His holiness (Ps. 89:35), *God has a holy arm* (1 Chron. 6:35; Isa. 52:10), *God sits on a holy throne* (Ps. 47:8), *God's throne is on a holy mountain* (Ezek. 28:14), *God has holy angels*,[15] and *God has a holy place* (heaven) where He dwells.[16]

Sin Is Being Unholy

If God's moral nature is the ultimate standard for what is right, and if God is absolutely holy, then it follows that *sin is being unholy*. Indeed, the Bible uses this very term of sin; for example, Paul said, "We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious" (1 Tim. 1:9). Again,

> People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a

form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them. (2 Tim. 3:2–5)

God Is Just (Righteous)

To be righteous means "to be just" or "right." Used of God, *righteous* refers to the intrinsic characteristic wherein He is absolutely just or right and is the ultimate standard of justice and rightness.

The biblical basis for God's righteousness is found in the many ways the words (Heb: *tsadaqah*, and Gk: *dikaioo, diakaiosune*) are used.

First, righteousness involves God's true ordinances (Ps. 19:9): "The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous."

Second, righteousness is the basis of God's throne (Ps. 89:14): "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you."

Third, righteousness is the royal power of God's domain (Heb. 1:8): "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom."

Fourth, righteousness does no injustice (Zeph. 3:5): "The LORD… is righteous; he does no wrong. Morning by morning he dispenses his justice, and every new day he does not fail."

Fifth, righteousness will always remain (2 Cor. 9:9): "As it is written: 'He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.' "

Sixth, righteousness is the ultimate standard of judgment (Acts 17:31): "He has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed."

Seventh, righteousness renders to all in keeping with their deeds (Rom. 2:6): God "will give to each person according to what he has done."

Eighth, righteousness is the basis for the believer's rewards (2 Tim. 4:8): "Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing."

Ninth, and finally, righteousness is revealed in the law of God (Rom. 10:5): "Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: 'The man who does these things will live by them.' "

Sin Is Unrighteousness (Injustice)

While righteousness is a moral attribute of God, righteousness is also one of His communicable characteristics and can be possessed by His creatures. Hence, righteousness is something that we should be *instructed in* (2 Tim. 3:17); that we should *seek* (Matt. 6:33); that we should *pursue* (2 Tim. 2:2); that we should *thirst after* (Matt. 5:6); that we should *suffer for* (1 Peter 3:14; 2 Tim. 3:12); that we should *submit to* (Rom. 10:3); that we should *be slaves of* (Rom. 6:18); and that we should *practice* (1 John 3:7).

Insofar as human beings fall short of God's righteousness (*justice*), *they are in sin*. Paul wrote of his Jewish brethren, "Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness" (Rom. 10:3). In fact, the Bible describes sin as "unrighteousness" itself, saying, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts" (Isa. 55:7 KJV). Paul adds,

> Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Cor. 6:9–10 KJV)

This list explicitly spells out what God by His very nature regards as unrighteousness: that which falls short of His absolute Tightness.

God Is Perfect

God is absolutely morally perfect—impeccable. This flawless excellence of God is expressed by several Hebrew words for our English word *perfect: tamim*, meaning "complete," "sound," "blameless," "perfect," "without blemish"; *shalem*, which means "complete," "safe," "blameless"; *tam*, which is rendered "complete," "blameless," "perfect;" *omen*, translated "perfect" and "faithful"; *kalil*, meaning "entire," "whole," "perfect"; and *taman*, which is expressed by words like *complete*, *finished*, and *blameless*.

The Greek words for *perfect* are *teleios*, which means "complete," "perfect," "mature"; *teleioo*, which bears the idea of "bringing to an end," "completing," "perfecting"; *teleiotes*, a kindred concept that can be rendered "completeness" and "perfection"; and *katartizo*, which means "to complete," "to perfect," "to prepare."

God is perfect in every way (Deut. 32:4; 2 Sam. 22:31). "Do you know how the clouds hang poised, those wonders of him who is *perfect in knowledge*?" (Job 37:16). "*The law of the* LORD *is perfect*, reviving the soul" (Ps. 19:7). "*The*

LORD *will fulfill his purpose for me [that is, "will perfect" me]*; your love, O LORD, endures forever—do not abandon the works of your hands" (Ps. 138:8). "O LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you and praise your name, for *in perfect faithfulness you have done marvelous things*, things planned long ago" (Isa. 25:1).

"Be perfect, therefore, as *your heavenly Father is perfect*" (Matt. 5:48). "Then you will be able to test and approve what [is] *God's* … good, pleasing and *perfect will*" (Rom. 12:2). "*When perfection comes*, the imperfect disappears" (1 Cor. 13:10). "We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone *perfect in Christ*" (Col. 1:28). "*Every good and perfect gift* is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows" (James 1:17). "The man who looks intently into the *perfect law* that gives freedom … will be blessed in what he does" (James 1:25). "There is no fear in love. But *perfect love* drives out fear" (1 John 4:18).

Sin Is Moral Imperfection

Since God's moral nature is the standard of perfection, it follows that *whatever is imperfect is sinful by nature*. Thus, the Bible exhorts believers to perfection (Matt. 5:48) by following His perfect will (Rom. 12:2): "Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity [perfection]" (Heb. 6:1). In addition, we are to "*stand perfect and complete* in all the will of God" (Col. 4:12 KJV). In short, imperfect thoughts, intentions, or actions are sinful, and the flawless standard of the Holy One's absolute perfection clearly cannot be achieved by human flesh but only by the enabling of God (Phil. 2:13).[17] Humans are totally depraved.

God Is Jealous

As mentioned in Volume 2, many are surprised that one of God's attributes is jealousy; however, His Word lists it as an essential characteristic, even declaring that it is part of His "name" (Ex. 34:14). God is jealous for what rightly belongs to Him, which is everything that He created.

The biblical Hebrew word for *jealous* (*kannaw*) means "to be desirous of," "to be zealous about," "to be excited to anger over," "to execute judgment because of." The primary Greek term (*zeloo*) means "to have strong affection

toward," "to be ardently devoted to," "to desire earnestly," "to be fervent." God's jealousy is never wrong because He is never jealous about something that doesn't belong to Him (Ps. 24:1).[18]

God's jealousy connotes *anger* (Deut. 29:20), *fury* (Zech. 8:2), and *wrath* (Isa. 42:13); His jealousy is carried out against sin, a violation of His perfect nature. The Bible describes God's passionate opposition to idols (1 Cor. 10:19–22), images (Ps. 78:58), other gods (Deut. 32:16), and other sins (1 Kings 14:22). God is jealous for His holy name (Ezek. 39:25), His holy people (Zech. 8:2), His holy land (Joel 2:18), and His holy city (Zech. 1:14). Foremost is God's jealousy for His holy nature, His uniqueness:

(1) God is unique and supreme.
(2) God is holy, loving, and morally perfect.
(3) Thus, God is uniquely and supremely holy, loving, and morally perfect.
(4) Whatever is supremely holy, loving, and perfect is to be preserved with the utmost zeal.
(5) God's jealousy is His zeal to preserve His own holy supremacy.
(6) Therefore, God is eminently justified in His jealousy (cf. Ex. 34:14).

Sin Is the Absence of Godly Jealousy and the Presence of Ungodly Jealousy (Envy)

In regard to humans, Scripture speaks of both righteous and unrighteous jealousy; we are to embrace the first and reject the second. Right jealousy is valuing and preserving what belongs to us, while wrong jealousy is being possessive of and demanding what does not belong to us. It is sinful for us not to guard and protect what God has entrusted to us; it is likewise sinful for us to be envious or covetous of what He has not given us.

Jealousy, then, is not an inherent evil. God is jealous for what is right, true, and unchanging—as we should be. For instance, Paul was zealously impassioned for the church: "I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him" (2 Cor. 11:2). In the same way, because it is God who ordains marriage, a husband and wife belong to each other (cf. Num. 5:14; 1 Cor. 7:4) and are rightly jealous to protect their love.

God Is Love

The Bible says that "God *is* love" (1 John 4:16). If love is defined as "that which wills the good of its object," then God is good. Indeed, He *is* goodness itself; God, truly, is *all-good* (or "omnibenevolent"). Biblically, the basic Hebrew term for "love" (*chesed*), used of God, means "lovingkindness" or "tender lovingkindness." The Greek word *agape*, used of God's love, means "selfless" or "sacrificial" love.

"The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: '*I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness*' " (Jer. 31:3). "The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, *he will quiet you with his love*, he will rejoice over you with singing" (Zeph. 3:17). "*God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son*, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). "*God has poured out his love into our hearts* by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us" (Rom. 5:5). "*God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us*" (Rom. 5:8).

"*Because of his great love for us*, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ" (Eph. 2:4–5). "[*I want you*] *to know this love that surpasses knowledge*—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:19). "Live a life of love, just as *Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God*" (Eph. 5:2). "*How great is the love the Father has lavished on us*, that we should be called children of God!" (1 John 3:1). "*This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us*. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers" (1 John 3:16).

Dear friends, let us love one another, for *love comes from God*. Whoever does not love does not know God, because *God is love*. This is how *God showed his love* among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that *he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins*. (1 John 4:7–10)

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.… And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But *the greatest of these is love*. (1 Cor. 13:4–8, 13)

Sin Is Being Unloving

If God, our ultimate moral standard, is love, then to be unloving is sin. Indeed, Jesus said that love is the greatest moral good (Matt. 22:37), and He added, "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute

you" (Matt. 5:43–44). The law said, "Do not hate your brother in your heart" (Lev. 19:17). Those who do not love their fellow believers do not love God, because "if anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen" (1 John 4:20).

God Is Truth

The Hebrew word for *truth* (*emeth*) means "firm," "stable," "faithful," "reliable," "correct." The Greek word for *truth* (*aletheia*) means "truthful," "dependable," "upright," "real." *Truth*, as taught in Scripture, means "that which, because it corresponds to reality (the facts, the original), is reliable, faithful, and stable." Used of words, truth is telling it like it is. True statements are those that correspond to reality, and hence are dependable.[19]

By contrast, falsehood is telling it like it is not (1 John 2:21), and therefore is not reliable. False expressions do not correspond to reality. The devil is the father of all lies (John 8:44); God, on the other hand, cannot lie (2 Cor. 1:18; Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18), and His Word cannot pass away (Mark 13:31; cf. Ps. 117:2).

God by His very nature is truthfulness. Creatures *have* truth, but God *is* truth: "[He is] … *a God of truth*" (Deut. 32:4 KJV). "*God is not a man, that he should lie*, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?" (Num. 23:19). "Redeem me, O LORD, the God of truth" (Ps. 31:5). "The word of the LORD is right and true; he is faithful in all he does" (Ps. 33:4). "*I am* the way and *the truth* and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). "*The Spirit of truth* … will testify about me" (John 15:26).

"You turned to God from idols to serve the living and *true God*" (1 Thess. 1:9). "God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which *it is impossible for God to lie*, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged" (Heb. 6:18). "This is how we recognize *the Spirit of truth* and the spirit of falsehood" (1 John 4:6). Because God is truthful, we can trust His promises (Ps. 89:35), we can be assured of our salvation (2 Tim. 2:13), we are protected (Ps. 91:4), we are saved (Eph. 1:13), we are sanctified (2 Thess. 2:13), we are liberated (John 8:32), and we are established forever (Ps. 117:2).

Sin Is Being Untruthful

Again, *if God's nature as truth is the ultimate standard of righteousness, then to be untruthful is sin*. Thus, the Bible exhorts us to always speak the truth (Eph. 4:25), to walk in His truth (Ps. 86:11), to serve Him in truth (1 Sam. 12:24), to diligently study His truth (2 Tim. 2:15; John 17:17), to worship Him in truth (John. 4:24), and to pray to be led in truth (Ps. 25:5).

Lying is sinful and is pointedly forbidden in the Ten Commandments: "Thou shalt not bear false witness" (Ex. 20:16 KJV).[20] The Bible commands us, "Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices" (Col. 3:9). Liars eventuate in eternal judgment: "Those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and *all liars*—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulphur" (Rev. 21:8).

AN OBJECTION TO THE DOCTRINE OF HUMAN SINFULNESS

There is a significant objection to this doctrine of human sinfulness: It is alleged that such a high and lofty standard is impossible for human beings to attain.

The Objection Stated—Avoiding Sin Appears to Be Impossible

In the light of God's absolute standard of perfection, it is argued that it is irrational to demand that mortal human beings comply. In effect, God is commanding the impossible and then blaming humans for not being able to measure up.

A Response to the Objection

In the first place, Adam *was* created with the ability to adhere to this standard of absolute perfection by his divine endowment of original righteousness.[21] As previously established, he was not tempted on ordinary moral matters but rather on whether he would obey God because God said that he must.[22] Before the Fall, then, humans *were* capable, in and of themselves, of living up to God's absolute standard of moral perfection. If they had *not* been given this ability, God could

be charged with making imperfect creatures.[23]

Further, even after the Fall, God could not have lowered or diminished the ultimate moral standard—His very nature, which He cannot change (Heb. 6:18; 2 Tim. 2:13). Being holiness itself, He cannot even look on sin (Hab. 1:13), and as it violates His very essence and thus the essence of reality and truth, sin absolutely cannot go unnoticed or unpunished before Him.

How, then, is it fair or just for God to demand of us, in our sinful state, what is impossible? The answer lies in His enabling grace. It *is* impossible for us to please God *in our sinful flesh*. "All our righteous acts are like filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6), and "he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy" (Titus 3:5). Paul declared, "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but *I cannot carry it out*" (Rom. 7:18). Indeed, Jesus said, "Without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5 NKJV).

What we cannot do in our own strength, though, we *can* do by the Lord's grace: "It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Phil. 2:13). Paul said, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Phil. 4:13).

> No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. (1 Cor. 10:13)

Consequently, *even in our fallen state* it is possible to live a holy life—which is developed in us when we accept the enabling and saving grace of God. God never commands what is actually impossible; to suggest otherwise is to attribute irrationality to the ultimate Source of rationality itself. As we have seen, *ought* implies *can*—and we *can*, not in our own strength but by His grace.[24]

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR THE NATURE OF HUMAN SINFULNESS

Throughout the history of the Christian church, its great teachers have affirmed the awful nature of human sin in contrast to God's wondrous perfection. The following citations illustrate the unity and continuity of their conviction regarding human depravity, stressing its nature as based upon free action, and its corruption (or privation) of the perfect good that God created.

Early Fathers

The biblical teaching on the nature of sin was carried on in the writings of the early Fathers.

Clement of Alexandria (150–c. 215)

> Man directs the voluntary motions of his own actions. And thus there are some things which have been created for this end, that in their services they should be subject to necessity, and should be unable to do aught else than what has been assigned to them; and when they have accomplished this service, the Creator of all things, who … arranged them according to His will, preserves them. But there are other things, in which there is a power of will, and which have a free choice of doing what they will. These, as I have said, do not remain always in that order in which they were created, but according as their will leads them, and the judgment of their mind inclines them, they effect either good or evil; and therefore He hath proposed rewards to those who do well, and penalties to those who do evil. (*ROC* in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, VIII.3.24)
>
> Some things, as we have said, He [God] has so willed to be, that they cannot be otherwise than as they are ordained by Him; and to these He has assigned neither rewards nor punishments; but those which He has willed to be so that they have it in their power to do what they will, He has assigned to them according to their actions and their wills, to earn either rewards or punishments. Since, therefore, as I have informed you, all things that are moved are divided into two parts, according to the distinction that I formerly stated, everything that God wills is, and everything that He wills not is not. (*ROC* in ibid., VIII.3.25)
>
> You will meet me by saying, "Even if it has come to this through freedom of will, was the Creator ignorant that those whom He created would fall away into evil? He ought therefore not to have created those who, He foresaw, would deviate from the path of righteousness."
>
> Now we tell those who ask such questions that the purpose of assertions of the sort made by us is to show why the wickedness of those who as yet were not [created], did not prevail over the goodness of the Creator. For if, wishing to fill up the number and measure of His creation, He had been afraid of the wickedness of those who were to be, and like one who could find no other way of remedy and cure, except only this, that He should refrain from His purpose of creating, lest the wickedness of those who were to be should be ascribed to Him; what else would this show but unworthy suffering and unseemly feebleness on the part of the Creator, who should so fear the actings of those who as yet were not [created], that He refrained from His purposed creation? (*ROC* in ibid.)
>
> By the freedom of the will, every man, while he is unbelieving in regard to things to come, by evil deeds runs into evils. And these are the things in the world which seem to be done contrary to order, which owe their existence to unbelief. Therefore the dispensation of divine providence is [in addition] to be admired, which [was granted] to those men in the beginning, walking in the good way of life, to enjoy incorruptible good things; but when they sinned, they gave birth to evil by sin. (*ROC* in ibid., VIII.8.51)

Tertullian (c. 155–c. 225)

> Behold, [the heretics] say, how He acknowledges Himself to be the creator of evil in the passage "It is I who create evil" [Isa. 45:7]. They take a word whose one form reduces to confusion and ambiguity two kinds of evils (because both sins and punishments are called *evils*), and will have Him in every

passage to be understood as the creator of all evil things, in order that He may be designated the author of evil.

We, on the contrary, distinguish between the two meanings of the word in question, and, by separating evils of sin from penal evils, *mala culpae* from *mala poenae*, confine to each of the two classes its own author—the devil as the author of the sinful evils (*culpae*), and God as the creator of penal evils (*poenae*); so that the one class shall be accounted as morally bad, and the other be classed as the operations of justice passing penal sentences against the evils of sin. Of the latter class of evils which are compatible with justice, God is therefore avowedly the creator. (*FBAM* in ibid., III.2.2.2.14)

Medieval Fathers

Beginning with Augustine and concluding with Thomas Aquinas, the great theologians of the Middle Ages stressed the same themes of the nature of evil as a privation of the good natures God had made brought about by granting free will to His creatures.

Augustine (354–430)

That the whole human race has been condemned in its first origin, this life itself, if life it is to be called, bears witness by the host of cruel ills with which it is filled. Is not this proved by the profound and dreadful ignorance which produces all the errors that enfold the children of Adam, and from which no man can be delivered without toil, pain, and fear? Is it not proved by [man's] love of so many vain and hurtful things, which produces gnawing cares, disquiet, griefs, fears, wild joys, quarrels, lawsuits, wars, treasons, angers, hatreds, deceit, flattery, fraud, theft, robbery, perfidy, pride, ambition, envy, murders, parricides, cruelty, ferocity, wickedness, luxury, insolence, impudence, shamelessness, fornications, adulteries, incests, and the numberless uncleannesses and unnatural acts of both sexes? (*C*, 22.22)

Neither are we to suppose that because sin shall have no power to delight … [that] free will must be withdrawn. It will, on the contrary, be all the more truly free, because [they will be] set free from delight in sinning to take unfailing delight [in God's goodness] in not sinning. For the first freedom of will which man received when he was created upright consisted in an ability not to sin, but also in an ability to sin; whereas this last freedom of will shall be superior, inasmuch as it shall not be able to sin.[25] This, indeed, shall not be a natural ability, but the gift of God. For it is one thing to be God, [and it is] another thing to be a partaker of God. God by nature cannot sin, but the partaker of God receives this inability from God. (*CG*, XXII, 30)

Our first parents fell into open disobedience because already they were secretly corrupted; for the evil act [would] never [have] been done had not an evil will preceded it. And what is the origin of our evil will but pride? For "pride is the beginning of sin" (*C*, 14.13).

The will which cleaves to the unchangeable good that is common to all, obtains man's first and best good things though it is itself only an intermediate good. But the will which turns from the unchangeable and common good and turns to its own private good or to anything exterior or inferior, sins. (*OFW*, 2.53)

What cause of willing can there be which is prior to willing? Either it is a will, in which case we have not got beyond the root of evil will, or it is not a will, and in that case there is no sin in it. Either, then, will is itself the first cause of sin, or the first cause is without sin. (ibid., 3.49)

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)

"The absence of good, taken in a privative [negative] sense, is an evil; as, for instance, the privation of sight is called blindness" (*ST*, 48.3).

> Evil … is the privation of good, which chiefly and of itself consists in perfection and act. Act, however, is twofold; first, and second. The first act is the form and integrity of a thing; the second act is its operation. Therefore evil also is twofold. In one way it occurs by the subtraction of the form, or of any part required for the integrity of the thing, as blindness is an evil, as also it is an evil to be wanting in any member of the body. (ibid., 48.4)

The Reformation Leaders

While the Reformers stressed the extent and depth of human depravity, as well as its absolute irredeemability apart from God's grace, the roots for their emphases were taken from the great medieval teachers before them, particularly Augustine.

Martin Luther (1483–1546)

> No suffering in a man's experience, be it never so severe, can be the greatest of the evils that are within him. So many more and far greater evils are there within him than any that he feels. And if he were to feel those, he would feel the pains of hell, for he holds a hell within himself. Do you ask how this can be? The Prophet says, "All men are liars"; and again, "Every man at his best state is altogether vanity." But to be a liar and vanity is to be without truth and reality; and to be without truth and reality is to be without God and to be nothing; and this is to be in hell and damned. Therefore, when God in His mercy chastens us, He reveals to us and lays upon us only the lighter evils; for if He were to lead us to the full knowledge of our evil, we should straightway perish. (*WL*, I.115)

John Calvin (1509–1564)

> Original sin, then, may be defined a hereditary corruption and depravity of our nature, extending to all the parts of the soul, which first makes us obnoxious to the wrath of God, and then produces in us works which in Scripture are termed works of the flesh. This corruption is repeatedly designated by Paul by the term sin (Gal. 5:19), while the works which proceed from it, such as adultery, fornication, theft, hatred, murder, revellings, he terms, in the same way, the fruits of sin, though in various passages of Scripture, and even by Paul himself, they are also termed sins. (*ICR*, II.1.8)

Philip Melanchthon (1497–1560)

> It is very necessary to recognize that sin is not caused by God. God has no pleasure in it, does not will it, and does nothing to effect it; he neither compels nor drives anyone to sin. On the contrary, he is an earnest enemy and punisher of sin. Man's will and the devil's will are the sources of sin! First the devils and then men themselves, of their own free wills, unforced by God, departed from God and fell into sin. (*OCD*, 45)

Post-Reformation Teachers

The results of the teaching of the Reformation continue on into the contemporary world, stressing the heinous nature of sin, resulting from the misuse of Adamic freedom, which polluted the bloodstream of all humankind.

Charles Hodge (1797–1878)

> The effects of sin upon our first parents themselves, were, (1) Shame, a sense of degradation and pollution. (2) Dread of the displeasure of God; or, a sense of guilt, and the consequent desire to hide from his presence. These effects were unavoidable. They prove the loss not only of innocence but of original righteousness, and with it of the favour and fellowship of God. The state therefore to which Adam was reduced by his disobedience, so far as his subjective condition is concerned, was analogous to that of the fallen angels. He was entirely and absolutely ruined. It is said that no man becomes thoroughly depraved by one transgression. In one sense this is true. But one transgression by incurring the wrath and curse of God and the loss of fellowship with Him, as effectually involves spiritual death, as one perforation of the heart causes the death of the body; or one puncture of the eyes involves us in perpetual darkness. (*ST*, II.VII)

William G. T. Shedd (1820–1894)

> The tendency to sin implies that the origination or self-determining power has been inwardly exerted, though it may not have been externally. A *tendency* to sin is an inclination to sin. It is a propensity of the heart, and a disposition of the will. The possibility of sinning is innocent; the tendency to sin is sinful. (*DT*, II.IV.150n)

Millard Erickson (b. 1932)

> Our sinful nature does not only affect us as individuals, but it affects our relationships as well. We become competitive, and want someone else's car, wife or husband, or house. We get to the point where we cannot empathize with others because the only thing we are concerned about is ourselves. We reject authority, because we must be free to do what we want to do. We become unable to love others, because if all we are is self-seeking, then even helping someone else out should only be done for the sake of making us look good. (*CT*, 615–19)

CONCLUSION

The originally created conditions for and in humankind, designed by God, were perfect. However, by an illicit usage of free choice,[26] sin made its entrance into the world, leaving a ghastly marring of God's unblemished creation. The subsequent state of human sinfulness left Adam's race *humanly* (but not

divinely) irreparable. When this fallen condition is viewed in the light of God's absolutely perfect nature—the ultimate standard of purity and holiness—the stark contrast reveals a horrible picture of human depravity.

Human beings are totally depraved; that is, sin extends to every part of human nature, including body and soul, mind, will, and emotion. No facet of our being is immune to sin's pervasive influence. However, while total depravity is extensive, extending to every part of a human being, nonetheless, it is not intensive, for it does not destroy a person's humanness. If it did, he would not be able to think, feel, or choose; without rational and volitional capability, a person would not be able to sin.

Fallen human beings are clearly in the image of God (Gen. 9:6; James 3:9), an image effaced but not erased by sin. While humans are totally incapable of initiating or attaining salvation on their own, they are cabable of rejecting it (John 3:18, 36; cf. Rom. 1:18). *And*, as we will see, they are capable, under the pervasive influence of the Holy Spirit, of accepting the gospel and being saved.[27]

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CHAPTER FIVE

THE EFFECTS OF SIN

THE EFFECTS OF SIN ON ADAM AND EVE

God created the first human beings in a state of perfection (see chapter 1). One of the perfections God gave was the power of free choice (see chapter 2). Adam and Eve exercised this freedom to disobey God (see chapter 3). What followed this wrong use of free will was a state of human sinfulness that we cannot reverse (see chapter 4).

As we shall see here in chapter 5, the disobedience of the original humans brought death into the world. There are three kinds of death: spiritual, physical, and eternal. Adam and Eve died *spiritually* the moment they sinned. They also began to die *physically* that very day.[1] Had Adam and Eve not accepted God's provision of salvation,[2] they would have eventually died *eternally*, which would have meant everlasting separation from God.[3]

Spiritual Death

Death is separation from God, and spiritual death is spiritual separation from God. Isaiah said, "Your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear" (Isa. 59:2). The instant Adam sinned, he experienced spiritual isolation from God; this is evidenced by his shame and his hiding from his Creator.

> Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and *they realized they were naked*; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and *they hid from the* LORD *God* among the trees of the garden. (Gen. 3:7–8)

Every descendant of Adam—every person born of natural parents since the Fall—is spiritually dead as well.

> As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins.… [We who are saved have been] made … alive with Christ even when we were *dead in transgressions*—it is by grace you have been saved. (Eph. 2:1, 5)

Thus, Jesus said to Nicodemus,

> I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.… No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, "You must be born again" (John 3:3, 5–7).

The new birth of which Jesus speaks is the act of *regeneration*, whereby God imparts spiritual life to the believer's soul (1 Peter 1:23). Paul says of this,

> He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:5–7)

Without this regeneration, every human being is spiritually dead in sin.

Physical Death

After creating Adam, "the LORD God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it *you will surely die*' " (Gen. 2:16–17). The very moment Adam partook of the forbidden fruit, he began to die physically, despite the lie of Satan that "you will not surely die" (Gen 3:4).[4]

Physical death is the inevitable result of Adam's sin not only for himself but for *all* of his natural descendants (except Christ):[5]

> Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned [in Adam] … death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come [Jesus]. (Rom. 5:12, 14)

Eternal Death

Had Adam not accepted God's provision of salvation (Gen. 3:15–24), he would have eventually experienced "the second death," which is eternal separation from God.[6] John wrote of this, saying, "The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name [is] not found written in the book of life, he [will be] thrown into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:14–15). Those who are born only once (physically) will die twice (physically *and* eternally);[7] however, those who are born twice (physically *and* spiritually) will die only once (physically). Jesus said, "Whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (John 11:26).

THE EFFECTS OF SIN ON ADAM'S DESCENDANTS

Adam's sin affected not only himself but also all of his offspring—all of us have sinned "through one man" (Rom. 5:12). All of Adam's descendants were present in him *potentially, seminally*,[8] and/or *legally* (*judicially*), since as the head of the race he was our legal representative (Rom. 5:18–21).

The Judicial (Legal) Effects of Adam's Sin

As our legal representative,[9] Adam sinned on our behalf, and we received the legal consequences of his choice. In other words, *Adam had the God-given power of attorney for the whole human race*, and when he exercised it for ill, the consequences of his sin were directly imputed[10] to all of his posterity—which is all of us. Paul says,

> Consequently, just as the result of one trespass [Adam's sin] was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness [Christ's death] was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man [Adam] the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man [Jesus] the many will be made righteous. (Rom. 5:18–19)

As legally or judicially, then, the consequences of Adam's sin were imputed to all his natural offspring, we will later learn that Christ, "the last Adam" (1 Cor. 15:45), revoked what Adam did, making every human being legally and potentially savable.[11]

> Hence, all of us stand guilty before God because of what Adam did on our behalf; his sin on behalf of

the race was imputed to the race. Clearly, the *all* (or *many*)[12] were not made sinners *actually*, since they did not actually exist at that time. However, they were *potentially* and *legally* present in Adam, and, as such, received the imputation of the consequences of his sin.

The Transmissional Effects of Adam's Sin

Not only was the effect of Adam's sin (fallenness or depravity) imputed to his descendants *directly* and *immediately*, but it was also transmitted to us *indirectly* and *mediately*. Everyone who is naturally generated from Adam—every human—inherits a sinful nature from him. This is sometimes called the doctrine of "original sin" (or "inherited sin" [see Ps. 51:5]). Again, Paul confirms,

> You were dead in your transgressions and sins.… All of us also lived among [the unsaved] at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, *we were by nature objects of wrath*. (Eph. 2:1, 3)

We are sinners not only because we sin, but also because we were born sinners. Being sinners *by nature*, short of and without salvation,[13] we inevitably are and do what comes naturally: We sin.

Just how this sinful nature is transmitted from parents to child is a subject of substantial theological debate. Undebatable, however, is the Bible's teaching that it *is* transmitted. The best explanation seems to come from the traducian view of the human soul's origin:[14]

(1) Since Adam's direct creation by God, each soul that comes into this world arrives by natural generation from his or her parents.
(2) Surely God does not directly create fallen souls.
(3) Just as certainly, each new soul is not created sinless; it is sinful from its conception.
(4) The most reasonable conclusion appears to be that a sinful soul is transmitted from sinful parents by the natural process of conception.[15]

The Relational Effects of Adam's Sin

Adam's sin also had an immediate effect upon his relationship with God, with other human beings, and with his environment.

The Effects of Sin on Relationship With God

Adam's fall affected his relationship with God in several ways.

Spiritual Separation

Death is separation, and spiritual death is spiritual separation from God. Consequently, by spiritual death, which occurred at the very moment he sinned, Adam lost his relationship with his Creator. Likewise, as we have seen, all his descendants are naturally "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1 KJV). Hence, without a new birth (John 3:3), also known as "regeneration" (Titus 3:5 KJV), no one can be saved.

However, *spiritual death* should not be misunderstood as referring to, for example, the notion of human beings so depraved that they have no capacity to understand and respond to God's message. In the very context of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, cited above, their salvation from spiritual death comes "through faith" (2:8–9).[16]

Other figures of speech describing *total depravity* likewise imply that a sinner is not *dead* in the sense of not being able by God's grace to understand and accept salvation." For instance, the sinner is

(1) *polluted*, in need of purification/cleansing;[17]
(2) *sick*, in need of healing;[18] and
(3) *in the dark*, in need of light.[19]

Clearly a sick person is able to receive a cure, just as a dirty person can embrace cleansing and a person in the dark can accept light. In every case, the sinner *is* incapable of doing these things *by himself* (in his own strength); lacking spiritual life, he needs the aid of the grace of God. *Total depravity*, then, means "total inability to achieve/obtain the solution to our sin by ourselves," *not* "total inability to accept it from God."[20]

Guilt and Shame

According to Romans 5, Adam's act of disobedience was a "sin," a "trespass," resulting in "condemnation" (vv. 12, 17, 18). It is in view of the law "that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God" (Rom. 3:19). Therefore, Adam's sin brought on him *guilt*, as well as the *shame* he expressed in view of it (Gen. 3:7).[21]

Loss of Fellowship

Not only did Adam lose his *relationship* with God, he also lost his *fellowship* with Him. Adam no longer wanted to talk with his Creator but instead hid from Him in the Garden. John reminds us:

> If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. (1 John 1:6–7)

The Effects of Sin on Relationship With Other Human Beings

Along with the loss of relationship (and fellowship) with God, the relationship between Adam and other people was also disturbed; sin has a horizontal as well as vertical effect, which is evident in two events that followed.

First, Adam blamed Eve for his situation. Responding to God's questioning about the forbidden fruit, he said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it" (Gen. 3:12).

Second, sibling relationship was disrupted by sin when, because of anger, Cain killed his brother Abel (Gen. 4:1–8).

The Effects of Sin on Relationship With the Environment

Adam's sin affected his relationship with God, other human beings, and the environment. Before the Fall, Adam and Eve were told to "subdue" the earth (Gen. 1:28); they were to "work" and "take care of" the Garden (Gen. 2:15), not destroy it; to rule over it, not ruin it; to cultivate it, not pollute it.

However, after the Fall, Adam's connection with his environment was disrupted. Thorns and thistles appeared. He had to work by the sweat of his brow. Death became a fact of life. Indeed, everything, because of his sin, was put under bondage. Paul writes:

> The creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. (Rom. 8:20–21)

The Volitional Effects of Adam's Sin

In addition to Adam's sin affecting his relationship with God, other human beings, and the environment, it also had an effect on his will.

Free Will Before *the Fall*

The power of free choice is part of humankind having been created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). Adam and Eve were commanded to multiply their kind (1:28) and to refrain from eating the forbidden fruit (2:16–17). *Both of these responsibilities imply the ability to respond*. As noted above, the fact that they *ought* to do these things implied that they *could* do them.

The text narrates their choice, saying, "*She took some and ate it*. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and *he ate it*" (Gen. 3:6). God's condemnation of their actions makes it evident that they were morally free to choose (Gen. 3:11, 13).

The New Testament references to Adam's action make it plain that he made a free choice for which he was responsible. Again, Romans 5 calls it "sin" (v. 16); a "trespass" (v. 15); and "disobedience" (v. 19). First Timothy 2:14 (RSV) refers to Eve as a "transgressor," pointedly implying culpability.

Free Will After *the Fall*

Even after Adam sinned and became spiritually "dead"[22] (Gen. 2:17; cf. Eph. 2:1) and thus, a sinner because of "[his] sinful nature" (Eph. 2:3), he was not so completely depraved that it was impossible for him to hear the voice of God or make a free response: "The LORD God called to the man, 'Where are you?' He answered, '*I heard you in the garden*, and I was afraid because I was naked; so *I hid*' " (Gen. 3:9–10).[23] As already noted, God's image in Adam was *effaced* but not *erased* by the Fall; it was corrupted (damaged) but not eliminated (annihilated). Indeed, the image of God (which includes free will) is *still* in human beings—this is why the murder or cursing of *anyone*, Christian or non-Christian, is sin, "for in the image of God has God made man" (Gen. 9:6).[24]

Fallen Descendants of Adam Have Free Will

Both Scripture and good reason inform us that depraved human beings have the power of free will. The Bible says that fallen humans are ignorant, depraved, and slaves of sin—all involving *choice*. Peter speaks of depraved ignorance as being "*willingly*" ignorant (2 Peter 3:5 KJV). Paul teaches that unsaved people perceive the truth, but they willfully "suppress" it (Rom. 1:18–19),[25] so that they are, as a result, "without excuse" (v. 20). He adds, "Don't you know that when you offer your selves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom *you obey*?" (Rom. 6:16). *Even our spiritual blindness is a result of the choice not to believe*.

With respect to *initiating* or *attaining* salvation, both Martin Luther and John Calvin were right—fallen humans are *not* free with regard to "things above."[26] Salvation is *received* by a free act of faith (John 1:12; Eph. 2:8–9), yet it does not find its *source* in our will but in God (John 1:13; Rom. 9:16). With respect to the freedom of *accepting* God's gift of salvation, the Bible is clear: fallen beings have the ability to so do, since God's Word repeatedly calls upon us to receive salvation by exercising our faith (cf. Acts 16:31; 17:30; 20:21).

Thus, the free will of fallen human beings is both "horizontal" (social) with respect to this world and "vertical" (spiritual) with respect to God. The *horizontal freedom* is evident, for instance, in our choice of a mate: "If her husband dies, she is *free* to marry anyone *she wishes*, but he must belong to the Lord" (1 Cor. 7:39). This freedom is described as having "*no constraint*," a freedom where one has "*authority over his own will*" and where one "*has decided this in his own heart*" (v. 37 NASB). This is also described in an act of giving "entirely on their own" (2 Cor. 8:3) as well as being "spontaneous and not forced" (Philem. 14).

The *vertical freedom* to believe is everywhere implied in the gospel call (e.g., cf. John 3:16; Acts 16:31; 17:30). That is, humans are offered salvation as a gift (Rom. 6:23) and called upon to believe it and accept it (John 1:12). Never does the Bible say, "Be saved in order to believe"; instead, repeatedly, it commands, "Believe in order to be saved."[27] Peter describes what is meant by free choice in saying that it is "*not under compulsion*" but "*voluntarily*" (1 Peter 5:2 NASB). Paul depicts the nature of freedom as an act where one "*purposed in his heart*" and does not act "*under compulsion*" (2 Cor. 9:7 NASB). In Philemon 14 he also says that choice is an act of "*consent*" and should "*not* be … by *compulsion*, but of your own *free will*" (NASB).

Unsaved people have a free choice regarding the reception or rejection of God's gift of salvation (Rom. 6:23). Jesus lamented the state of those who rejected Him: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem … how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but *you were not willing*" (Matt. 23:37). John affirmed, "*All* who received him [Christ], to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12). Indeed, as we have frequently observed, God desires that all unsaved people will change their mind (i.e., repent), for "he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but *everyone to come to repentance*" (2 Peter 3:9).

Like the alternatives of life and death that Moses gave to Israel, God says, "*Choose* life" (cf. Deut. 30:19). Joshua said to his people: "*Choose* for

yourselves this day whom you will serve" (Josh. 24:15). God sets morally and spiritually responsible alternatives before human beings, leaving the *choice* and *responsibility* to them. Jesus said to the unbelievers of His day: "If you do not *believe* that I am … you will indeed die in your sins" (John 8:24), which implies they *could have* and *should have* believed.

Over and over, "belief" is declared to be something we are accountable to embrace: "*We* believe and know that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:69); "Who is he, sir?… Tell me so that *I* may believe in him" (John 9:36); "Then the man said, 'Lord, *I* believe,' and he worshiped him" (John 9:38); "Jesus answered, 'I did tell you, but *you* do not believe' " (John 10:25). This is why Jesus said, "*Whoever believes* in [me] is not condemned, but *whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed* in the name of God's one and only Son" (John 3:18).

The General Effects of Sin and Common Grace

The effects of sin on fallen human beings are so great that without God's common grace (i.e., His nonsaving grace that is available to all persons), society would be unlivable and salvation unattainable. Without common grace:

(1) The judicial effects of sin (Rom. 5:12–21) would produce overwhelming guilt.
(2) The blinding effects of sin (2 Cor. 4:4) would make it impossible for us to recognize evil as such.
(3) The deceiving effects of sin (Jer. 17:9) would make rational thought and action virtually impossible.
(4) The debasing effects of sin (Rom. 1:21–32) would be destructive of self and others.
(5) The corrupting effects of sin (Eph. 2:1–3) would produce moral decay that would dominate society.
(6) The debilitating effects of sin (Rom. 3:10–18) would make the performance of social good unachievable, (cf. Radmacher, *S*, 80)

It is God's common grace to unsaved persons that makes living in this corrupt world possible. This common grace is provided through His natural revelation (Rom. 1:19–20), through the moral law written on human hearts (Rom. 2:12–15), through His image (Gen. 9:6; James 3:9), through marriage (Heb. 13:4),

through the family structure (Eph. 6:1–4), through human government (Rom. 13:1–7), and through many other nonredemptive means.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR HUMAN SIN AND HUMAN FREE WILL

Early Fathers

That human beings have free will was held by the great Fathers of the Christian church.

Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)

Vain, too, are Marcion and his followers when they seek to exclude Abraham from the inheritance, to which the Spirit through many men, and now by Paul, bears witness, that "he believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness" (*AH*, I. 4.8.1 in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, 1:470).

Origen (c. 185–c. 254)

We hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law.… If an example is required, I think it must suffice to mention the thief on the cross, who asked Christ to save him and was told: "Truly, this day you will be with me in paradise" [Luke 23:43] (*CR*, 3.28).

Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 315–c. 387)

> Just as a writing-pen or a dart has need of one to employ it, so also does grace have need of believing hearts.… It is God's part to confer grace, but yours to accept and guard it. (*CL*, I.1)

Ambrose (339–397)

> "For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.' " Abraham believed God. Let us also believe, so that we who are the heirs of his race may likewise be heirs of his faith. (*ODHBS*, 2.89 in Oden, *FC*, 22:236, as cited in *ACCS*, 6:111)

John Chrysostom (347–407)

> In order to stop anyone from asking: "How can we be saved without contributing anything at all to our salvation?" Paul shows that in fact we do contribute a great deal toward it—we supply our faith! (*HE* in Schaff, *NPNF*, 1.11.377, as cited in ibid., 6:100)
>
> So that you may not be elated by the magnitude of these benefits, see how Paul put you in your place. For "by grace you are saved," he says, "through faith," then, so as to do no injury to free will, he

allots a role to us, then takes it away again, saying “and this not of ourselves” (*HE*, 2:8 in *IOEP*, 2:160, as cited in Oden, *JR*, 44).

Ambrosiaster (c. fourth century)

“They are justified freely, because they have not done anything nor given anything in return, but by faith alone they have been made holy by the gift of God” (*CSEL*, 81, ad loc in Oden, *ACCSNT*, 6:101, as cited in ibid., 108).

Medieval Fathers

The teachers of the Middle Ages were no less definite with this message, carrying on the salvific tradition from both the apostles and the patristics.

Jerome (c. 340–420)

“Paul shows clearly that righteousness depends not on the merit of man, but on the grace of God, who accepts the faith of those who believe, without the works of the Law” (*EG*, 1.2.16 in Oden, *FC*, 53:306, as cited in ibid., 6:106).

Augustine (354–430)

> God is said to be “our Helper”; but nobody can be helped who does not make some effort of his own accord. For God does not work out salvation in us as if he were working in insensate stones, or in creatures in whom nature has placed neither reason nor will. (*OFSB*, 2.28)

Theodoret of Cyrrhus (c. 393–c. 466)

“The Lord Christ is both God and the mercy seat, both the priest and the lamb, and he performed the work of our salvation by his blood, demanding only faith from us” (*ILR*, 82, ad loc as cited in Oden, *ACCS*, 6:102).

Anselm (1033–1109)

> This is the question[28] which you ought to ask those in whose behalf you are speaking, who have no faith in the need for Christ for man’s salvation, and you should also request them to tell how man can be saved without Christ.… And if this terrifies them, let them believe in Christ as we do, that they may be saved. (*CDH*, I.XXIV)

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)

> This salvation of grace is by faith in Christ. In the justification of an adult who has sinned, the movement of faith toward God coincides with the infusion of grace. “Thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace” [Luke 8:48 KJV] (*CE*, 95).

> Of course, grace is necessary to aid the will. So, any human act, then, that is under the control of free will, can be meritorious, if it is directed towards God. Now, to believe is an act of mind assenting to the divine truth by virtue of the command of the will as it is moved by God through grace; in this way the act stands under the control of free will and is directed toward God. (*ST*, 2a2ae.2, 9)

Reformation Leaders

The main point of the Reformation was, at its heart, that "the just shall live *by faith*—and faith alone." Therefore, the exercise of faith is the one condition (action) necessary for a person to receive justification before God.[29] Nevertheless, both ironically and contradictorily, Martin Luther (1483–1546) insisted, against the mainstream of fifteen hundred years of church teaching and history, that a free act of belief is *not* a condition for receiving salvation at all. Rather, he argued that "this is plainly to ascribe *divinity* to 'free will,' for to will to embrace the Law and the Gospel … belongs to the power of God alone" (*BW*, sect. 44, final emphasis original).

Addressing John's statement that a man must "receive" Christ (John 1:12), Luther contended,

> This man is merely passive (as the term is used), nor does he do anything, but is wholly mad; and John is speaking of being made; he saith we are made the sons of God by a power given unto us from above, not by the power of "free will" inherent in ourselves, (ibid., 74)

He added,

> How could reason then think that faith in Jesus as the Son of God and man was necessary, when even at this day it could neither receive nor believe it? … so far is it from possibility that it should either will it, or believe it. (ibid.)

Luther was not timid in carrying his view to its logical conclusion, namely, that *even evil men are caused to act by God:*

> He uses evil instruments, which cannot escape the sway and motion of [His] omnipotence.… Hence it is, that the wicked man cannot but always err and sin; because, being carried along by the motion of the Divine Omnipotence, he is not permitted to remain motionless, but must will, desire, and act according to his nature. All this is fixed certainty, if we believe that God is Omnipotent! (ibid., 84)

John Calvin (1509–1564)

Calvin also swam against the current of church history when he argued that faith is a gift of God only to the elect, who make no free decision to accept or reject it. He acknowledged the same when he wrote of God's alleged influence

on the human will:

> This movement of the will is not of that description which was for many ages taught and believed—viz., a movement which thereafter leaves us the choice to obey or resist it—but one which affects us efficaciously.[30] We must, therefore, repudiate the oft-repeated sentiment of Chrysostom, "Whom he draws, he draws willingly;" insinuating that the Lord only stretches out his hand, and waits to see whether we will be pleased to take his aid. We grant that, as man was originally constituted [before the Fall], he could incline to either side, but since he has taught us by his example how miserable a thing free will is if God works not in us to will and to do, of what use to us were grace imparted in such scanty measure? (*ICR*, 260–61)

Interestingly, both Calvin and Luther admitted that their views left some nagging questions. Calvin wrote:

> Perseverance is the gift of God, which he does not lavish promiscuously on all, but imparts to whom he pleases. If it is asked how the difference arises—why some steadily persevere, and others prove deficient in steadfastness—we can give no other reason than that the Lord, by his mighty power, strengthens and sustains [those who persevere], so that they perish not, while he does not furnish the same assistance to [those who do not], but leaves them to be monuments of instability, (ibid., 275)

Luther confessed:

> Why does He not then change, in His motion, those evil wills which He moves? This belongs to those secrets of Majesty, where "His judgments are past finding out." Nor is it ours to search into, but to adore these mysteries. (*BW*, 88)

The answer, in reality, is that there isn't a need to ask these questions. *Whatever God does is right by definition*.[31] Luther's own words, however, contradict this truth: "What God wills is not therefore right because He ought or ever was bound so to will; but on the contrary, what takes place is therefore right, *because* He so wills" (ibid., emphasis added). This radical voluntarism (as opposed to essentialism) is addressed in chapter 12

ANSWERING EXTREME CALVINISM ON HUMAN FREE WILL

Can *Everyone* Believe?

Contrary to the extreme Calvinist view, faith is not a gift that God offers only to some ("the elect"). *All* are responsible to believe, and *whoever* decides to

believe can believe:[32] Jesus said, "*Everyone* who believes in [me] will not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16 NLT). He added, "*Whoever* believes in [me] is not condemned" (v. 18).

Some, however, have objected that if *everyone* (or *anyone*) can believe, then how can John 12:37–40 be explained?

> Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him. This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet: "Lord, who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"[33] For this reason they could not believe, because, as Isaiah says elsewhere: "He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn—and I would heal them."[34]

The answer is found in the context.

First, belief was obviously their responsibility, since God held them responsible for not believing. As John himself records, "*They still would not believe in him*."

Second, Jesus was speaking to hardhearted Jews, people who had seen numerous indisputable miracles[35] and who had been called upon repeatedly, before this point, to believe (cf. John 8:24–26). This manifests the fact that *they were able to do so*.

Third, and finally, it was their own stubborn unbelief that caused their blindness. Jesus had already said to them, "*If you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be*, you will indeed die in your sins" (8:24). Thus, their blindness was *chosen* and *avoidable*.

Can *Anyone* Believe Unto Salvation Without God's Special Grace?

Even though *faith* is possible for the unsaved, nonetheless, no one can believe *unto salvation*[36] without the aid of God's special grace. Jesus says, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (John 6:44). Paul adds, "By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect" (1 Cor. 15:10). Jesus promises, "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Cor. 12:9). Paul confessed, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Phil. 4:13). Indeed, David acknowledged to God, "Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand" (1 Chron. 29:14).

However, although no one can believe unto salvation without the aid of God's saving grace, the gracious action by which we are saved is not monergistic (an act of God alone) but synergistic (an act of God *and* our free choice). *Salvation comes from God, but it is received by our cooperation*; as we have noted, His

grace is not exercised on a passive object but on an active agent. Again, Augustine said,

> God is said to be "our Helper"; but nobody can be helped who does not make some effort of his own accord. For God does not work out salvation in us as if he were working in insensate stones, or in creatures in whom nature has placed neither reason nor will. (*OFSB*, 2.28)

The difference between the extreme and moderate Calvinistic position on the need for God's grace for our salvation can be summarized as follows:

THE RELATION OF GRACE AND FREE WILL

Position	**Extreme Calvinism**	**Moderate Calvinism**
Grace	Operative	Cooperative
Action	Monergistic	Synergistic
Recipient	Passive object	Active agent
Free act	No	Yes
Resistibility	Irresistible on the unwilling	Irresistible on the willing

SOVEREIGNTY AND FREE WILL?

God's sovereignty and human freedom: Is it either one or the other, or is it both one and the other? The Bible says both. Earlier we saw that on the one hand God is sovereign over all things, including human events and choices.[37] Nothing catches Him by surprise, and nothing is outside His control. On the other hand, in this chapter we have seen that human beings possess the God-given power of free will.[38] This applies to many earthly elements here "below" as well as to some heavenly elements from "above," specifically our reception of God's magnificent salvation.

The mystery of the relationship between divine sovereignty and human free will has challenged the greatest Christian thinkers down through the centuries. Unfortunately, some have purged human responsibility in order to seemingly preserve divine prerogative. Likewise, others have sacrificed God's sovereignty in order to hold on to humanity's free choice. Each of these alternatives is wrong and leads to subsequent error.[39]

THE EFFECTS OF SIN ON ANGELS

While not resulting from Adam's sin, nonetheless, evil had an effect on angels as well. As was shown earlier,[40] angels sinned prior to the creation of humankind—Satan, the fallen angel Lucifer, was already on the scene and solidified in wickedness when Adam arrived (Gen. 3:1; cf. Rev. 12:9).[41] While the sin of angels *directly* affects only themselves, by virtue of their presence in the world to tempt human beings into sin, Satan and all his demons[42] have had an *indirect* effect on the sins of humans as well.

Angels Are Irredeemable by Choice

Paul, in speaking of Satan, who chose to rebel against God, commands that an elder should not be "a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation *incurred by the devil*" (1 Tim. 3:6 NASB). Jude 6 adds, "Angels who *did not keep their own domain*, but *abandoned their proper abode*, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day" (NASB).

Peter notes that "God did not spare angels *when they sinned*, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment" (2 Peter 2:4 NASB). As established previously,[43] angels are never called upon to repent in the Bible, nor do they manifest any desire to so do. As C. S. Lewis said, for angels, "*Their freedom is simply that of making a single naked choice*—of loving God more than the self or the self more than God" (*PP*, 18, emphasis added). Thus, by the very nature of their freedom, angels are irredeemable once they have made their decision.

Angels Are Irredeemable by Nature

Like God,[44] angels are immaterial, being pure spirits. Therefore, they have an invisible nature, though some angels have taken on physical forms and appeared to human beings (cf. Gen. 18; Josh. 5:13–15). Colossians 1:16 declares: "By Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him" (NASB). Hebrews 1:14 calls angels "ministering spirits," and in Luke 24:39 Jesus said that spirits do not have "flesh

and bones" (NKJV).

Further, each angel is a species of its own—each is one of a kind, even though there are groups or classes (such as *cherubim* or *seraphim*). Unlike the human species, whose members can multiply, angels by nature are simple, created, and indivisible. They are not sexual beings, nor do they engage in marriage; hence, they can produce no offspring (Matt. 22:30). In Luke 20:35–36, Jesus said,

> Those who are considered worthy of taking part in that [eternal] age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection.[45]

Having a fixed *nature* from the moment of their creation, angels do not change. Unlike human beings, they do not grow up or grow old; they have no age, nor are they subject to any other kind of natural alteration. They thus have no accidents,[46] and, hence, they cannot change *accidentally*. The only *essential* change they can undergo is creation or annihilation by God (if He chose to do so).[47]

Since angels have no body, they are not subject to decay and death; they are immortal (Matt. 25:41). Since they cannot change, they are fixed in their nature; consequently, once an angel sins, he is doomed forever (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6). Indeed, the Bible says explicitly that Christ did not die to redeem angels: "It is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants" (Heb. 2:16). Again, those angels who sinned are never called upon to repent, nor can they.[48] Christ's death is never presented as a means of their salvation but only of their condemnation: Jesus, "having disarmed the [spiritual] powers and authorities … made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross" (Col. 2:15).

Like all of God's creatures who possess both rationality *and* morality, angels were given a choice. And, like humans at the point of physical death (Heb. 9:27), once angels have made their final choice, it is eternally too late. Since by nature they cannot change, once they have made their decision, it is final, and they know it (Matt. 8:29).

Church Fathers on the Fall of Angels

The great ecclesiastical teachers, especially Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas, have had much to say about the sin of angels.

Augustine on the Fall of Angels

Since these things are so, those spirits whom we call angels were never at any time or in any way darkness, but, as soon as they were made, were made light; yet they were not so created in order that they might exist and live in any way whatever, but were enlightened that they might live wisely and blessedly. Some of them, having turned away from this light, have not won this wise and blessed life, which is certainly eternal, and accompanied with the sure confidence of its eternity; but they have still the life of reason, though darkened with folly, and this they cannot lose even if they would [desire or aspire to do so]. (*CG*, 11)

That the contrary propensities in good and bad angels have arisen, not from a difference in their nature and origin, since God, the good Author and Creator of all essences, created them both, but from a difference in their wills and desires, it is impossible to doubt. While some steadfastly continued in that which was the common good of all, namely, in God Himself, and in His eternity, truth, and love; others, being enamored rather of their own power, as if they could be their own good, lapsed to this private good of their own, from that higher and beatific good which was common to all, and, bartering the lofty dignity of eternity for the inflation of pride, the most assured verity for the slyness of vanity, uniting love for factious partisanship, they became proud, deceived, envious, (ibid., 12.1)

There is, then, no natural efficient cause or, if I may be allowed the expression, no essential cause, of the evil will, since … the will is made evil by nothing else than defection from God, a defection of which the cause, too, is certainly deficient, (ibid., 12.9)

Anselm on the Fall of Angels

As man must not be restored by a man of a different race, though of the same nature, so are not angels to be saved by any other angel, though all were of the same nature, for they are not like men, all of the same race. For all angels were not sprung from one, as all men were. (*CDH*, 2.21)

Further,

There is another objection to their restoration, viz., that as they fell with none to plot their fall, so they must rise with none to aid them; but this is impossible, [for] had they not sinned, they would have been confirmed in virtue without any foreign aid, simply by the power given to them from the first, (ibid.)

Thomas Aquinas on the Fall of Angels

An angel or any other rational creature, considered in his own nature, can sin.… Mortal sin occurs in two ways in the act of free choice. First, when something evil is chosen.… In another way, sin comes of free choice by electing something good in itself, but not according to the proper measure or rule [as angels did]. (*ST*, 1a.63.1)

A spiritual nature cannot be affected by such pleasures as pertain to bodies, but only such as can be found in spiritual beings.… But there can be no sin when anyone is incited to a good of the spiritual order, unless in such affection the rule of the superior be not kept. Such is precisely the sin of pride—not to be subject to the superior where subjection is due. Consequently the first sin of the angel can be none other than pride, (ibid., la.63.2)

ANSWERING OBJECTIONS ABOUT THE

EFFECTS OF ANGELIC SIN

Many protests have been leveled at the above conclusions. The first, and one of the most perplexing, is about how sin could arise in a perfect creature.

Objection One—Based on the Perfect Nature of Lucifer

The Bible declares that God made all things perfect (Gen. 1:31; 1 Tim. 4:11), which would include the angel Lucifer, who became known as Satan. In God and in His heaven, there is no sin (Hab. 1:13; James 1:13), yet Lucifer sinned and rebelled against God (1 Tim. 3:6), leading a third of all the angels with him (Rev. 12:4). How could a perfect creature, made by a perfect God and placed in a perfect environment (heaven), commit evil? Sin could not have arisen from a perfect God, or from Lucifer's perfect environment, or from his perfect nature. Whence, then, sin?

Response to Objection One

Sin first arose in the universe from Lucifer's free will. As laid out before, God made perfect creatures and gave them both perfect natures *and* perfect freedom. With freedom, though it is good in itself, comes the ability to sin.

Creaturely freedom *is* good, but it does, by nature, contain the possibility of evil. God made Lucifer perfectly good; Lucifer was made evil by choosing it. God gave him the good *fact* of freedom; Lucifer performed the evil *act* of freedom. God provided the good *power* of free choice, but Lucifer performed the bad *action* of free choice.

Even the Calvinistic *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1648) acknowledged that some actions are not necessary or inevitable[49] but instead arise from the secondary cause known as free will: "Neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established" (3.1). Hence, "God hath endued the will of man with the natural liberty that is neither forced nor any absolute necessity of nature determined to good or evil" (9.1).

Objection Two—Based on the Irredeemability of Angels

A third of the angels sinned and became demons (Rev. 12:4). When Adam

sinned, he and his progeny were offered salvation (Gen. 3:15). What about angels? Can they be saved?

Response to Objection Two

The biblical answer is no.

First, the Scriptures say emphatically, "It is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants" (Heb. 2:16). That is, Christ assumed human nature (v. 14), not angelic nature, to redeem human beings, not angels.

Second, the cross of Christ, which is declared to be the source of human salvation, is by contrast proclaimed to be the source of demons' condemnation (Col. 2:14–15).

Third, the lost state of demons is always portrayed in the Bible as final and eternal (2 Peter 2:4; cf. Jude 6). Even they appear to recognize their everlasting doom; as one asked of Jesus, "Have You come here to torment us before the time?" (Matt. 8:29 NASB). Satan actually "*knows* that his time is short" (Rev. 12:12).

Fourth, and finally, Aquinas offers an explanation as to why angels are naturally irredeemable:

> The angel's apprehension differs from man's in this respect, that by his intellect the angel apprehends immovably … whereas man by his reason apprehends movably, proceeding discursively from one thing to another, and having the way open by which he may proceed to either of two opposites; whereas the angel's will adheres fixedly and immovable. [In brief,] as Damascene [c. eighth century] says, "*Death is to men what the fall is to the angels*." Now, it is clear that all the mortal sins of men, grave or less grave, are pardonable before death; whereas after death they are without remission, and endure forever. (*ST*, la.64.2)

Objection Three—Based on the Justice of Angelic Condemnation

It seems unfair to some that humans were given an opportunity for redemption after they fell, while angels were not. Why did God not offer salvation for them as well?

Response to Objection Three

In reply, we must observe several important facts.

First, angels, like humans, do have a choice in their destiny. They freely chose to rebel against God. They were not forced to do so; they were not doomed *against* their will but *in accordance with* their will.

Second, like humans, angels were doomed after their final choice. The only difference is that their first choice was also their last. Even as humans have a cut-off point (Heb. 9:27), angels too make a final decision.

Third, as noted above (by Aquinas), the very nature of angels makes their first choice final, for they are created simple beings who are by their very nature unchangeable (except by annihilation). Hence, once they make a choice to serve or rebel against God, it is permanent, one way or the other.

Fourth, and finally, unlike human beings, angels are never called upon to repent (Acts 17:30; 2 Peter 3:9). In short, what is a lifetime for us is an instant for an angel. Once their minds are freely made up, they are naturally immutable, and, since by nature they cannot change, there is no possibility of their redemption. God, knowing this, did not need to provide salvation for angels.

THE EXTENT OF SIN (DEPRAVITY): VARIOUS VIEWS

As observed above, humans—Adam and Eve after the Fall, as well as all of their natural descendants—are totally and wholly depraved. Just how far this depravity extends (and therefore what is meant by "total depravity") has been a matter of theological dispute for centuries. A brief survey of the various views on total depravity will be helpful before making a determination.

Pelagianism

The Pelagian perspective on human depravity emanates from the British monk Pelagius (c. 354–c. 420), whose alleged views (and/or those of his followers) on the matter were condemned by the Council of Carthage (416–418). He and/or his followers held that human beings are born innocent, just as Adam was created. In this state they are able to obey God, since they inherit no sin from Adam and did not sin "*in* Adam" (cf. Rom. 5) but instead sin *like* Adam. The only thing, then, that Adam bequeathed to us is a bad example.

According to Pelagianism, only *our* own sins are imputed to us (rather than both our sins *and* Adam's). Spiritual and eternal death can only be activated by one's personal sins. Even our physical death is not the result of Adam's sin, as his sin was not transmitted to us. Allegedly, humans were simply created mortal; the original image of God is untarnished from the time of creation, and no grace

is needed for salvation, which can be attained by our unaided free choice.

Arminianism

This view gets it name from Jacob (James) Arminius (1560–1609), a Reformed theologian from Holland, although "Arminianism" also bears resemblance to a view called semi-Pelagianism. However, the popular version of what we know *today* as "Arminianism" springs from John Wesley (1703–1791) and is more properly called "Wesleyanism."[50]

Since subviews in the overall Arminian camp differ significantly, it is difficult to point to a single person who held to all the elements listed here. Even so, a general Arminian view of depravity, in contrast to Pelagianism, maintains that all people are born depraved and *cannot* on their own power obey God. Each human was either potentially or seminally in Adam when he chose evil, and, hence, he or she is born with a corrupt nature, under the stigma of Adam's sin.

Arminianism (Wesleyanism) believes that all human beings are born with both the bent toward sin and the unavoidability of physical death; and should they not repent of their sins, they will die eternally. The image of God in humans is so effaced that they need His grace to overcome it and to move in His direction, as He alone can save them. In contrast to the insistence of extreme Calvinism, however, God's grace does not work *irresistibly* on all (or on the elect only). Rather, God's grace works *sufficiently* on all, awaiting their free cooperation before it becomes savingly (salvifically) effective. H. Orton Wiley (1877–1961) was a theologian in the Arminian (Wesleyan) tradition, as was Richard Watson (1781–1833) before him.

Moderate Calvinism

Unlike Arminianism, moderate Calvinism holds that we inherit a judicial guilt from Adam's sin and that we are legally (and/or naturally) connected to him. As a result of Adam's choice for evil, all human beings, apart from salvation, suffer spiritual death and will undergo both physical and eternal death. Further, God's grace is not merely *sufficient* for all; it is *efficient* for the elect. In order for God's grace to be effective, there must be cooperation by the recipient on whom God has moved.

In common with strong Calvinism,[51] moderate Calvinism maintains that all human beings sinned in Adam, either legally or naturally, and that we all inherit

a sinful nature—Adam's guilt is imputed to all his posterity. This guilt can only be overcome by God's saving grace, which, according to moderate Calvinism, is irresistible only on the *willing*.

Strong Calvinism

Strong Calvinism is on the opposite pole from Pelagianism; it affirms that we are not only born depraved but that we are also *totally* depraved.[52] According to strong Calvinism, the spiritual image of God[53] in human beings has not only been marred, it has been destroyed—not only effaced, but for all practical purposes erased. The natural person cannot understand or respond to the gospel; God must, by irresistible grace, regenerate the sinner (against his will) before he can be saved. Adam's sin has been imputed to the entire human race, and being completely dead in trespasses and sins (totally depraved), the sinner cannot even cooperate with God's saving grace. As with moderate Calvinism, every person born since Adam, apart from Christ, is spiritually dead; those who are not rescued will undergo both physical and eternal death. However, with strong Calvinism, only those select few (the elect) whom God irresistibly regenerates—meaning, they have no choice—will be able to understand and believe the gospel. Strong Calvinism finds its roots in Theodore Beza (1519–1605) and blossomed in Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758).

The various perspectives can be summarized as follows:

VARIOUS VIEWS ON HUMAN DEPRAVITY

	Pelagianism	**Arminianism**	**Moderate Calvinism**	**Strong Calvinism**
State at birth	Innocent	Depraved	Totally Depraved (extensively)	Totally depraved (intensively)
Ability	Can obey God	Can cooperate with God	Can cooperate with God	Can't cooperate with God
Guilt	None	Potential	Judicial (and/ or actual)	Actual (and/ or judicial)

"In Adam" (Rom. 5:12)	Not at all (rather, we sinned *like* Adam)	Potentially (or seminally)	Legally (and/ or naturally)	Naturally (and/ or legally)
What is inherited from Adam	Bad example	Propensity to sin; necessity to die	Propensity to sin; necessity to die	Necessity to sin; necessity to die
Deaths incurred	Spiritual and eternal	Physical and spiritual	Physical, spiritual, and eternal	Physical, spiritual, and eternal
What is imputed	One's own sin	One's own sin (we *ratify* Adam's sin)	One's own sin and Adam's sin	One's own sin and Adam's sin
Spiritual image of God	Retained	Effaced	Effaced	Erased[*]
Effect of grace	None	Sufficient for all	Irresistible on the willing	Irresistible on the unwilling

Of course, there are other shades and variations of views, but Pelagianism, Arminianism (Wesleyanism), moderate Calvinism, and strong Calvinism are the four main perspectives. As the foregoing and following analysis shows, the biblical, theological, and historical evidence favors the moderate Calvinist view.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR THE EFFECTS OF HUMAN SIN

According to the Bible, the effects of sin upon human beings are vast and pervasive. Sin reaches to the very core of our beings, corrupting the totality of human nature—nothing is left untouched.

The Effects of Sin on the Image of God in Humans

Numerous passages speak of humans as created in God's image, beginning with Genesis 1:27 (cf. 5:1; 9:6; Col. 3:10). The relation of sin to this image is theologically important, and it can be summarized in two major points.

The Image of God in Humans Is Effaced but Not Erased

Even in their fallen state, human beings are still in the image of God; His image in people is damaged but not destroyed by sin. Again, it is for this reason that we are forbidden to murder anyone, whether saved or unsaved: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man" (Gen. 9:6). If unsaved persons were not still in the image of God, this prohibition (against murdering them) would make no sense.

Likewise, we are told not to curse other human beings, since they are in God's image, and hence we would thereby be cursing God in effigy: "With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be" (James 3:9–10).

In brief, sin *effaces* but does not *erase* the image of God in human beings; it is *marred* but not *eliminated*. Even the most vile of human beings retain God's likeness, be it oh so vitiated within.

Total Depravity Is Extensive, Not Intensive

Since the whole person is made in God's image, and since sin affects the whole person, the first thing to be said is that the effect of sin on God's image in fallen human beings is pervasive, extending to every dimension of his being—body and soul, mind and will.[54] Hence, it is in this sense that sinful humanity is appropriately described by moderate Calvinism as "totally depraved." This *does not* mean that fallen humans are as sinful as they could be, but it *does* mean that apart from Christ we are not as good as we should be (in accordance with God's perfect nature and the perfection with which He created us).

Sin *does* penetrate and permeate our whole being. Humans *are* born wholly, not partially, depraved; that is, every aspect of our being is affected by sin. No element of human nature is unaffected by inherited evil, even though no aspect is completely destroyed by it.

While this pervasive depravity is *extensive*, it is not *intensive*. That is to say, even though fallenness extends to every dimension of human nature, it does not destroy either human nature or any of its essential powers. For example, fallen human beings can still think, feel, and choose (see below); they have not,

because of sin, lost any of these abilities of personhood. If they had, they would no longer be persons. They *are* still human, and therefore they are still in the image of God, even though they are *fallen* humans, consequently incapable of either initiating or attaining their own salvation.

Ironically, if one takes total depravity too far, he destroys a person's ability to be depraved. For if *total depravity* means "one's ability to know and chose good over evil is destroyed," then the person whose knowledge and volition have been eliminated is no longer able to sin, because then he would have had no access to the good (only evil would have been available to him). There *are* creatures without these abilities, but they are subhuman animals and plants that cannot sin. What has no moral capacity and ability has no moral responsibility.

The Noetic Effects of Human Sin

Sin also has noetic[55] effects on human beings. When Adam chose evil, his mind was darkened by sin, as are the minds of his posterity. Depravity brings spiritual darkness and blindness to unbelievers. Paul said of pagan minds, "Since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a *depraved mind*, to do what ought not to be done" (Rom. 1:28). He told the Corinthians that "the god of this age has *blinded the minds* of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor. 4:4).

Jesus said, "I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness" (John 12:46). Paul reminded the Ephesians, "You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord" (Eph. 5:8). The purpose of salvation is "to open their eyes [unbelievers] and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God" (Acts 26:18).

The Volitional Effects of Human Sin

Sin makes its indelible mark not only on the human mind but also on the human will. The result is that there are several actions the unaided human will *cannot* perform.

For one thing, human will cannot, unmoved by divine grace, seek God. Paul said, "There is no one who understands, no one who seeks God" (Rom. 3:11).

Further, human will cannot initiate salvation. John declared emphatically that believers are "children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a

husband's will, but born of God" (John 1:13).

Also, by the human will one cannot attain his own salvation: "It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy" (Rom. 9:16).

Nonetheless, while the unaided human will cannot do any of the above, there are certain things, by God's grace, that fallen human beings *can* do.

First of all, as both Luther and Calvin acknowledged, the human will is free in the "things below"; that is, there is freedom in social and moral matters. For example, one is free to choose a school, a job, and a life-partner; he is also free to either care for or abuse his children.

In addition, one is free in the choice to receive or reject the gift of salvation (Rom. 6:23). God not only wants all to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9) but He also provides the ability for all who choose to believe (John 1:12). While we cannot believe without God's grace, neither can we receive God's grace of salvation without believing. Again, as John Chrysostom put it:

> In order to stop anyone from asking: "How can we be saved without contributing anything at all to our salvation?" Paul shows that in fact we do contribute a great deal toward it—we supply our faith! (in Schaff, *NPNF*, 1.11:377)

Of course, our act of faith is itself prompted and aided by God: "What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?" (1 Cor. 4:7). Again, "not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God" (2 Cor. 3:5). While God, though, *prompts* our act of faith, He does not *perform* it—it is, after all, our act. While God aids our choice, He does not choose for us. He provides the impetus and assistance, but we must make the decision to believe.

As to the charge that even the act of receiving salvation as a gift from God would be meritorious:[56]

> A rich man bestows, on a poor and famished beggar, alms by which he may be able to maintain himself and his family. *Does it cease to be a pure gift, because the beggar extends his hand to receive it*? Can it be said with propriety that "the alms depend partly on the liberality of the Donor, and partly on the liberty of the Receiver," though the latter would not have possessed the alms unless he had received it by stretching out his hand? … If these assertions cannot be truly made about a beggar who receives alms, how much less can they be made about the gift of faith, for the receiving of which far more acts of Divine Grace are required! (Arminius, *WJA*, 1.365–66, emphasis added)

The Effects of Sin on Human Nature

A human person has a human nature; hence, if the person is fallen, his nature is fallen. Just what does it mean to have a fallen nature? To begin, there are

things this *does* mean.

First, having a fallen nature means we are born this way (Ps. 51:5). The psalmist says, "Even from birth the wicked go astray; from the womb they are wayward and speak lies" (Ps. 58:3; cf. Eph. 2:3).

Second, having a fallen nature means that it is natural for us to sin. Sin is not merely an acquired habit; it is a basic inclination. One does not have to be taught to sin.

Third, having a fallen nature means that one will inevitably sin. Given the opportunity, sin will manifest itself.

Fourth, and finally, having a fallen nature means we are incapable of saving ourselves. No matter how good we try to be, we are still sinners by nature and practice, and, as such, we cannot enter God's perfect heaven without Jesus Christ. In short, having a fallen nature means that we are not simply sinners because we sin; we sin because we are sinners.

However, there are also several things having a sinful nature *does not* mean.

First, as even strong Calvinists agree, having a fallen nature does not mean that we are as sinful as we could be. Rather, as stated before, it means that we are not as good as we should be.

Second, having a fallen nature does not mean that sin is excusable. We are responsible for every sin we commit.

Third, having a fallen nature does not mean we're unable to avoid sin; if we were, then we would not be responsible for our sins—but we are. Indeed, "each of us will give an account of himself to God" (Rom. 14:12), and "the dead [will be] judged according to what they [have] done as recorded in the books" (Rev. 20:12).

Fourth, having a fallen nature does not mean that any particular sin is inescapable. While sin *in general* is inevitable, no sin *in particular* is unavoidable. God's grace is always available for the resistance of sin, both for the believer (1 Cor. 10:13) and for the unbeliever (Titus 2:11–13). As Calvin correctly noted, "It [is] beyond dispute that free will does not enable any man to perform good works, unless he is assisted by grace" (*ICR*, 1.2.2.6).

Fifth, and finally, as already established, having a fallen nature does not mean we have no choice in our salvation. While the unaided human will cannot believe unto salvation, nonetheless, all who are willing to receive God's gift of salvation are aided by His grace to this end. He not only wants all to be saved, but He provides the ability for all who desire it (Phil. 2:13). Our free choice does not *initiate* (1 John 3:19) and cannot *attain* (John 1:13) the unmerited gift of

salvation, but by God's grace (Eph. 2:8–9) our will can *receive* it (John 1:12; 3:16–18).

CONCLUSION

The effects of sin are extensive, both on the human race overall and on individuals in particular (Rom. 3:23). The entire human race is fallen and irredeemable, except by God's grace (Titus 3:5–7; Eph. 2:8–9). Furthermore, each individual is totally depraved, for sin has extended to every part of his being. He is a fallen person, including mind, emotions, will, and body.

While this depravity, however, does not mean that everyone is as evil as they are able to be, it does mean that they are not as good as they need to be. Hence, God's grace is the only force in the universe that can overcome the natural irredeemability of human beings. "Grace alone" (Lat: *sola gratia*) is the only cure for humankind's total depravity. Grace, and only grace, can overcome the vast and devastating effects of sin (Titus 2:11–13).

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CHAPTER SIX

THE DEFEAT OF SIN

God chose not to annihilate sin but rather to defeat it. He chose to defeat it progressively instead of instantaneously. There are many possible reasons for this, but two prominent ones involve (1) the freedom God gave to humans and (2) God's desire to produce a more godlike (godly) product in the process. Defeating evil without destroying freedom, while at the same time perfecting free creatures—this appears to be at the heart of God's plan.

THE DIVINE PLAN TO DEFEAT EVIL[1]

God's plan to defeat evil was devised in the council chambers of eternity. In order to conquer evil, God had to permit it. To permit evil in order to allow for greater good, He had to create free creatures. These he created in two kinds: angels (spirit) and human beings (spirit/body).[2]

THE PREREQUISITES OF GOD'S PLAN

Since God is an eternal Being,[3] His plan was willed from all eternity, rooted in several other divine attributes. Since God is all-knowing (omniscient), He knew how everything would turn out from the beginning.[4] Further, because God

is all-loving (omnibenevolent), it was assured from the start that He would honor the free will He gave to His creatures.[5] And, as God is all-powerful (omnipotent), it was certain from the outset that He would accomplish what He set out to do.[6] As it has been said, the rest is history. Finally, God's freedom guarantees that He was not forced to do what He did,[7] and His omnisapience (all-wisdom) insured that He would choose the wisest means to accomplish His ends.[8]

THE PURPOSE OF GOD'S PLAN

If God knew evil would occur, why did He create at all? He was free to create or not to create, so why did He choose to make a world He knew would fall into sin? This appears to conflict with God being all-good and all-wise, for as an all-good God He must have had a good purpose for doing what He did, and as an all-wise God He must have chosen the best possible way to do it. Why, then, did He freely create a world of free creatures He knew would choose evil—many of whom would never recover?[9] Critics often claim that there were other (better) alternatives open to God.

Alternative One: Not to Have Created

If God is all-knowing,[10] all-good, and free in accordance with His own nature, then there were other options He could have chosen. As all-knowing, God foresaw evil, and as free He could have avoided creating any world at all. This would have avoided all of the evil this world contains and hence would seem to have been preferable.

Alternative Two: To Have Created a Non-Free World

Further, God could have created a nonmoral world where there would be no sin. Such a world, by virtue of having no free beings in it, would be void of any moral evil. This kind of world would seem to be an improvement over the evil one we have.

Alternative Three: To Have Created a Free World Where No One Ever Chooses to Sin

In addition, God could have created a world where no one ever decides for evil. That a free person *can* sin[11] does not mean that he *will* sin.[12] God knew who would sin and who would not, and it would seem that He could have simply created those He knew would not choose evil.

Alternative Four: To Have Created a Free World Where No One Is Allowed to Sin

God is all-powerful, and He could have created free creatures that He prevented from sinning, even if they would have otherwise (if given free will) chosen to do so. Since God does not will evil and has the power to prevent it, exercising His power to make sin impossible would seem to have been a better option. Surely this would appear to have been preferable to the world we have, wherein free creatures have been allowed to sin in such destructive ways.

Alternative Five: To Have Created a Free World Where Sin Occurs but Where All Are Eventually Saved

Finally, why didn't God make a world where everyone is free and where sin occurs, but where everyone is also eventually rescued from it? Such a world would have had the advantage of allowing the freedom to do evil while also including the time and circumstances necessary for us to learn the lessons from it and thus choose to reform. In the end, this would have provided an evil-free world.

The problem for the Christian theist can be summarized in this manner:

(1) God could have chosen an alternative to this world (which contains free creatures who sin) by:
  (a) not creating at all;
  (b) not creating a free world;
  (c) creating a free world that would not sin;
  (d) creating a free world that could not sin; or
  (e) creating a world that sinned but would all be saved in the end.
(2) However, according to His own Word, God did not choose any one of these supposedly better alternatives. Rather, He created a world of free creatures who could and would sin, and yet would not all be saved in the

end.
(3) Since God did not choose one of these apparently "preferable" options, He is vulnerable to the charge that He did not do His best.
(4) To do less than one's best is evil.
(5) Therefore, no all-perfect God exists.

GOD'S PLAN IN PERMITTING EVIL

In response to this objection, one must demonstrate, from an evangelical Christian point of view, that no other possible alternatives would have been better than the one God chose:

(1) In His infinite wisdom and goodness, God chose the plan that would bring the greatest good.
(2) God deemed that the plan resulting in the greatest good would be to permit evil in order to defeat it, without destroying free will in the process.
(3) As He is the greatest possible Good, God willed the greatest possible good for free creatures.
(4) Furthermore, God used the greatest possible means to attain the greatest possible good.

An understanding of this plan will unfold as each of the above alternatives is addressed.

Some theologians challenge the fourth premise ("To do less than one's best is evil"), arguing that God is not obligated to do *His best*; He merely has to do *good*. And what He did in creating this world was good, even if there could have been something better.

This, though, is problematic in view of God being *all*-good. How can the Best Being possible do less than what is *best* to do? It would seem that the perfect Being must perform perfect actions, for less than the best does not measure up to the standards of the Best. In any event, it is necessary to address the alternatives, for an opponent can also argue that it was not good for God to permit evil in the first place, since He had other alternatives that would have resulted in no evil.[13]

Response to Alternative One (Not to Have Created)

In reply, the truth is that *no world* is not morally better than *some world*.

Nothing is not better than *something*. This is a category mistake; *something* and *nothing* have nothing in common, so they cannot be compared. This is not even like comparing apples to oranges, since at least both of those are fruits. It is more like comparing apples and no apples, insisting that *no apples* tastes "better" or "worse.[14]

Further, the critic's argument is that *no world* would have been morally better than this one. But *no world* is not a moral world (no world is not a world at all)—it is amoral.[15] Here again, it is a category mistake to claim that an amoral world is *morally better* than a moral world. They aren't in the same theological or ideological realm.[16]

Therefore, *to create* was not better than *to not create*. Creation was a free choice; God was under no compunction to create something. He did not create because He *had to* (either metaphysically or morally)—He created because He *wanted to*.

Response to Alternative Two (To Have Created a Non-Free World)

In the same way, a non-free world is not morally better than a free world, for a non-free world is a nonmoral world—free will is necessary for morality. As just noted (in response to Alternative One), a nonmoral world cannot be *morally better* than a moral world, regardless of whether there is no world at all or whether the world is non-free. Since the posited world is not even a moral world (either being no world at all, as in Alternative One, or being a non-free world, as in Alternative Two), there is no moral basis for the comparison with the world God made. This alternative is a category mistake as well.

Response to Alternative Three (To Have Created a Free World Where No One Ever Chooses to Sin)

This alternative implies that it is possible to have a free world where no one ever decides for evil. This conclusion is questionable; in fact, it involves an equivocation on the word *possible*. Of course, it is *logically possible* that a free creature will never sin, since human freedom to sin involves the ability to do otherwise.[17] However, not everything logically possible is *actually achievable*.

Given what we know about freedom, a world where *no one* exercised it in a wrong way (*ever*) is beyond highly unlikely. In a 50/50 situation, if there are really two possibilities—for example, heads and tails—and the coin is flipped a

million times while never coming up tails, we suspect that the coin is loaded. And, unlike the coin, *humans are free to choose otherwise*.

At any rate, even if it is logically possible that God could have created a world in which no one ever sinned, it may have been actually *un* achievable, if we posit God's infallibly foreknowing that in every truly free world He could have created, at least some would freely sin. So while a free world where no one ever sins is *logically* possible, it may not be *actually* possible. Hence, it is possible that God could *not* have created only those who wouldn't sin, since He knew with certainty that in any group He made some would choose evil. For example, it is possible that had God created fewer angels, a third of them would have sinned.

In addition, even if God could have created a world where everyone was free but no one ever sinned, it is debatable whether this truly would be best. The best possible world is the one that achieves the greatest good—which, as Scripture makes clear, is achieved by allowing first-order (lower) evils in order to achieve second-order (higher) goods. For example, patience is not achievable without tribulation, nor forgiveness without sin, nor courage without fear, nor mercy without tragedy. *All* of these greater goods are dependent on permitting the precondition of evil. If, then, the greater good cannot be achieved without allowing evil, and if God must achieve the greatest good (because He *is* the greatest Good), then it seems to follow that it would not have been best for God to have chosen to create a free world where sin would not occur (even if it were actually possible).

If, as mentioned before, it is objected that God does not have to do His best and, consequently, did not have to achieve the *greatest* good but simply a *good* world, then the entire objection that God should have chosen a better world fails anyway. This present world that God created with allowance for sin *is* a good world, and if a good world will suffice, then this world meets the criterion and the objection is irrelevant.

Response to Alternative Four (To Have Created a Free World Where No One Is Allowed to Sin)

As to the view that God could have made a free world in which no one was permitted to do evil, it appears to be contradictory. God is omnipotent, but even an omnipotent Being cannot do what is contradictory,[18] and it is a contradiction to say that one is free to sin but yet is not allowed to sin. The only logical way

sin can be avoided is for there to be no ability to do otherwise. Once someone is forced not to sin, he is not free; we have noted that *forced freedom* is an absurd concept. God *can*, of course, make creatures that cannot sin; they are, for example, rocks and robots, not moral beings. A *moral* creature, by nature, is one who is free to choose,[19] and it is antithetical to say one is free to do otherwise and also *not* free to do otherwise.

Response to Alternative Five (To Have Created a Free World Where Sin Occurs but All Are Eventually Saved)

Like Alternative Three, a free world where everyone sins and then gets saved is *conceivable*, but it may not be *achievable*. As long as everyone is truly free, it is always possible that in every possible world someone will refuse to be saved.[20] Of course, if God *forced* everyone to be saved they would not be free—there is no such reality as *coerced liberty*. Since God is love, He does not and cannot force Himself on people against their will. So a sinful world where universal salvation occurs because of divine coercion upon the unwilling is untenable. In addition, while a world where everyone eventually is saved because they unilaterally refuse *ever* to choose sin *would* be evil-free in the end; nevertheless, it is possible that given what God foreknew from all eternity about their use of free will, such a world is not truly attainable.

Further, a world where sin never materializes is *conceivable*, but it may not actually be the most *morally desirable*.

For one thing, if evil is not permitted, it cannot be defeated. As with automobiles, a tested world is better than an untested one. Or to put it another way, no boxer can actually defeat an opponent unless he gets into the ring with him. God, then, may have permitted evil in order to defeat it (and thus achieve a greater good).

Also, if evil is not allowed, then higher virtues cannot be attained. To reemphasize a previously stated example, there is no way for us to experience the joy of being forgiven without God's allowance for our fall into sin (e.g., Luke 7:36–48). While a world where sin does occur and everyone is saved is *theoretically conceivable*, it seems, nevertheless, that such a world would be *morally inferior*.

In brief, since none of these alternative views is necessary (and some are impossible), it has not been demonstrated that any theorized world-variant is morally better than the one we have. As a result, opponents have failed to show

that God did less than His best in creating our world. This, of course, does not mean we are committed to the belief that this present world is the best world achievable. God is not yet finished: *This world is only the best* way *possible to the best world achievable*.[21]

SUMMARY OF THE ARGUMENTS FOR AN ALTERNATIVE WORLD

Pulling the strings together, we have seen that no alternative has been demonstrated to be superior to the world God chose to create, namely, a world where evil is possible and in which it has actually happened. Surely nonmoral (amoral) worlds—Alternatives One and Two—cannot be *morally* better than this moral world. Likewise, a world of forced freedom—Alternative Four—is not even a logically viable alternative. And a world where persons are free but evil never occurs—Alternative Three—is theoretically conceivable but may not be actually achievable.[22] The same is true of Alternative Five, for it may be that no such world would or could actually materialize where everyone freely willed to be saved. (And even if it were achievable, it would be morally inferior.) In short, it can be argued:

(1) If the greatest possible Being (God) decides to create a moral world, then it is either
   (a) necessary for Him to achieve the greatest possible good in it, or
   (b) not necessary for Him to achieve the greatest possible good in it.
(2) If it is *not* necessary for Him to achieve the greatest possible good in it, then this world meets the qualification, and the objection (that the world could have been better if He had chosen an alternative plan) fails.
(3) If it *is* necessary for God to achieve the greatest possible good, then permitting this evil world as a necessary precondition for achieving the highest good would be the best alternative.
(4) This world has not yet achieved the greatest good.[23]
(5) However, this present evil world is the best means of achieving the end of the greatest good, which could not be achieved without the preconditioning presence of evil.
(6) An all-good God must accomplish the best end.
(7) An all-wise God must choose the best means to the best end.

(8) An all-powerful God can achieve an end that does not involve any contradiction.
(9) It is contradictory to force freedom to achieve a moral end.
(10) Hence, universalism,[24] in which all are saved (including some against their will), is a contradiction.
(11) Therefore, it is conceivable that this present evil world is the best possible means of obtaining the best world achievable (namely, (a) one where some are saved and some are lost and (b) where sin is defeated and a greater good is achieved).

According to the Bible, what has been shown here to be philosophically and logically possible is *actually* what God decided to do. That is, He chose to permit evil in order to defeat it, thus bringing about a greater good. He chose to create a perfect—and free—world, which He knew would become imperfect by free choices, so that He could bring about a more perfect world. In other words, He chose to permit a world that is not the best possible world in order to achieve one that is. In summary, while our world is not the *best world* possible, it is the *best way* possible to achieve the *best of all possible worlds*, namely, a world where (1) everyone freely chooses his own destiny and (2) where sin is forever defeated (hell) and righteousness reigns eternally (heaven).

GOD DESIRES TO, CAN, AND WILL DEFEAT EVIL

The very nature of God assures us that evil will eventually be defeated.

(1) God is all-loving and wants to defeat evil.
(2) God is all-powerful and can defeat evil.
(3) Evil is not yet defeated.[25]
(4) Hence, evil will yet be defeated (in the future).

The fact that God is all-good and all-powerful guarantees this conclusion. Further, since God is all-wise, we can be sure that He has chosen the best means to that end (defeating evil).

Consequently, while this present world is not the best of all possible worlds, nonetheless, it must be the best means to the best world. Thus, a world in which evil is permitted is the best kind of world to permit as a means to produce the

best kind of world—one that has no evil in it. That world is our promised destiny.[26]

THE PROCESS OF DEFEATING EVIL

As previously established, God chose not to annihilate all evil immediately, for then He would have to destroy all the good made possible by freedom as well. Rather, in His infinite wisdom, God decided to defeat evil gradually, without destroying free will. God is doing this in stages through out the ages.

The Role of Dispensations

Dispensation is a biblical term (see Volume 4, chapters 13, and 15). Speaking of Christ's coming kingdom, Paul affirmed "that in the *dispensation* of the fullness of the times He might gather together … all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth in Him" (Eph. 1:10 NKJV).

A dispensation is a "divine order of affairs" or a "period of administration." It is a specific time in the unfolding drama of redemption wherein God ordains a specific arrangement of events and commands for a specific purpose. His purpose includes the defeat of evil.

The Number of Dispensations

Most evangelical scholars believe in several administrations of God's plan, even if they do not use the term *dispensation*. For example, the divine economy God set up in the Garden of Eden, under which Adam and Eve were tested, is obviously not the same as the one set up between Eden and Moses, or the one after the time of Christ. Neither do we have the same conditions now that will prevail when Christ bodily returns to earth and reigns after His second coming (see Volume 4, chapter 17).[27] In this sense, virtually all evangelical scholars are "dispensationalist," even those who disavow the label. The only question for everyone, then, is how many dispensations there are. *Minimally*, there would seem to be at least four or five. Some scholars see more. Be that as it may, it is not the *number* but the *nature* and *purpose* of dispensations that matter.

The Nature and Purpose of Dispensations

Relying upon the traditional seven dispensations, God's purpose to defeat evil seems to go something like this: In each age or period from Adam through Christ's return, God orchestrates a different condition, with a different test, to see whether human beings will obey Him. Each time they fail—under almost every conceivable condition. The sum total of the dispensational examinations demonstrates that it is always wrong to disobey God and that complete obedience to Him is the only true path to eternal satisfaction. The aforementioned seven dispensations can be delineated in Scripture.

DISPENSATIONS

The Dispensation of Probation (Innocence)

In the Garden of Eden, the test was whether in a state of innocent purity, when people did not know good or evil, they would obey God's command (Gen. 2:16–17). They failed miserably, and God, after judgment (Gen. 3), gave them another chance to prove themselves under a new condition—that of conscience.[28]

The Dispensation of Conscience (Moral Sense)

After the Fall, human beings had a conscience that informed them what was right and what was wrong (Rom. 2:12–15). But here too they heeded not the command of God to do good and shun evil. The period of conscience also ended in tragedy and judgment when God sent the Flood (Gen. 6–9).

The Dispensation of Human Government

Since violence had filled the earth (Gen. 6:11) in the previous period, God established human government for humans to obey, providing the sword to enforce it (Gen. 9:6). However, here again human beings failed the test and used the powers of government to make a kingdom in defiance of God. This disobedience to God's established order led to disaster; He destroyed their tower and dispersed them by confounding their languages (Gen. 11).

The Dispensation of Promise

Thus began the period in which God, after judging the peoples at Babel, chose one nation through whom He would bless all others (Gen. 12:1–3). He gave Abraham the Promised Land and commanded him to dwell in it. Subsequently, as before, humans failed the test. Abraham (and his offspring after him) left the land and descended into Egypt, the land of bondage.[29]

The Dispensation of Law

As before, God provided grace, giving humans another chance under new conditions to prove that they would not abuse their freedom. They accepted the law given by God through Moses, but then proceeded to disobey by engaging in idolatry and immorality down through the centuries, until God sent them into captivity, first by the Assyrians and then by the Babylonians. Indeed, even when He sent the promised Messiah, they crucified Him (John 1:10–12); consequently, their temple was destroyed, and God scattered them throughout the world. Yet God's moral law embedded in the Old Testament theocracy did not pass away with it, but continues in the New Testament as a reflection of His moral character.

The Dispensation of Grace

While God was gracious in every prior age, offering new opportunities to obey Him under new conditions, His unlimited benevolence was poured out through the Cross at the beginning of this new dispensation—the age of grace. Here too God's grace was spurned by the masses; this era will end in the tragedy of the Great Tribulation at the end of the age, though God's grace exists in every age.[30]

The Dispensation of the Kingdom

Although God is sovereign and has always ruled the affairs of humanity, nonetheless, the promised reign of the Messiah in a visible, literal kingdom has not yet occurred (Matt. 19:28; Acts 1:5; Rev. 19–20). This dispensation will provide an opportunity to test human freedom under a new condition—one in which the devil will be bound for "a thousand years" (Rev. 20:2). Unlike in

previous periods, human beings will not be able to use the excuse that "the devil made me do it." Even so, after the millennial reign of Christ—personally and physically, here on earth—there will be a mass rebellion against God (Rev. 20:7–8), an uprising that He will judge with fire from heaven (v. 9).

So concludes the series of the periods of human history in which people have been divinely examined under almost every conceivable condition: innocence, conscience, government, promise, law, grace, and the kingdom. In each case they proved (or will prove) that human freedom, left to itself, will always rebel against God. They have also demonstrated that God is always right and that real satisfaction comes only from obeying Him.[31]

Again, the point is not how many of these periods existed or even what they should be called, but instead that there have been a number of different conditions at distinct time periods under which God has tested humankind in working out His plan to defeat evil. In the end, God will have used human history, with its varied conditions and administrations (dispensations), to show in eternity to come that (1) sin is always wrong, (2) God is always right, and (3) evil is justly put away forever.

Untold throngs from all the ages will be able to testify from their experience, under a wide variety of conditions, that God is just, that sin is destructive, and that submitting freely to His will is the only way to obtain true and permanent blessedness. In effect, *God will have defeated sin by permitting it in virtually every possible way*. This defeat will include a final separation of the wheat from the tares, the sheep from the goats—the latter being sent to eternal condemnation (Matt. 25:40–41; Rev. 20:14–15) and the former into everlasting bliss (Rev. 21–22). Sin will be quarantined forever, and each person will be assigned the permanent place of his or her own choosing. C. S. Lewis (1898–1963) put it:

> I would pay any price to be able to say truthfully "All will be saved." But my reason retorts, "Without their will, or with it?" If I say "Without their will," I at once perceive a contradiction; how can the supreme voluntary act of self-surrender be involuntary? If I say "With their will," my reason replies "How, if they *will not* give in?" (*PP*, 106–07).

Therefore,

> There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God says, in the end, "*Thy* will be done." All that are in hell, choose it. (*GD*, 69)

Lewis believed that "without that self-choice there could be no hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find.

To those who knock it is opened" (ibid.). God has determined not to rob His creatures of the freedom He gave them, and hence to instead defeat sin without destroying volition.[32]

THE EXECUTION OF GOD'S PLAN

God's plan to defeat evil was and is (and will be) carefully and gradually executed in seven primary stages:

(1) the creation of free creatures;
(2) the fall of humankind;
(3) the preparation for the Savior;
(4) the incarnation of the Savior;
(5) the present session of the Savior (in heaven);
(6) the return and reign of the Savior (the final judgment); and
(7) the new heaven and new earth.

The Creation of Free Creatures

As omniscient,[33] God knows the end from the beginning (Isa. 46:10). Before He created, He foresaw the fall of humanity and made plans for our salvation. Nonetheless, God created human beings innocent and perfect,[34] endowing them with free will (Gen. 2:16) and, consequently, holding them responsible for their choices (Gen. 2:16–17).

The Fall of Humankind

Again, God foresaw the Fall, even planning for it from all eternity. John spoke of "the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world" (Rev. 13:8), and Paul said, "He hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love" (Eph. 1:4 KJV). Nothing catches the omniscient Mind by surprise. Permitting Adam and Eve to sin was part of God's plan to defeat evil.

The Preparation for the Savior

Immediately following the Fall, God announced His eternal plan to provide salvation for all humankind. He said to the serpent, whom He had allowed to tempt Adam and Eve, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel” (Gen. 3:15). The Savior would be the Seed of the woman, and He would ultimately—fatally—crush the serpent’s head. This Christ did *officially* on the Cross (Col. 2:14) and will do *actually* when He returns (Rom. 16:20; Rev. 20:10).

The rest of the Old Testament is the preparation for the coming Savior. To begin, God called into existence the holy nation through which He would bring the Promised Seed. In the *books of the law* (Genesis through Deuteronomy), God laid the *foundation* for Christ. In the *historical* books (Joshua through Nehemiah), He made the *provision* for the holy nation to enter and obtain the Holy Land so that they could produce the Holy One (Christ).

We see, then, that in Genesis God chose the nation; in Exodus He redeemed them; in Leviticus He sanctified them; in Numbers He guided them, and in Deuteronomy He instructed them so that in Joshua they could be victorious. In Judges they were unsettled without a king, but in 1 Samuel the nation was established and in 2 Samuel it was expanded. After the reign of Solomon, the nation declined (in 1 Kings) and was deported (in 2 Kings—a *prophetic* history repeated from a *priestly* viewpoint in 1 and 2 Chronicles). In Esther the nation was protected, and in Ezra and Nehemiah they were returned and rebuilt.

Meanwhile, the *poetic* books express an *aspiration* for Christ. Job aspired for mediation, Psalms for communion with God, Proverbs for wisdom, Ecclesiastes for the greatest good (Lat: *summum bonun*), and Song of Solomon for intimate union—*all* of which was found ultimately in Jesus the Messiah.

Finally, the *prophetic* books (Isaiah through Malachi) earnestly proclaim an *expectation* for Christ. Each book in its own way anticipated the coming Savior,[35] concluding the Old Testament preparation for the One who was to bring salvation.

The Incarnation of the Savior

> When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons [adoption]. (Gal. 4:4–5)

The *anticipation* of the Old Testament became the *realization* of the New Testament: The eternal Word assumed temporal flesh. He became incarnate (1) to fulfill prophecy, (2) to manifest deity, and (3) to redeem humanity.

First of all, as John says,

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God … [And] the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:1, John 1:14)

Also, Jesus said, “Even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45), and “The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost” (Luke 19:10).

The Gospels detail the historic manifestation of Christ; Acts chronicles the spread of the sharing of Christ; the Epistles establish the interpretation and application of Christ; and Revelation reveals the final consummation in Christ.

Christ’s Substitutionary Death

Jesus did not come simply to speak to His people as their Prophet, but He also made a sacrifice for them as their Priest (see Mark 10:45): “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full… and I lay down my life for the sheep” (John 10:10, 15). Christ’s atoning death was not merely exemplar,[36] but it was also sacrificial and substitutionary.[37] He died in our place, as a substitute for our sins.[38]

Christ’s Physical Resurrection

The resurrection of Christ is the kingpin of God’s plan of redemption. Paul wrote, “He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification” (Rom. 4:25). Jesus, when asked for proof of His identity, answered,

> A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. (Matt. 12:39–40)

As He approached the cross, Jesus said, specifically: “ ‘The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life.’ And the disciples were filled with grief” (Matt. 17:22–23).

The resurrection of Christ was the dominant theme of early apostolic preaching (e.g., Acts 2, 13). It is the culmination point of Matthew, Mark, Luke, *and* John, occupying the last sections of each. Indeed, Paul proclaimed that the resurrection of Jesus was at the heart of the gospel (1 Cor. 15:1–8) and that one could not be saved without believing in it (1 Cor. 15:14–19; cf. Rom. 10:9).

Christ's Bodily Ascension Into Heaven

Christ's work of salvation did not end with His death and resurrection. He told Mary, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, '*I am returning to my Father* and your Father, to my God and your God' " (John 20:17). He said this because He had not yet completed His work by ascending to the Father and receiving acceptance of His finished work of salvation. His ascension, like His resurrection, was announced in advance.

Luke wrote, "As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem."[39] Later, before His ascension, He said,

> "I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. (Luke 24:49–51)

In John 14:2–3, Jesus told His disciples,

> In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

His ascension was necessary to complete the work of salvation by preparing a place for His bride. Paul said,

> Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. (Eph. 5:25–27)

Jesus promised,

> I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because *I am going to the Father* … You heard me say, "I am going away and I am coming back to you." If you loved me, you would be glad that *I am going to the Father*. (John 14:12, 28)

Without the Ascension, the Holy Spirit would not have descended to indwell and empower the disciples.

Jesus also said,

> *I am going to the Father*, where you can see me no longer.… I came from the Father and entered the

world; now *I am leaving the world and going back to the Father*. (John 16:10, 28)

The language is unequivocal: Jesus came from and returned to His Father—He descended and then ascended.

> What "does he ascended"[40] mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe. (Eph. 4:9–10)

Just as Jesus in His humiliation descended to the grave, so in His exaltation He ascended into heaven.

The Ascension is implied in Philippians 2:8–11, regarding Christ's exaltation:

> Being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! *Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name*, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Acts 1:9–11 is the chief text on Christ's bodily assumption into heaven. It affirms that the Ascension was a literal, visible rising of His resurrection body. His body was not, as some suggest, transformed into an invisible one. Rather, His physical body simply passed out of their sight behind "a cloud":

> After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."[41]

Christ's Present Session (the Church)

In addition to Christ's physical death, literal bodily resurrection, and actual ascension into heaven, He has an indescribably important "present priestly session" in heaven on behalf of believers.

> My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 2:1–2)

According to John, Satan is the accuser of God's people (Rev. 12; cf. Job. 1–2)

> Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. *For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down*" (Rev. 12:10).

In view of this, Christ—our Advocate—counters by pleading (with His Father) the efficacy of His blood, which was shed for our sins.

> It is declared: "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek." … Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant. Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. Such a high priest meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. (Heb. 7:17, 22–26)

Because Christ is human as well as divine, He can sympathize with our human frailties:

> Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. (Heb. 4:14–15)

Since He Himself was tempted in all points that we are, He can, by His present session, overcome these temptations:

> No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. (1 Cor. 10:13)

This "way out" is provided by Christ's intercession for us, His present priestly ministry on our behalf.

The Return and Reign of the Savior

As noted above, Jesus will come again and fulfill His role as King over His people. The complete discussion of Christ's second coming and subsequent reign is found under "Eschatology."[42]

Christ As King

Jesus is not only Prophet to and Priest for His people, but one day He will literally (actually, physically) be King over them as well: "I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you

who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28). John added,

> I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and *reigned with Christ a thousand years*. (Rev. 20:4)

The Final Judgment

According to Revelation,

> When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever. (20:7–10)

This is followed by the final judgment before the Great White Throne:

> Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Rev. 20:11–15)

The New Heaven and New Earth

Following this, John said,

> Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."
>
> One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates.…
>
> The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second

> sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass. I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. (Rev. 21:1–4, 9–12, 18–22)

Also describing this great event, Peter wrote:

> The day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. (2 Peter 3:10–13; cf. Isa. 65:17–25)

THE RESULT OF GOD'S PLAN

God's great plan culminates in the total defeat of evil. Evil was vanquished *officially* at the Cross (Col. 2:14; Heb. 2:14) and will be defeated *actually* at Christ's return.

The Official and Actual Victories Over Sin

This official defeat of sin at the Cross notwithstanding, the fact is that Satan is still present and acting upon planet earth. He knows, however, that his doom is sealed (Matt. 8:29) and that his time is short (Rev. 12:12). The day of his destiny is coming:

> Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after [God] has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he "has put everything under his feet." Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all. (1 Cor. 15:24–28)

We see, then, that the official defeat of sin came at the First Advent; the actual defeat will be at the Second Coming.

There are three stages in the overall battle to defeat sin in the lives of God's children.[43]

Justification (deliverance from the *penalty* of sin) is a past action for all

believers, accomplished at the Cross.

Sanctification (deliverance from the *power* of sin) is a present and continuous process of believers becoming Christlike, accomplished by the Holy Spirit's power and presence.

Finally, *glorification* (deliverance from the *presence* of sin) will take place at Christ's return—the dawning of the eternal kingdom.[44]

The Eventual (Ultimate) Defeat of Sin

We speak of the *defeat*, not the *destruction*, of sin, because sin, in the sinner, will continue forever in hell. Even so, *God will defeat sin without destroying the sinner*. Thus, what is meant by *defeat* must be unpacked.

What does the defeat of sin *not* mean?

For one thing, it does not mean that God will annihilate sinners.[45] This would be to attack His own immortal image, which all sinners, even those in hell, still bear.

Further, the annihilation of all sinners would not be punishment, since those who do not exist cannot feel any pain.

What is more, there are degrees of punishment in hell (Rev. 20:12–13), and clearly there cannot be "degrees of annihilation."

Finally, it is contrary to the nature of an all-loving God to snuff out people who do not love Him in return. Rather, in His infinite love, God will allow even those who hate Him to "have it their way." Again, as C. S. Lewis intoned, since they refuse to say to Him, "Thy will be done," *He* will say to *them*, "Thy will be done."

What *does* the defeat of sin mean?

For one thing, it means everlasting torment.[46] Sin against the Eternal demands eternal consequence. God is forever just and hence cannot overlook sin forever.

For another thing, it involves eternal separation of the saved from the lost, of righteousness from sin. Today, good and evil exist side by side. As Jesus said, the wheat (saved) and the tares (lost) must live together for the time being: "Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: 'First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn' " (Matt. 13:30). For, in the end,

> The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and

gnashing of teeth. (Matt. 13:41–42)

What frustrates good people is evil, and what frustrates evil people is good. The final solution demands a separation, where there will be no more evil to frustrate good persons and no more good to frustrate evil persons. Each will have it according to their respective wills: Sin will be defeated in the saved, since they will be rescued from its very presence, and sin will also be defeated in the unsaved, since they will no longer be able to spread it to others. The infection of evil will be forever halted by its everlasting quarantine. Therefore, the good will be forever preserved from evil's deadly effects.

Finally, evil is *defeated* because the good is actually victorious over it. Evil has been proven to be wrong in every age and in every way. Good can no longer be contaminated by it, and the righteous will reign while the wicked are in pain. The good will be unshackled from the presence of sin, and the evil will be forever enslaved by it. There will indeed be "no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" (Rev. 21:4 NKJV).

THE DEFEAT OF SATAN

Sin will not ultimately be defeated until Satan is defeated. God's plan to defeat evil, then, is also a plan to defeat the devil and his demons.

The Creation of the Devil

We have noted that God did not create the devil as such. Rather, He created pure spiritual beings,[47] and some of them rebelled against Him, becoming "the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41). God created only good things (Gen. 1:31), for "every creature of God is good" (1 Tim. 4:4 NKJV). And God created all the heavenly host: "Praise Him, all His angels.… For He commanded and they were created" (Ps. 148:2, 5 NKJV). Paul said,

> By him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him. (Col. 1:16 KJV)

The Fall of the Devil

As we have seen, while Ezekiel 28 speaks directly about the prince of Tyre,

nonetheless it eloquently expresses truths about the one who inspired him, for Paul reminds us that pride brought Lucifer down (cf. 1 Tim. 3:6).

Speaking of the King of Tyre, who emulated Satan, the Lord said,

> "*You were the model of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God*; every precious stone adorned you: ruby, topaz and emerald, chrysolite, onyx and jasper, sapphire, turquoise and beryl.… *You were anointed as a guardian cherub*, for so I ordained you. *You were on the holy mount of God; you walked among the fiery stones*.
>
> *You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you*. Through your widespread trade you were filled with violence, and you sinned. So I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God, and I expelled you, O guardian cherub, from among the fiery stones. *Your heart became proud on account of your beauty*, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor. So I threw you to the earth" (Ezek. 28:12–17).

Speaking of the king of Babylon, Isaiah's words also describe the one who inspired and typified his fall:

> *How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!* How art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! *For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High*. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit. (Isa. 14:12–15 KJV)

The Fall of the Demons

Many good angels followed Satan in His rebellion against God. John wrote:

> There appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth … And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. (Rev. 12:3–4, 7–9 KJV)

Peter said, "God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment" (2 Peter 2:4 KJV). Again, Jude added, "The angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day" (Jude 6).

The Plan of the Devil and His Demons

The purpose of Satan can be determined in large part from his many names. He is “the prince of this world” (John 12:31; John 16:11); “the prince of the power of the air” (Eph. 2:2 NASB); “the god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4); “Satan” (“adversary”—Zech. 3:1; Rev. 12:9); “the Devil” (“slanderer”—Luke Rev 4:2; Rev. 12:9); “the serpent” (“crafty”—Gen 3:1; “that ancient serpent” (Rev. 12:9); “the great dragon” (“terrifying”—Rev. 12:3, 7, 9); “the evil one” (John 17:15; 1 John 5:18); “the Destroyer” (Rev. 9:11); “the Tempter” (Matt. 4:3; 1 Thess. 3:5); “the Accuser” (Job 1:9; Zech. 3:1; Rev. 12:10); “the Deceiver” (Rev. 12:10; cf. Eph. 6:11); “the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2 NKJV); “Beelzebub” (“prince of demons”—Matt. 12:25; Luke 11:15); “Baal-Zebub” (“Lord of high places”—2 Kings 1:3); “Abaddon” (“Apollyon,” “destructor”—Rev. 9:11); “Belial” (2 Cor. 6:15), an “angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14), and “the evil one” (1 John 5:19).

In brief, like the antichrist whom he inspires, the devil “opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God” (2 Thess. 2:4 NKJV). He not only opposes God, but he opposes God’s plan and God’s people. As John stated, he “accuses them [the saints] before our God day and night” (Rev. 12:10).

Satan’s tactics are to cause doubt, denial, disobedience, deception, and the destruction of God’s people and plan. Paul said, “No wonder, for … Satan disguises himself as an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14 NASB).

The Defeat of the Devil and His Demons

The defeat of the devil, like the defeat of sin, is not accomplished in one blow. It was *promised* from the beginning, when God said to the serpent: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; *he will crush your head*, and you will strike his heel.” This was not officially *accomplished*, however, until Christ died on the cross and rose again:

> He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And *having disarmed the powers and authorities*, he made a public spectacle of them, *triumphing over them by the cross*. (Col. 2:14–15)

Just how did this happen? While the serpent was biting the heel of the Savior (by His crucifixion), the Savior was crushing the head of the serpent (by His resurrection). As one writer put it, Satan bit on the bait of Christ’s humanity and was caught on the hook of His deity. The writer of Hebrews said, “Since the

children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity *so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil*" (2:14).

The defeat of Satan is also in three stages.

> *Officially*, it occurred (as the above verses indicate) on the Cross.
> *Practically*, it is occurring through the purification of believers.
> *Actually*, it will not occur until Christ's return.

These correspond to the aforementioned three stages of salvation in the believer's life: justification (salvation from the penalty of sin—*official*); sanctification (salvation from the power of sin—*practical*), and glorification (salvation from the presence of sin—*actual*).

Satan was defeated officially (legally) by the death of Christ (Rom. 3–5). He is defeated practically (applicationally) in our lives when we resist him by the power of the Cross (Rom. 6–7). And He will be defeated finally (ultimately) when Christ returns (Rom. 8) and redeems our bodies from death. In this connection, Paul promised the Romans, "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet" (Rom. 16:20):

> We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as *we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies*. (Rom. 8:22–23)

In this final stage of salvation, the defeat of Satan (and his demons) will consist of two main elements.

First, the wheat and the tares, the sheep and the goats, will be separated from each other.

> All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world." … Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:32–34, 41).

Second, not only will Satan be separated from the good so that he can no longer corrupt it, but he will be quarantined from spreading evil:

> The devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. Likewise, all his demons will be cast into the Lake of Fire with him. (Rev. 20:10 NASB)

John wrote, “The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8 NASB). Finally, in the end, he who was the great destroyer will be destroyed.

CONCLUSION

God permitted evil to defeat evil. He *created* only good creatures, but He *permitted* evil in order that He might ultimately conquer it. Satan, who was the great deceiver, was self-deceived; Paul speaks of “the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Cor. 2:8 NASB). While the serpent bit the Savior’s heel, Christ crushed the devil’s head. The defeat of sin has not been swift and immediate, but it will be complete and final.

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PART TWO

SALVATION (SOTERIOLOGY)

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE ORIGIN OF SALVATION

S is the precondition for salvation;[1] salvation isn't necessary unless there are sinners in need of being saved. As to the origin of salvation, there is universal agreement among orthodox theologians: God is the author of our salvation, for whereas human sin originated with human beings on earth, salvation originated with God in heaven.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR SALVATION

The topic at hand is divided into several soteriological sections: the origin of God's decrees,[2] the nature of God's decrees, the order of God's decrees, and the results of God's decrees.

The Origin of God's Decrees

The origin of salvation is the will of God, who decreed from all eternity to provide salvation for those who would believe: "Salvation is *of the Lord*" (Jonah 2:9 NKJV). As John puts it, believers are "children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but *born of God*" (John 1:13). Paul adds, "It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on *God's mercy*" (Rom. 9:16), for "he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through

Jesus Christ, *in accordance with his pleasure and will*" (Eph. 1:5). In short, salvation originated in God's decision to save us. Otherwise, no one would ever be rescued.

With God, as with human beings in His image, free choice is self determination;[3] salvation is based in a free, self-determined act of God. This decision was made in accordance with His good and gracious nature, but the choice was completely self-determined (cf. Eph. 1:5; 1 Peter 1:2). There was no external or internal compulsion for God either to create or to save. He did both freely.[4]

Election According to God's Foreknowledge

Peter spoke of the "elect *according to the foreknowledge of God* the Father" (1 Peter 1:2 NKJV). Thus, it is necessary that God act lovingly, since He *is* love (1 John 4:16), and it is also necessary that God act justly, since He is just (Gen. 18:25; Rom. 2:11; 3:26). However, it was not required that God create moral creatures; what is incumbent is that if God chooses to create moral creatures, that He then act consistently with His unchanging nature of love and justice and with the freedom He chose to give His creatures.[5]

The Condition for Giving vs. the Condition for Receiving

Likewise, it is necessary that upon the conditions that God chose to create and to save free moral creatures, He does so in accordance with the freedom He gave them. Hence, there is no condition for God's *giving* salvation, but there is one (and only one) condition laid down for *receiving* the gift of eternal life: faith (Acts 16:31; Rom. 4:5; Eph. 2:8–9). Therefore, the reception of salvation is conditioned on our belief.[6] Salvation is unconditioned from the perspective of the Giver, but it is conditioned from the view of the receiver (who must believe in order to receive it). In short, salvation comes *from* God, but we receive it *through* faith: "For *by* grace you have been saved *through* faith" (Eph. 2:8 NASB).

The Nature of God's Decrees

Whereas the source of salvation is God's choice to save us, the nature of salvation is God's grace. The wondrous gift of everlasting life is by grace and grace alone, "and if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace" (Rom. 11:6). *Soteriologically*, grace and works are

mutually exclusive. “Working for grace” is a contradiction in terms, for “when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation” (Rom. 4:4). “However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness” (Rom. 4:5).

The Nature of Grace: Unmerited Favor

Grace, then, is unmerited favor. What we work for, we earn, and what we do not work for, we do not earn. Since salvation comes to us without works on our part, it follows that we did not merit it: Salvation is “the gift of God” (Rom. 6:23). God’s salvific grace is His unmerited favor for us.

Some have contrasted grace and mercy by noting that grace is giving us what we *did not* deserve (viz., salvation), whereas mercy is *not* giving us what we *did* deserve (viz., condemnation). Although biblical usage of these terms does not necessarily accord with this distinction, the point is biblical nonetheless. God’s actions of grace and mercy are two sides of His unconditional love for us.

The Object of Grace: Repentant Sinners

According to the Bible, God’s grace of salvation is not bestowed automatically or unilaterally on sinners but is received only *through faith*.[7] Paul is careful to qualify how God’s gracious provision of eternal life is received: “It is by grace you have been saved, *through faith*—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8). Elsewhere he adds,

> Now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes *through* faith in Jesus Christ *to all who believe*. (Rom. 3:21–22)

Again,

> There is no difference [between persons], for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, *through faith* in his blood. (Rom. 3:22–25)[8]

Even in the strongly stated words of Romans 9, the “objects of his wrath” are such because *they did not repent:* “What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, *bore with great patience* the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction?” (v. 4:22). Why is God salvifically patient with us? Because, as Peter says, He doesn’t want “anyone to perish, but *[He wants] everyone to come to repentance*” (2 Peter 3:9).

The Relation of Grace and Wrath

Therefore, the rejection of grace incurs wrath, and the acceptance of grace brings salvation. As we have seen, like a person standing under Niagara Falls with an upside-down cup, the emptiness comes from rejecting the flow. By a simple act of repentance (turning the "cup" of the soul right side up), one can receive the blessings intended for him from the abundant flow of God's love.

The Order of God's Decrees

Whereas there is general agreement on the *origin* of salvation, theologians have long debated the *order* of God's salvific decrees. The fact of God's election is clear in Scripture; it is the progression of His choices relating to election that is the subject of much dialogue.

The main discussion on the order of God's decrees has followed along the lines indicated by the chart below, the primary question being whether God decreed to elect before or after He decreed to permit the Fall (Lat: *lapsus*).

The chart begins with the most Calvinistic on the left and proceeds to the Arminian (i.e., Wesleyan) view on the right. Various terms on the chart will be subsequently defined and explained.

THE ORDER OF GOD'S DECREES

Supralapsarianism	Infralapsarianism	Sublapsarianism	Wesleyanism
(1) Elect some and reprobate others	(1) Create all	(1) Create all	(1) Create all
(2) Create both the elect and the non-elect	(2) Permit the Fall	(2) Permit the Fall	(2) Permit the the Fall
(3) Permit the Fall	(3) Elect some and pass others by	(3) Provide salvation for all	(3) Provide salvation for all
(4) Provide salvation only for the elect	(4) Provide salvation only for the elect	(4) Elect those who believe and pass by those who do not	(4) Elect based on the fore seen faith of believers
(5) Apply salvation only to the elect	(5) Apply salvation only to the elect	(5) Apply salvation only to believers (who cannot lose it)	(5) Apply salvation only to believers (who can lose it)

The term *supralapsarian* is from the Latin *supra (above)* and *lapsus (fall)*, meaning that God's decree of election (predestination) is considered by supralapsarians to be *above*, or logically prior to, His decree to permit the Fall. Since *infra* means "below," the infralapsarians consider God's decree of election to be beneath, or logically after, His decree to permit the Fall. The sublapsarians (Amyraldians)[9] are similar to the infralapsarians, except they place God's order to provide salvation before His order to elect (see Chafer, *ST*, 2.105). Wesleyans adhere to the same basic order as infralapsarians, except they hold that God's election is *based on His foreknowledge* rather than simply *in accord with it*. Hence, for Wesleyans (Arminians), God's decree is conditional instead of unconditional (which is maintained by the three Calvinistic views).

Supralapsarians are *hypter*-Calvinists, being double-predestinarians.[10] Infralapsarians are *strong* Calvinists but are not double-predestinarians. Sublapsarians (Amyraldians) are *moderate* Calvinists, holding to unlimited atonement. Again, Wesleyans are Arminians, insisting that election is conditional, not unconditional. Wesleyans also do not believe in eternal security,[11] while adherents to the other views do.

The Sequence of God's Decrees

One of the primary problems with this discussion is the way it has been framed, namely, on the assumption that there is an order in the decrees of God. In view of God's attributes,[12] one thing is clear: Whatever order there may be in God's choices, it is not chronological, since an eternal Being has no chronological sequence. God is both simple and eternal, and, as such, He does not think or act sequentially.

There Is No Chronological *Order in God's Decrees*

Being eternal (nontemporal), God does not have any time-related sequence in His thoughts or decisions. Whatever things He has thought and whatever actions He has done, He has thought and done simultaneously, from all eternity.

There Is No Logical *Order in God's Decrees*

Is there a logical order, though, to God's decrees? Not for Him. God does not think sequentially (i.e., discursively, having one thought after another). He knows all things immediately and intuitively in Himself, since He is simple, eternal, and immutable in His Being. As such, all that He knows and chooses is

known and performed immediately and intuitively, from all eternity.[13]

There Is an Operational *Order in God's Decrees*

Of course, there *is* an operational order in the execution of God's decrees. God eternally willed things to happen in a certain temporal sequence (one after the other), just as a doctor wills in advance the patient's cure by prescribing, for instance, the ingestion of a pill a day for a week. Hence, God willed, for example, that Creation would occur before the Fall, and that salvation would be provided after the Fall.

It makes no sense to speak of God having a logical order in His mind, as though one of His thoughts followed after another. All thoughts are known by God in one eternal contuition (i.e., co-intuition). As a simple Being, He therefore knows all things simply, which is why the Bible speaks of election as being "*in accordance with*" His will (Eph. 1:5; cf. 1 Peter 1:2) and not based on or independent of other attributes. *All* of God's attributes, thoughts, and decisions are eternal in accord with one another, and none is logically dependent on or independent of another. If it were, there would be a contradictory logical sequence in a God who has no multiplicity, not even in His thoughts.[14]

The Results of God's Decrees

The results of God's salvific decrees are twofold: to *provide* salvation for all, and to *apply* salvation to those who believe.

Salvation Is Provided *for All*

The Bible is clear and emphatic: God desires all to be saved and, thus, He provided salvation for all humankind.[15] "God so loved *the world* that He gave His only begotten Son" (John 3:16 NKJV).

> Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for *all men*. (Rom. 5:18)

"Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that *one died for all*, and therefore all died" (2 Cor. 5:14). "God was *reconciling the world to himself* in Christ, not counting men's sins against them" (2 Cor. 5:19). God "*wants all men to be saved* and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). "We have put our hope in the living God, who is *the Savior of all men*, and especially of those

who believe (1 Tim. 4:10). "The *grace* of God that brings salvation *has appeared to all men*" (Titus 2:11). "[Jesus] suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might *taste death for everyone*" (Heb. 2:9). "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also *for the sins of the whole world*" (1 John 2:2).

God willed from all eternity, then, to provide salvation for all humankind. Hence, Christ is "the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world" (Rev. 13:8; cf. Eph. 1:4).

Salvation Is Applied to Those Who Believe

However, while salvation was *provided* for all, it is *applied* only to those who believe. Some ask the question, "For whom was the Atonement *designed*?" Strong Calvinists respond by asking why, if the Atonement was intended for *all*, all are not saved. How can a sovereign God's intention be thwarted? (see chapter 12).

If, as strong Calvinists argue, the Atonement was intended only for some (the elect), then limited atonement follows. This leads to the apparent dilemma that either (1) the Atonement was intended for all or (2) the Atonement was intended only for some (the elect).[16] If it *was* intended for all, then all will be saved (since God's sovereign intentions must come to pass), and if it was *not* intended for all, then it was intended only for some (the elect). Therefore, it would appear that either universalism is true or else limited atonement is true (see Sproul, *CG*, 205).

Of course, both moderate Calvinists and traditional Arminians deny universalism.[17] Hence, in response to the supposed problem, it is only necessary to point out that the argument contains a false dilemma. There is a third alternative: The Atonement was intended to *provide* (offer) salvation for all as well as to *procure* (apply) salvation for those who believe.

In short, the problem is a false dichotomy, wrongly assuming either (1) that there was only one intention for the Atonement, or if understood in terms of a primary or single intention, (2) that the one purpose of the Atonement was to *procure* salvation for the elect. Actually, *since God also wanted everyone to believe, He also intended that Christ would die to* provide *salvation for all people*. The alternative—limited atonement—leads to a denial that God truly wants all persons to be saved—a belief contrary to His omnibenevolence[18] as revealed in Scripture.

Salvation, then, was provided for all, but it is only applied to those who believe. "It is by grace you have been saved, *through faith*—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8). "This righteousness from God

comes *through faith* in Jesus Christ *to all who believe*" (Rom. 3:22). Again, we "are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, *through faith* in his blood" (Rom. 3:24–25).

THE THEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BASIS FOR THE ORIGIN OF SALVATION

Since the *origin* of salvation is found in the will of God as a loving Being (His omnibenevolence), the *basis* for God's will to save sinful human beings is found in His omnipotence[19] and its application involves the God-given power of human free choice.[20]

Because God is loving, and because love cannot force itself on the beloved (since, again, "forced love" is a contradiction), it was necessary that if God wished to love and to be loved by His creatures, He had to create them free. Testimony to the doctrine of human free will (both before *and* after the Fall) is found in abundance throughout the history of the church. In fact, with the explainable exception of the later Augustine, virtually every major father of the church has held that salvation is received by the free choice of human beings.[21]

Since God is all-loving, He must love all. And since love is impossible for God and creatures without free will, both must be free. If God freely loves all His creatures and cannot force His love upon them, then there is one condition for receiving this love: the willingness to be loved. In short, not everyone will be saved because not everyone wills to be saved (cf. Matt. 23:37; 2 Peter 3:9).

Theologically, then, salvation originates in divine omnibenevolence and is received by human choice. Salvation is *given* by an act of God's freedom, and it is *received* by an act of our freedom. To be sure, this act of freedom is aided by God's grace, but His grace does not save apart from the co-operation of our will.[22]

The Nature of God's Freedom

Freedom in God means that He is self-determined, neither determined by another nor undetermined in His actions (which are caused by Himself).[23]

No External Compulsion

Logically, God's actions must be (1) caused by another, (2) uncaused, or (3) caused by Himself. Uncaused actions (indetermined) are contrary to the principle of causality; there is a cause for every event.[24] God's actions cannot be caused by another (determined), since there is no force outside of Him capable of determining His actions (the sovereign God cannot be forced to do anything by anyone else). While self-caused *being* is contrary to the law of noncontradiction,[25] God's *actions* must be caused by Himself (self-determined).

No Internal Compulsion

Likewise, God's actions cannot be internally compelled. "Forced freedom" is a contradiction regardless of whether the alleged force comes from without or from within. As opposed to the suggestion of pantheism, God's choice to create (and to save) was not determined by His nature. *Creation flows freely from God's will*, and, as God's will is identical to His nature, it is of His nature that God is free to create or not to create. As we saw in Volume 2, He did not create because He had to but because He wanted to. Creation does not come from God like a flower unfolds from a seed; rather, it flows like love from a lover—freely.

Internal Consistency

While salvation does not flow from God necessarily (i.e., by compulsion) but freely, nevertheless, it is consistent with His moral nature that God chose to provide salvation for all and to save those who believe. Even so, it was not necessary that God create *or elect* anyone; election is an unconditional act. There are no conditions for God's choice to *provide* salvation; however, again, there is one condition for us to *receive* it—a free act of faith in God. This is demanded both by the nature of God as all-loving and by the nature of free creatures, who alone are able to love Him.

The Nature of God's Omnibenevolence

God's freedom is rooted in His unchanging love; He cannot act contrary to His own nature. For example, since God is truth, "it is impossible for God to lie" (Heb. 6:18; cf. Titus 1:2), and since God is love, it is impossible for Him not to love whatever is good.[26] Since God's omnibenevolence has already been treated extensively,[27] the main points will be only summarized here.

God has said, "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you

with loving-kindness" (Jer. 31:3). "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). "Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died" (2 Cor. 5:14). "Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ" (Eph. 2:4–5). "Live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph. 5:2). "When the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy" (Titus 3:4–5). "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!" (1 John 3:1).

> Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. (1 John 4:7–10)

Theologically, God's omnibenevolence flows from a logical connection between love and several of His metaphysical attributes.

God's Infinity and Simplicity Imply Omnibenevolence

God is infinite in His essence,[28] and love is of the essence of God (1 John 4:16). Therefore, God must be infinite love.

God's essence is also simple,[29] which means that He is indivisible, having no parts. Therefore, God cannot be partly anything, and since God is loving, it follows that He must be wholly and completely loving.

God's Necessity Implies Omnibenevolence

God is a necessary Being,[30] and God is love; hence, God necessarily is love—He cannot *not* love. He must love Himself, and if He chooses to create beings like Himself, then He must necessarily love them—all of them. In addition, there is no conflict between necessity and freedom in God, since it is of His necessary nature that all creation and salvation flow freely from Him. Further, freedom in God does not mean "the power of contrary choice in moral matters" (e.g., the ability to do evil rather than good). God's freedom in moral matters, as His basic freedom in all matters, is the power of self-determined actions. In this sense, there is no logical contradiction between freedom and the necessity to love all He creates.

Implications of God's Omnibenevolence

Two important soteriological implications, following from the omnibenevolence of God, must again be observed.

Implications for the Doctrine of Irresistible Grace

All Calvinists believe in some form of irresistible grace: Extreme Calvinists and strong Calvinists believe grace is irresistible on the *unwilling*, and moderate Calvinists believe grace is irresistible on the *willing*.[31] In view of God's omnibenevolence, it follows that grace cannot be irresistible on the unwilling, for a God of complete love cannot force anyone to act against his or her will. "Forced love" is intrinsically impossible; a loving God can work persuasively but not coercively. C. S. Lewis aptly commented,

> The Irresistible and the Indisputable are the two weapons which the very nature of His scheme forbids Him to use. Merely to override a human will …would be for Him useless. He cannot ravish. He can only woo. (*SL*, 38)

Implications for Universalism

As we saw in Volume 2 (chapter 15), God's omnibenevolence renders universalism untenable.[32] Though an omnipotent God can do whatever is possible, an omnibenevolent God is only able to do what is moral, and there would be nothing morally right about forcing moral beings to go against their will. God clearly wants all to be saved, but "irresistible grace on the unwilling" is in opposition to God-given human freedom. Hence, there is no guarantee (such as is offered by universalism) that all people will be saved; God's omnibenevolence will not allow Him to do everything His omnipotence could otherwise do.

It simply begs the question to argue that all will eventually become willing. How? By having their freedom fettered? If so, then they would not truly be free, at any rate. It is contrary to both Scripture and experience to insist that all will eventually choose to follow God freely.[33]

In addition, if strong Calvinism is correct in maintaining that God *can* force people (by irresistible grace) to be saved, then the only way supralapsarians and infralapsarians can avoid universalism (which, again, is plainly false) is by denying that God is omnibenevolent. The reason for this is that if God can save anyone He wants to save, even apart from the response of free will (the assertion of strong Calvinists), and if God really loves all (omnibenevolence) and wants all to be saved, then all *will* be save … which is universalism. Therefore, we

insist that God is all-loving, and, as such, He cannot coerce free choices—it would be contradictory for Him to do so, and God cannot do what is contradictory.

Monergism vs. Synergism

This raises the hotly debated theological issue of monergism vs. synergism. Strong Calvinists maintain that the moment of conversion (regeneration) is totally the result of God's operation, without any cooperation on the human's part. This is sometimes called *operative grace*, as opposed to *cooperative grace*. Regeneration (conversion) is thus said to be a *monergistic* act (meaning, "His work alone"). However, according to strong Calvinists, at every point after regeneration, our will cooperates with God's actions for the purpose of our sanctification (purification); all of this subsequent work of grace is acknowledged to be *synergistic* (meaning, "our work together"; see Sproul, *WB*, 119).

That is, for the strong Calvinist, humans are completely passive with regard to the beginning of their salvation, but they are active in cooperating with God's grace from that point forward. This view was held, for instance, by the later Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, and Francis Turretin. The Synod of Dort,[34] following the later Augustine, even used the illustration of the "resurrection from the dead" of God's work on the unregenerate.[35]

As stated, the strong Calvinist view of an initial monergism is based on the belief that God exercises irresistible grace on the unwilling. This would be a violation of *God-given* human free choice. There are several reasons for rejecting monergism.

Monergism Is Not Supported by the Bible

Scripture does not support the view that irresistible grace is exercised on the unwilling; the Bible affirms that all can and some do resist the grace of God. Jesus lamented,

> O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, *but you were not willing*. (Matt. 23:37; cf. 2 Peter 3:9)

Stephen spoke of the stiff-necked people of God, charging, "*You always resist the Holy Spirit!*" (Acts 7:51).

In the days of Noah, "The LORD said, '*My Spirit shall not strive with man forever*' " (Gen. 6:3 NKJV). Indeed, while the Holy Spirit "will *convict the world of sin*, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (John 16:8 NKJV), not all the world will respond. During His earthly ministry, and in spite of His supernatural works, Jesus did not convince everyone of the need to be saved. Indeed, He pronounced that some had so rejected the work of the Holy Spirit that they "*blasphemed against" Him* and, hence, would never receive forgiveness but would be "subject to eternal condemnation" (Mark 3:28–29 NKJV).

Monergism Is Not Supported by the Church Fathers

Besides the later Augustine, who was caught up in the donatist controversy, no major Fathers up to the Reformation held to irresistible grace on the unwilling. For example, Augustine earlier (and correctly) stated:

> God is said to be "our Helper;" but nobody can be helped who does not make some effort of his own accord. For God does not work out salvation in us as if he were working in insensate stones, or in creatures in whom nature has placed neither reason nor will. (*OFSB*, 2.28)

Even Martin Luther's perspective, the first major one after the later Augustine to argue for irresistible grace on the unwilling, was reversed by his disciple and systematizer, Philip Melanchthon (1497–1560), whom subsequent Lutherans followed. Likewise, John Calvin's view was opposed by Jacob Arminius (1560–1609) and is rejected by all moderate Calvinists.[36]

Monergism Is Contrary to the "Protestant Principle"

One of the fundamental principles of Protestantism is "salvation by faith alone" (Lat: *sola fidei*). If salvation comes by faith—which Scripture plainly affirms—then faith is logically prior to being regenerated. Again, as to whether regeneration is prior to faith or faith is prior to regeneration, the Bible is clear. We are saved through faith (Eph. 2:8–9); we are justified by faith (Rom. 5:1); we must believe in Christ in order to be saved (Acts 16:31). In each case, faith is logically prior to salvation. We do not get saved in order to believe; rather, we believe in order to become saved.[37]

Monergism Is Contrary to God's Omnibenevolence

Strong Calvinists admit to believing that God is not all-loving in a redemptive sense: They maintain that He loves, sent Christ to die for, and attempts to save

only the elect. However, this is contrary to Scripture;[38] an all loving God (1 John 4:16) loves all (John 3:16) and wants all to come to salvation (1 Tim. 2:4–5; cf. 2 Peter 3:9).

Monergism Is Contrary to God-Given Free Will

Since love is always persuasive but never coercive, God cannot force anyone to love Him—and this is what "irresistible grace on the unwilling" would do. God's persuasive but *resistible* love goes hand in glove with God-given human free choice. Again, human free will is self-determination, involving the ability to choose otherwise. We can either accept or reject God's grace.

In brief, God's saving grace works synergistically with free will; that is, it must be received to be effective. There are no conditions for *giving* grace, but there is one condition for *receiving* it—faith. Put in other terms, God's grace works cooperatively, not operatively. Faith is the precondition for receiving God's gift of salvation, and faith is prior to regeneration, since we are "saved through faith" (Eph. 2:8 NKJV) and "justified through faith" (Rom. 5:1).

ANSWERING OBJECTIONS TO THE ORIGIN OF SALVATION

Since many of the following objections revolve around the love of God and the freedom of humanity, they have already been addressed in some form. Only the prominent ones will be briefly repeated here.[39]

Objection One—Based on the Idea That Necessary Love Is Contradictory

Love is a free act, flowing from one's free choice, and a person cannot be forced to love. If this is so, then love cannot flow from the essence of God, since God's essence is necessary.[40] Hence, salvation must flow from God's will and not from His unchangeable nature.

Response to Objection One

Love and *necessity* are not contradictory, but love and *compulsion* are.[41] It is of the nature of God that He loves, and since God's nature is necessary, it is

necessary that God loves. Further, since love is a free act, it is necessary that God loves freely. Consequently, it is *not* contradictory for love to be both necessary and free; this simply means that God, by His very nature, must love. Since love must be expressed freely, then it is of the necessary nature of God that he loves freely; that is because His will is in accord with His nature, His freely chosen love is in accordance with His necessary and unchanging essence.

Objection Two—Based on God's Unique Love for the Elect

Strong Calvinists claim that God does not salvifically love all people, insisting that Christ died only for the elect. If this is true, then God is not omnibenevolent. For instance: "He chose *us*" (not "all"—Eph. 1:4); "Christ died for *our* sins" (1 Cor. 15:3); "I lay down my life for *the* sheep" (John 10:15); "Christ loved *the church* and gave himself up for *her*" (Eph. 5:25).

Response to Objection Two[42]

The fact that only believers are mentioned in some passages as the object of Christ's death does not prove that the Atonement is limited, for several reasons.

First, Paul also said that Jesus "gave himself for *me*" (Gal. 2:20), yet no proponent of limited atonement takes this to exclude the fact that Christ died for others as well.

Second, when the Bible uses terms like *we*, *our*, or *us* of the Atonement, it speaks only of those to whom it has been *applied*, not for all those for whom it was *provided*. In doing so, Scripture does not thereby limit the Atonement.

Third, and finally, the fact that Jesus loves His bride and died for her (Eph. 5:25) does not mean that God the Father and Jesus the Son do not love the whole world and desire them to be part of His bride, the church. John 3:16 explicitly says otherwise.[43]

Objection Three—Based on God's Loving Jacob and Hating Esau

According to Romans 9, God loved Jacob and hated Esau (v. 13); He has mercy on some but not on others (v. 15); He destines some to destruction and not others (v. 22); He hardens the hearts of some (in unbelief) but not others (v. 18). From these examples, it seems obvious that God is not omnibenevolent when it comes to salvation.

Response to Objection Three

This is a misinterpretation of these texts.

First, the passage is not speaking about electing *individuals* but *nations*. *Esau* is the nation of Edom that came from him (cf. Mal. 1:2), and *Jacob* is the nation of Israel that came from him (cf. 9:2–3).

Second, the passage is not referring to the election of individuals to salvation but of Israel being chosen as a national channel through which the eternal blessing of salvation, through Christ, would come to all (cf. Gen. 12:1–3; Rom. 9:4–5). In addition, even though Israel *as a nation* was chosen by God, not every *individual* in Israel was elected to be saved (9:6).

Third, the word *hate* (Gk: *emisesa*, from *miseo*), in this case, means "to love less" or "to regard with less affection"; it does not mean "not to love at all" or "not to will the good of the person."[44] This is evident, for instance, from Genesis 29:30–31: The phrase "loved Rachel more than Leah" is used as the equivalent of "Leah was hated" (cf. also Matt. 10:37).

Fourth, Pharaoh hardened his *own* heart against God (cf. Ex. 7:13–14; 8:15, 19, 32) before *God* hardened it (Ex. 9:12). The purpose of the ten plagues upon Egypt was to convince Pharaoh to repent; since he refused, his heart was hardened as a result of his own actions. Repeatedly we have seen that the same sun that melts wax, hardens clay. The problem is not with the source but with the receptivity of the agent on which it is acting.

Fifth, and finally, the "vessels of wrath" (Rom. 9:22 NKJV) were not destined to destruction against their will. Indeed, they were such because they rejected God even as He "endured with much longsuffering," waiting for them to repent (cf. 2 Peter 3:9).

Objection Four—Based on the Idea That Omnibenevolence *Must* Lead to Universalism

If God loves all people and therefore desires all of them to be saved, then why are not all people saved? He is omnipotent, and an all-powerful Being, allegedly, can do whatever He wants to do. Further, God is sovereignly in control of all things,[45] and His will cannot be thwarted—He accomplishes whatever He sets out to do (Isa. 55:11). If God can accomplish whatever He desires, and if He desires to save all, then it seems to follow that all will be saved (universalism).

Response to Objection Four

As we have observed, God's *ultimate* will is always accomplished, but His *immediate* will is not. This is because God wills some things conditionally and others unconditionally. Salvation is willed on the condition of our accepting it (cf. John 1:12; 3:16). Neither omnipotence nor omnibenevolence is in question (2 Peter 3:9; cf. Matt. 23:37).

In addition, it is *not* true that an all-powerful God can do anything and everything. Again: *He cannot do what is contradictory* (cf. Heb. 6:18; 2 Tim. 2:13). So while God *is* all-powerful (omnipotent) He must exercise His power *in accordance with His love* (all-goodness). His love cannot (and thus will not) force someone to love Him.

Objection Five—Based on God Having Power That Is Not Used

Extreme Calvinists argue that God is not obligated to exercise love toward everyone just because He is all-loving any more than He must exercise His power toward everyone just because He is omnipotent. Simply stated, from this viewpoint, God can have more love than He uses, just as He has more power than He uses.

Response to Objection Five

First of all, love is a *moral* attribute of God, while power is *nonmoral*; it is a category mistake to confuse them.[46] Moral attributes bind God to act in a certain way *because* they are moral attributes; nonmoral attributes *do* not because they *are* not.[47] For example, that God has the power to create more worlds does not mean He must do so.

Furthermore, it is inconsistent to argue (as extreme Calvinists do) that God must always act justly by virtue of His being all-just, while at the same time maintaining that He does not always have to act lovingly by virtue of His being all-loving.[48] If God's omnibenevolence were not to compel Him to love all people, then, likewise, God's justice would not obligate Him to condemn all sin —but it does, just as His love binds Him to love all sinners.

Objection Six—Based on What Sinners Deserve

We are saved by God's grace, but grace isn't deserved by any sinner, which means *any of us*. On the contrary, justice demands that all sin be condemned.

Response to Objection Six

It is true that there is nothing *in sinners* that prompts God to save us. Rather, as rightly objected, justice must condemn us in our sinfulness. However, it is also true that there is something *in God* that prompts Him to save us: His love. Since God is essentially omnibenevolent, He must try to save His fallen creatures. Therefore, God does not have to show love *because we deserve it* (we don't), but *because His nature demands it*. Love is not an *arbitrary* attribute of God, but is rooted in His *necessary* nature. Hence, if He is all loving, then He must love all.

Objection Seven—From a Monergistic Perspective

The central argument against the salvific synergism implied in the above discussion is that it supposedly makes human beings responsible for their own eternal life. Thus, such synergism seems to suggest a kind of works salvation, taking the sole glory from God and making salvation dependent (in part) upon the actions of human beings.

Response to Objection Seven

This criticism overlooks several important factors.

First, in synergistic salvation, the *origin* and *initiative* of justification *is* solely from God. Humans simply respond to *receive* the gift He has offered.

Second, faith is not a form of works; rather it is an acknowledgment that as sinners we are totally incapable of saving ourselves and must depend upon God's grace to be eternally rescued. As the apostle Paul points out, there's a big difference between *meriting* something that is earned and *receiving* an unmerited gift (Rom. 4:4–5). It is a twisted logic that attempts to give the credit for salvation to the receiver rather than to the Giver.

Third, and finally, the monergist confuses an *action* (faith) with a *work*. All works are actions, but not all actions are works. *The act of faith*, by which we acknowledge that we cannot work for or merit our salvation, *is not a work*.

Again, as Paul emphatically affirms,

> When a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. (Rom. 4:4–5)

Objection Eight—From a Broadly Deterministic Vantage Point

Pantheists and other determinists contend that if God is a necessary Being, is it not necessary, on the basis of His necessity alone, that He wills to save? No, it isn't. The only necessity placed on a necessary Being is the necessity that it be what it is; therefore, God cannot be other than God, and no contingent being or thing can place any necessity on Him.[49] How, then, can God be *both* free *and* necessary? How can He be a necessary Being and yet also free to create and to save?

Response to Objection Eight

By His very nature as a personal Being, it is necessary that God be free with regard to morality. That is, it is of necessity that as a moral Being, God must be a free Being. Hence, the will to create and to save free beings is a free moral decision of a free moral Being (God). Again, it is of the very nature of God that He be free; as such, God is both necessary and free—*it is necessary that He be free*.

Objection Nine—From a Neotheistic Perspective

So-called "open theists" suggest that if God originated and determined (by His free choice) who would be saved, from all eternity, then we cannot be free. Their argument can be stated as follows:

(1) Whatever God knows infallibly must come to pass.
(2) Whatever must come to pass could not have been otherwise.
(3) What is freely chosen could have been otherwise.
(4) Therefore, if God foreordained who would be saved, then none of us had a choice in the matter, and consequently we cannot be free.

Neotheists also contend that if God knows the future infallibly, then it must occur the way He knows it, or else He would be wrong in what He knows. If the

future *must* occur according to that knowledge, then God is not free to change it. Hence, a God who knows the future infallibly is not really free (in the sense that He could have chosen otherwise regarding the future).

The argument can also be stated this way: If God knew eternally what would happen in the future, then God's knowing this is part of the past and is now fixed, impossible to change. And,

> Since God is infallible, it is completely impossible that things will turn out differently than God expects them to turn out. [But] if God knows that a person is going to perform [a certain action], then it is impossible that the person fail to perform it—so one does not have a free choice whether or not to perform it. (Pinnock, *OG*, 147)

Response to Objection Nine

In reply, several things should be noted.

For one thing, God *could* be free in the *non-libertarian* sense of doing what He desires.[50] As mentioned previously, *this* view is open to strong Calvinists in the tradition of Jonathan Edwards.

However, for moderate Calvinists and Arminians, another alternative is also possible. God could be free to create in a *libertarian* sense (of having the power of contrary choice, i.e., the freedom to do otherwise), or even in the *broader* sense of having the power of self-determining choice; either way, He could still know the future with certainty (meaning, the future is determined). As Anselm observed, there is a difference between antecedent and consequent necessity.[51] If God wills the future to be a certain way, then by *consequent* necessity it must be that way. But God was free not to will it as such; hence, He had *antecedent* freedom with regard to which way the future would occur. God could have chosen to create a different world, yet when God decides to make a certain world, His omniscience knows how everything will occur by consequent necessity.

Being a simple Being, God's will and knowledge are coordinate; He knows what He wills, and He wills what He knows. In fact, He knows eternally what He wills eternally, and He wills eternally what He knows eternally. One is not subsequent to the other, either chronologically (since He is not temporal) or logically (since He knows intuitively, not sequentially).

Also, the argument from open theism wrongly assumes that God knows in the way we know and also wills in the way that we will—that God does have foreknowledge of what we will do and, thus, reacts accordingly. This is an incorrect perception. An eternal Being does not really *fore* know anything as

future; He knows it all in His eternal *Now*.[52] Hence, God's decisions are not determined "in advance" of His knowing our free choices. Indeed, God knew our temporal choices from eternity, not by foreseeing them outside Himself, but by seeing them inside Himself in the same way that effects preexist in their Cause. Our free choices, then, are not determined "in advance"; God does not actually *fore* see what will happen—He simply *sees*, within the infinity of His own nature, all that will proceed from it and participate in it. God, in everlasting perspective, sees in Himself the entire course of time. God is *proactive*, not reactive, in what He will in accord with what He knows.

Thus, no free action is so determined in advance so that it could not have been otherwise. If we had chosen otherwise, then God would have seen it from all eternity. As a result, humans can be free in the libertarian sense (of having the ability to do otherwise—contrary choice), and God can eternally know all of this without violating our freedom.

CONCLUSION

Salvation originates with God, being based in an unconditional act of His boundless love and unmerited favor (grace). Nonetheless, once again, while there are no conditions for God's *giving* salvation, there is one condition for our *receiving* it: faith. God has sovereignly willed it this way; salvation is *by* grace but comes *through* our belief. Faith is a free act on the part of the recipient, for an omnibenevolent God must not only love all, but He must respect the freedom He freely gave to His creatures. It is necessary for God to act in accordance with His own perfect nature, and love is of this very essence.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

THEORIES OF SALVATION

All evangelical theologians agree that Christ died “for our sins” (1 Cor. 15:3). Likewise, all believe that Christ made atonement for us. However, there is considerable divergence among theologians on how the Atonement works.

This, naturally, has led to many theories of the Atonement. A review of the main viewpoints will be helpful in achieving a better understanding of salvation in its broadest dimensions.

VARIOUS THEORIES OF THE ATONEMENT

Not all theories of the Atonement can be justified biblically. Some are incompatible with others, and many, while having an element of truth, are not adequate explanations of how salvation is accomplished. All of them, however, are illuminating and in some way widen our knowledge of this profound and crucial subject.

Brief evaluation will accompany the theories, but an attempt to view salvation in an extensive, biblically based, theologically satisfactory manner is set forth in chapter 9. By and large, the views will be discussed in the order of their first appearance in history.

The Recapitulation Theory of the Atonement

Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202) was the first church father to propose the *recapitulation theory*.[1] He held,

> The fully divine Christ became fully man in order to sum up all humanity in himself. What was lost through the disobedience of the first Adam was restored through the obedience of the second Adam. [That is,] Christ went through all the stages of human life, resisted all temptations, died and arose a victor over death and the devil. [Hence,] the benefits of Christ's victory are available through participation in him. (Elwell, *BDT*, 569)

The primary text used to support this position is Romans 5:18–21, where Paul states:

> Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

In the words of Irenaeus,

> [God] caused man (human nature) to cleave to and to become one with God. For unless man had overcome the enemy of man, the enemy would not have been legitimately vanquished.… Unless man had been joined to God, he could never have become partaker of incorruptibility.… Wherefore also He [Christ] passed through every stage of life, restoring to all communion with God. [For] as by the disobedience of the one man [Adam], who was originally moulded from virgin soil, the many were made sinners, and forfeited life; so was it necessary that, by the obedience of one man [Jesus], who was originally born from a virgin, many should be justified and receive salvation. [Thus,] God recapitulated in himself the ancient formation of man, that He might kill sin, deprive death of its power, and vivify man. (*AH*, 18.7)

The Ransom Theory of the Atonement

Forms of the *ransom theory* were widely held by various fathers of the church, beginning with Origen (c. 185–c. 254), who proposed that Christ's death was paid to Satan to purchase human beings, who were captive in sin, and set them free. Used as a basis is Mark 10:45, where Jesus said, "Even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Likewise, Paul reminded: "You were bought at a price" (1 Cor. 6:20).

Origen wrote: "Now it was the devil that held us, to whose side we had been drawn away by our sins. He asked, therefore, as our price the blood of Christ" (*CR*, 2.13). Of course, Satan got the short end of the deal, for after demanding Christ's blood from the Father, his own doom was sealed by Christ's death and victorious resurrection. According to the ransom theory, Satan released

humankind (for the payment made to him by Christ to the Father), only to discover that he could not hold Christ (who rose and thus defeated death).

Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–c. 395) explained the plot of redemption this way:

> The Deity [of Christ] was hidden under the veil of our nature, so that, as with ravenous fish, the hook of the Deity might be gulped down along with the bait of flesh. (*C*, 22)

Because this idea seemed, to many Christians, to suggest a deceptive action on God's part, Gregory expanded the theory in an attempt to show how it maintained God's justice. He reasoned that since our bondage to Satan is of our own choosing, it would have been unjust to rob Satan of his captives by some arbitrary method (ibid.); therefore, a payment to Satan had to be made. Although the whole transaction may seem to have been a deception, Gregory reasoned that Satan got his due *and* that God's motive (His love of human beings) was pure. Gregory argued:

> As regards the aim and purpose of what took place, a change in direction of the nobler is involved … the enemy [Satan] effected his deception for the ruin of our nature.… He who is at once the just, and good, and wise one [God], used His device, in which there was deception, for the salvation of him [humanity] who had perished, and thus not only conferred benefits on the lost one, but on him too who had wrought our ruin. (ibid., 24)

Augustine (354–430), another ransom-theory adherent, differently explained God's tactics in defeating Satan. Although he too thought of the Cross as bait or a trap, he maintained that Satan's deception is not something God did but what Satan did to himself—God simply permitted the self-deception of Satan to accomplish our salvation (*OT,* 13.12). Satan was a victim of his own pride—the fatal flaw he had from the beginning (1 Tim. 3:6).

After Anselm,[2] the ransom theory waned but was later resurrected by Gustaf Aulen (1879–1978) with a new emphasis—God's triumph (*CV,* 26–27). This view is sometimes called the *victory theory* or *drama theory* of the Atonement, and it maintains that the central point of the Cross is God's triumph over Satan. In Aulen's own words:

> Let it be added, in conclusion, that if the classic idea of the Atonement ever again resumes a leading place in Christian theology, it is not likely that it will revert to precisely the same forms of expression that it has used in the past; its revival will not consist in a putting back of the clock. It is the idea itself that will be essentially the same: the fundamental idea that the Atonement is, above all, a movement of God to man, not in the first place a movement of man to God. We shall hear again its tremendous paradoxes: that God, the all-ruler, the Infinite, yet accepts the lowliness of the Incarnation; we shall hear again the old realistic message of the conflict of God with the dark, hostile forces of evil, and His

> victory over them by the Divine self-sacrifice; above all, we shall hear again the note of triumph.
>
> For my own part, I am persuaded that no form of Christian teaching has any future before it except such as can keep steadily in view the reality of the evil in the world, and go to meet the evil with a battle-song of triumph. Therefore I believe that the classic idea of the Atonement and of Christianity is coming back—that is to say, the genuine, authentic Christian faith, (ibid., 158–59)

Unlike other theories of the Atonement, in this case Christ's work on the cross was not directed toward God or toward human beings, but instead toward victory over the devil: "The atonement is a divine victory overcoming the destructive powers of hell and death, making available and visible the reconciling love of God" (Elwell, *BDT*, 107).

The Moral-Example Theory of the Atonement

In the fourth century, Pelagius (c. 354–c. 420) offered a view of the Atonement called the *moral-example theory*. According to this position, Christ's death provided an example of faith and obedience that inspires others to be obedient to God. The exhortation of 1 Peter 2:21 is often used to support this view: "To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps."

Translator Theodore De Bruyn states in *Pelagius's Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*:

> Adam and Christ are not, however, equal as antetype and type. Pelagius, following Paul, observes that Christ has begun something immeasurably greater than Adam. Whereas Adam led only himself and his descendants into death, Christ frees not only those who have lived after him, but also those who were born before him and were alive in his lifetime (Rom. 5:15). Furthermore, whereas Adam destroyed righteousness by his example of sin, Christ not only provides an example of righteousness, but also has the power to forgive past sins. [Rom. 5:16] (41)

De Bruyn continues:

> The first verses of [Romans] 8 elaborate what was announced in the last verse of [Romans] 7 to show how Christ frees one from sin and enables one to be righteous—neither of which the law was able to effect (Rom. 8:1–4). By his death Christ makes it possible for the sins of the "carnal person" to be forgiven, and by his life Christ provides an example of the way sin can be overcome (Rom. 8:3). As a result one is expected to refrain from sin and increase in holiness, embarking on a process of sanctification … in the gifts of the Spirit. (ibid., 44)

Faustus Socinius (1539–1604) perpetuated this view, which was later adopted by the unitarians. His followers (the socinians) minimized the role of Christ as Priest in favor of His other two ministries as Prophet and King. They stressed

His beautiful and perfect moral example of God's total love for us, which provides the inspiration for us to live life in honor of Christ (cf. Rom. 5:8). Socinians also appealed primarily to 1 Peter 2:21, and, as referenced in Millard Erickson's *Christian Theology*,

> Other passages appealed to include 1 John 2:6: "He who says he abides in him [Christ] ought to walk in the same way in which he [Christ] walked" (RSV). It is however, only in 1 Peter 2:21 that we find an explicit connection drawn between Christ's example and his death. (Socinius, *CRBI*, 1.667, as cited in Erickson, *CT*, 784)

The Necessary-Satisfaction Theory of the Atonement

In the latter years of the Middle Ages, another view of the Atonement emerged in the famous writing of Anselm (1033–1109), called *Cur Deus Homo* ("Why the God-Man?"). This position is called the *necessary-satisfaction theory* because of its affirmation that it was necessary for God's offended justice and honor to be satisfied by a penalty only Christ could pay. As the God-man, His death had infinite value and, therefore, could restore the honor due to an infinitely holy God. Since God cannot simply remit[3] sins—reparation *must* be paid—this view is sometimes called the *commercial theory* of the Atonement.

However, Anselm, unlike with Origen's ransom theory, held that the payment had to be paid to God, not to Satan, for it is *God* who is offended by sin and who, therefore, must be compensated. Anselm's comments unfold naturally under several headings.

Sin Puts Us in Debt to God

> What is the debt which we owe to God? Every wish of a rational creature should be subject to the will of God. Nothing is more sure. This is the debt which man and angels owe to God, and no one who pays this debt commits sins; but everyone who does not pay it sins. This is justice or uprightness of will, which makes a being just or upright in heart, that is, in will, and this is the sole and complete debt of honor which we owe to God, and which God requires of us.… He who does not render this honor which is due to God, robs God of his own and dishonors him; and this is sin. (*CDH*, I.XI)
>
> In the order of things, there is nothing less to be endured than that the creature should take away the honor due the Creator, and not restore what he has taken away. (ibid., I.XIII)
>
> Can you think that man, who has sinned, and never made satisfaction to God for his sin, but only been suffered to go unpunished, may become the equal of an angel who has never sinned? (ibid., I.XIX)

God Is Just and Cannot Overlook Sin

> Again, if there is nothing greater or better than God, there is nothing more just than supreme justice,

which maintains God's honor in the arrangement of things, and which is nothing else but God himself. (ibid., I.XIII)

Therefore God maintains nothing with more justice than the honor of his own dignity. Does it seem to you that he wholly preserves it, if he allows himself to be so defrauded of it as that he should neither receive satisfaction nor punish the one defrauding him? (ibid.)

"Even God cannot raise to happiness any being at all by the debt of sin, because He ought not to" (ibid., I.XXI).

We Cannot Pay Our Own Debt of Sin

Listen to the voice of strict justice; and judge according to that whether man makes to God a real satisfaction for his sin, unless by overcoming the devil, man restores to God what he took from God in allowing himself to be conquered by the devil; so that as by this conquest over man the devil took what belonged to God, and God was the loser, so in man's victory the devil may be despoiled, and God recover his right. Surely nothing can be more exactly or justly conceived. Think you that supreme justice can violate this justice? I dare not think it. (ibid., I.XXIII)

When you render anything to God which you owe him, irrespective of your past sin, you should not reckon this as the debt which you owe for sin.… But what do you give to God by your obedience, which is not owed him already, since he demands from you all that you are and have and can become? (ibid., I.XX)

"If in justice I owe God myself and all my powers, even when I do not sin, I have nothing left to render to him for my sin" (ibid.). "Therefore you make no satisfaction unless you restore something greater than the amount of that obligation, which should restrain you from committing the sin" (ibid., I.XXI).

Moreover, so long as [man] does not restore what he has taken away, he remains in fault; and it will not suffice merely to restore what has been taken away, but, considering the contempt offered, he ought to restore more than he took away. For as one who imperils another's safety, without making some compensation for the anguish incurred; so he who violates another's honor does not enough by merely rendering honor again, but must, according to the extent of the injury done, make restitution in some way satisfactory to the person whom he has dishonored. (ibid., I.XI)

God Cannot Forgive Sins Without the Debt Being Paid

Let us return and consider whether it were proper for God to put away sins by compassion alone, without any payment of the honor taken from him.… To remit sin in this manner is nothing else than not to punish; and since it is not right to cancel sin without compensation or punishment; if it be not punished, then is it passed by undischarged. [And] it is not fitting for God to pass over anything in his kingdom undischarged.… There is also another thing which follows if sin be passed by unpunished, viz., that with God there will be no difference between the guilty and the not guilty; and this is unbecoming to God. (ibid., I.XII)

Truly, such compassion on the part of God is wholly contrary to the Divine justice, which allows nothing but punishment as the recompense of sin. Therefore, as God cannot be inconsistent with himself, his compassion cannot be of this nature. (ibid., I.XXIV)

It [is] not fitting for God to do anything unjustly, or out of course, it does not belong to his liberty or compassion or will to let the sinner go unpunished, who makes no return to God of what the sinner has defrauded him. (ibid., I.XII)

Therefore the honor taken away must be repaid, or punishment must follow; otherwise either God will not be just to himself, or he will be weak in respect to both parties; and this is impious even to think of. (ibid.)

Briefly put, "satisfaction or punishment must follow every sin" (ibid., I.XV).

If it is unfitting for God to elevate man with any stain upon him, to that for which he made him free from all stain, lest it should seem that God had repented of his good intent, or was unable to accomplish his designs; far more is it impossible, on account of the same unfitness, that no man should be exalted to that state for which he was made. (ibid., I.XXV)

Only the God-Man Can Pay the Debt of Sin

How, then, shall man be saved, if [man] neither pays what he owes, and ought not to be saved without paying? Or, with what face shall we declare that God, who is rich in mercy above all human conception, cannot exercise this compassion? (ibid., I.XXIV)

Thus,

The restoring of mankind ought not to take place, and could not, without man paid [paying] the debt which he owed God for his sin. And this debt was so great that, while none but man must solve the debt, none but God was able to do it; so that he who does it must be both God and man. And hence arises a necessity that God should take man into unity with his own person; so that he who in his own nature was bound to pay the debt, but could not, might be able to do it in the person of God.… Moreover … the life of this man [is] so excellent and so glorious as to make ample satisfaction for the sins of the whole world, and even infinitely more. (ibid., I.XVIII.a)

No man except this one [Christ] ever gave to God what he was not obligated to lose, or paid a debt he did not owe. But he freely offered to the Father what there was no need of his ever losing, and paid for sinners what he owed not for himself. (ibid., I.XVIII.b)

Consequently,

It is sufficiently proved that a man can be saved by Christ.… For either by Christ or by someone else can man be saved, or else not at all. If, then, it is false that man cannot be saved at all, or that he can be saved in any other way, his salvation must necessarily be by Christ. (ibid., II.XXV)

Further,

As God owed nothing to the devil but punishment, so man must only make amends by conquering the devil as man had already been conquered by him. But whatever was demanded of man, he owed to God and not to the devil. (ibid., II.XIX)

The Moral-Influence Theory of the Atonement

Peter Abelard (1079–1142) is credited with originating the *moral-influence theory*, which holds that the primary effect of Christ's death was not as a moral example to us (as in the view of Pelagius) but as *a demonstration of God's great love for us*. Abelard developed this theory in reaction to Anselm's (necessary-satisfaction) insistence that some sort of payment to God was required (*CER* 3.26; 5.5, as cited in Erickson, *CT*, 785).

This theory was not widely accepted until Horace Bushnell (1802–1876) and Hastings Rashdall (1858–1924) embraced it in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when it became the heart of the liberal view of the Atonement.[4] In the moral-influence view, God is perceived as essentially love, to the virtual exclusion of His justice and holiness. The primary difficulty of sin, proponents say, is not with God's need to punish evil or His necessity of being appeased, but with us in that we have a spiritual sickness from which we must be healed. Thus,

> [Christ's] sacrifice, taken as a fact in time, was not before him as the end, or object of his ministry —that would have it as a mere pageant of suffering, without rational dignity, or character—but, when it came, it was simply the bad fortune such a work, prosecuted with such devotion, must encounter on its way. (Rashdall, *IACT*, 26)

The Optional-Satisfaction Theory of the Atonement

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) offered the *optional-satisfaction theory* of the Atonement, which *allowed for* but did not *require* satisfaction of God for the sinner (see Stump, "AAA" in Morris, *PCF*). Aquinas made three important claims on the matter of Christ being the satisfaction for our sins:

(1) Christ's passion caused God to be satisfied on behalf of our sins.
(2) God could have forgiven us without Christ's death.
(3) However there was no better or more fitting way to satisfy God than with the death of Christ.

First, to the question "Did Christ's passion cause our salvation by way of satisfaction?" Aquinas said yes (*ST*, 3a.48.2):

> A man effectively atones for an offense when he offers to the one who has been offended something which he accepts as matching or outweighing the former offense. Christ, suffering in loving and obedient spirit, offered more to God than was demanded in recompense for all the sins of mankind.…

> Christ's passion, then, was not only sufficient but superabundant for the sins of mankind; as John says, "He is a propitiation for our sins, not for ours only but also for those of the whole world" (ibid.).

Second, as to whether God could have forgiven us without the death of Jesus: "Simply and absolutely speaking, God could have freed man otherwise than by Christ's passion, for 'nothing is impossible with God' " (ibid., 3a.46.2). Aquinas explicitly rejected the argument that "God's justice required that man be free from sin by Christ's atoning passion":

> Even this justice depends upon the divine will.… For if God had wanted to free man from sin without any satisfaction at all, he would not have been acting against justice.… But God has no one above him, for he is himself the supreme and common good of the entire universe. If then, he forgives sin, which is a crime in that it is committed against him, he violates no one's rights. The man who waives satisfaction and forgives an offense done to himself acts mercifully, not unjustly. (ibid., 3a.46.2–3)

Third, by the reasoning of Aquinas, even though the Cross was not necessary for God to forgive us, nonetheless, there was no better or more fitting way:

> First, man could thus see how much God loved him, and so would be aroused to love him.… Second, he gave us an example of obedience, humility, constancy, justice, and of other virtues which his passion revealed and which are necessary for our salvation.… Third, by his passion, Christ not only freed man from sin, but merited for him the grace of justification, and the glory of beatitude.… Fifth, in this way a greater dignity accrues to man. Man had been overcome and deceived by the devil. But it is a man [Jesus] who overcomes the devil.… It was therefore better for us to have been delivered by Christ's passion than by God's will alone. (ibid., 3a.46.3)

According to Aquinas, God is not an accountant, adding up our sins that must be paid for, but instead a parent wanting to forgive us while also desiring to change us so that we will not choose evil again. Hence, in the optional-satisfaction view, any punishment is strictly a means to an end, the end being the sinner's harmony with God.

When a person sins, he does not incur, on his celestial account, a debt of guilt that must somehow be paid back. In Aquinas's perspective, God is not concerned with balancing the account but with restoring the sinner. Therefore, the aim of satisfaction (including vicarious satisfaction) is not to cancel a debt incurred by sin but to restore a sinner to harmony with God.

Aquinas saw the problem not as one of God's wrath toward human sin, but of human withdrawal from God. Thus, Christ's atonement produced reconciliation with a loving God, not appeasement of an angry God. By Aquinas's argument, God does not *require* a penalty for sin, either from humanity or from Jesus, and,

thus, He did not *inflict* suffering on Christ as a punishment for sin; rather, He *accepted* Christ's sacrifice as an act of making satisfaction *aimed at restoration of the sinner* (cf. Luke 19:10). As a result, when the sinner accepts that sacrifice for his sins, he is moved away from his sin to God.

Consequently, nothing compelled God to deal with sin by a vicarious substitute (Jesus), but there is, nonetheless, something appropriate about His doing it for two reasons: (1) When a person is made aware of his evil and sees his separation from God, he will want to undo what he has done, and (2) by God's wooing the sinner to repentance by vicarious satisfaction, hopefully he will not be so easily enticed back into the same sin again.

The Substitution Theory of the Atonement

The roots of the legal or penal *substitution theory* of the Atonement are found in the earlier ransom and optional-satisfaction views (see above), since both contain objective elements holding that a penalty *was* paid. Likewise, the substitution theory builds on Anselm's view that a satisfaction of God *must* be accomplished (i.e., it was *necessary*). On the other hand, the substitution argument insists that this necessity of satisfaction is not simply because God's perfect honor has been offended but also because His absolute justice has been violated, and, therefore, a substitution for our sins had to be made by the sinless Son of God. John Calvin (1509–1564) is credited with giving expression to this view, which subsequently moved to the front and center of evangelical soteriology.

Calvin asked the question: "How can it be said that God, who prevents us with his mercy, was our enemy until he reconciled to us by Christ?" He answered: "God was the enemy of men until they were restored in favour by the death of Christ (Rom. 5:10); they were cursed until their iniquity was expiated by the sacrifice of Christ" [Gal. 3:10, 13] (*ICR*, 2.16.2). Calvin added,

> But again, let [man] be told, as Scripture teaches, that he was estranged from God by sin, and heir of wrath, exposed to the curse of eternal death. Excluded from all hope of salvation … that then Christ interposed, took the punishment upon himself, and bore what by the just judgment of God was impending over sinners; with his own blood expiated the sins which rendered them hateful to God, by this expiation satisfied and duly propitiated God the Father, by this intercession appeased his anger, on this basis founded peace between God and men, and by this tie secured the Divine benevolence toward them. (ibid.)

This is a description of why a substitutionary atonement is not merely *fitting*

(as Aquinas said) but is *essential*. In Calvin's words,

> God, who is perfect righteousness, cannot love the iniquity which he sees in all. All of us, therefore, have that within which deserves the hatred of God. Hence, in respect, first, of our corrupt nature; and, secondly, of the depraved conduct following upon it, we are all offensive to God, guilty in his sight, and by nature the children of hell. (ibid., 2.16.3)
>
> But, in short, from the moment when he [Christ] assumed the form of a servant, he began, in order to redeem us, to pay the price of deliverance.… He himself declares that he gave his life a ransom for many. [Matt. 20:28] (ibid., 2.16.5)
>
> Moreover, as the curse consequent upon guilt remained for the final judgment of God, one principal point in the narrative [of Hebrews 10:5] is his condemnation before Pontius Pilate, the governor of Judea, to teach us that the punishment to which we were liable was inflicted on that Just One. (ibid.)

Therefore,

> Our acquittal is in this—that the guilt which made us liable to punishment was transferred to the head of the Son of God (Isa. 53:12). We must specially remember this *substitution* in order that we may not be all our lives in trepidation and anxiety, as if the just vengeance, which the Son of God transferred to himself, were still impending over us.…
>
> Wherefore, in order to accomplish full expiation, he made his soul *asham*, i.e., "a propitiatory victim for sin" (as the Prophet says, Isa. 53:5, 10) on which the guilt and *penalty* being in a manner laid, ceases to be imputed to us. (ibid., 2.16.6, emphasis added)

It is clear from the emphasized words that Calvin pointed to a penal substitution for our sins. What is more, he made it plain that God's absolute holiness demands such a substitute to appease His wrath and release His mercy (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 3:21–25).

The Governmental Theory of the Atonement

Hugo Grotius (1583–1645) responded to the antinomian extremes he saw implied in the socianian (moral-example) view, which pictured a God of overindulgent love, lacking in emphasis upon justice and holiness. As a lawyer, Grotius formulated the *governmental theory* of the Atonement by stressing the law of God and reminding believers that any violation of it was a serious matter. In His holiness, God has established laws to which sin is in opposition. These are the primary tenets of the governmental view: God, as sovereign Ruler, has the *right* to punish sin, which is inherently deserving of punishment, but it is not *mandatory* that He do so. *Love* is *God's dominant attribute*. He desires to forgive sins, but He wishes to do it in such a way as to maintain His moral government (*DFCSC*, 20).

Just as a creditor may cancel a debt if he so chooses, he must still act in the

best interest of those under his authority. Likewise, God, taking into consideration the best interest of humanity, sent Christ to die for our sins. The Atonement was necessary to provide forgiveness and simultaneously to retain the moral structure of the world. However, the death of Christ was not offered as *payment* for the penalty for our sins; rather, it was a *substitute* for the penalty. Christ's sacrifice demonstrated that God's justice will require us to suffer if we continue in sin.

Unlike with Anselm's necessary-satisfaction theory, Christ's death, according the governmental view of Grotius, is not a satisfaction for our sin for breaking God's law—punishment, allegedly, cannot be transferred from one person to another. Christ's death, then, was *a demonstration of God's hatred of sin*. Sin is not punished because it deserves to be, but because of the demands of moral government. The point of punishment, according to the governmental perspective, is not retribution but *deterrence* of further sins.

Grotius believed that if the death of Christ *were* truly a punishment for the sins of humanity, then there would be no possibility of future punishment for us and, consequently, we could do whatever we wanted, knowing that there would be no penalty.[5] Thus, says the governmental view, while there *is* an objective element in the Atonement—Christ's suffering as an acceptable substitute to the moral Ruler of the universe—the *chief aim* is its impact upon human beings, serving as a deterrent to sin. By the death of Jesus, God was able to forgive sins in such a way that there would be no adverse consequences for human beings. It was not a full payment of the debt of sin, but it was a sufficient satisfaction to provide God with grounds for forgiving sinners and yet without encouraging sin.

Grotius offers little explicit scriptural support for his governmental theory of the Atonement, though Isaiah 42:21 is used: "It pleased the LORD for the sake of his righteousness to make his law great and glorious." Psalm 2 is also referenced, since it refers to God as the Ruler whose wrath is kindled at the unruly:

> Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One.
> "Let us break their chains," they say, "and throw off their fetters."
> The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them.

The Mystical Theory of the Atonement

One final perspective on the Atonement is the *mystical theory*, which comes

from the “father of liberalism,” Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834). He proposed that salvation is attained by a mystical union with Christ—in Him, the ideal of humanity is fully realized.

According to the mystical theory, since Christ was the absolute unity of divinity and humanity, God became man that man may become God. As “God-men,” the redeemed partake of the divine human nature, or the life of Christ. For Schleiermacher, then, God and man become mystically united in the person of Jesus:

> [This] presentation of the redeeming activity of Christ… exhibits it as the establishment of a new life common to Him and us (original in Him, in us new and derived), [and it] is usually called, by those who have not had the experience, “mystical.” This expression is so extremely vague that it seems better to avoid it. But if we are willing to keep so close to [the term’s] original use as to understand by [“mystical”] what belongs to the circle of doctrines which only a few share, but for others are a mystery, then we may accept [the definition]. Provided that we recognize that no one can be received into this circle arbitrarily, because doctrines are only expressions of inward experiences, whoever has these experiences ipso facto belongs to the circle. (*CF*, 428)
>
> The original activity of the Redeemer, therefore, which belongs to Him alone, and which precedes all activity of our own in this challenge, would be that by means of which He assumes us into this fellowship of His activity and His life. The continuance of that fellowship, accordingly, constitutes the essence of the state of grace; the new corporate life is the sphere within which Christ produces this act; in it is revealed the continuous activity of His sinless perfection. (ibid., 425)
>
> Hence we can know the fellowship of the Redeemer only in so far as we are not conscious of our own individual life; as impulses flow to us from Him, we find that in Him from which everything proceeds to be the source of our activity is also a common possession, as it were. This too is the meaning of all those passages in Scripture which speak of Christ being and living in us, of being dead to sin, of putting off the old and putting on the new man. But Christ can only direct His God-consciousness against sin in so far as He enters into the corporate life of man and empathetically shares the consciousness of sin, but shares it as something He is to overcome. This very consciousness of sin as something to be overcome becomes the principle of our activity in the action which He evokes in us. (ibid., 425–26)

Although Schleiermacher understood this mystical union in a pantheistic context, many of his followers have tried to translate it into a more theistic framework. In any event, adherents to this theory still believe that salvation is a mystical unity made possible by God becoming man in Christ, so that man may have a union with God in Christ (cf. Eph. 4:3–4). The Atonement, then, has a purely subjective basis—the mystical theory alleges that there is no objective basis in any redemptive act of Christ on the cross that makes salvation possible (see Hodge, *ST*, 3.204–08).

AN EVALUATION OF THE THEORIES OF THE

ATONEMENT

There are dimensions of truth in all of these views.

First, as the recapitulation theory[6] asserts, “Christ went through all the stages of human life, resisted all temptations, died and arose a victor over death and the devil,” thus making all “the benefits of [His] victory available to us through participation in him.”

Second, as the ransom theory[7] affirms, Christ *did* pay the price to purchase us from the clutches of Satan, though the price was paid to God, not the devil. Without the Atonement, we would still be in bondage to Satan and, consequently, to sin (cf. Mark 10:45; 1 Cor. 6:20).

Third, the moral-example theory[8] contains truth, for Christ’s death *did* provide an example of faith and obedience that inspires us to be obedient to God (cf. 1 Peter 2:21).

Fourth, the necessary-satisfaction theory[9] gets to the very heart of the Atonement, affirming that it *was* necessary for God’s offended justice and honor to be satisfied by a penalty that only Jesus could pay. Because He is the God-man, Christ’s death had infinite value and, hence, could restore the honor due to an infinitely holy God. Since God cannot simply remit sins, a reparation must be paid, and only a sinless person could pay it for humanity.

Fifth, there is truth in even the liberal moral-influence theory[10]. God *is* love; His demonstration of self-sacrificing love at the cross (Rom. 5:8) *does* have a moral influence on us (1 John 3:16; 2 Cor. 5:14–15).

Sixth, building on the necessary-satisfaction theory, the substitution theory[11] rightly maintains that such an atonement *was* a substitution for the sins of all human beings.[12] Absolute justice *has* been violated, and, therefore, a substitution for our sins *had* to be made by the sinless Son of God.

Seventh, although the need for God’s satisfaction is *not* optional, again, the optional satisfaction theory[13] correctly affirms:

> A man effectively atones for an offense when he offers to the one who has been offended something which he accepts as matching or outweighing the former offense. Christ, suffering in loving and obedient spirit, offered more to God than was demanded in recompense for all the sins of mankind.… Christ’s passion, then, was not only sufficient but superabundant for the sins of mankind; as John says, “He is a propitiation for our sins, not for ours only but also for those of the whole world” (*ST*, 3a.48, 2).

Eighth, even the governmental theory[14] is not without verity, for it truthfully

affirms that, in His holiness, God *has* established laws of which sin is a violation. As the sovereign Ruler, God *does* have the right to punish sin, which is inherently deserving of punishment. Likewise, the governmental theory correctly stresses God's love and notes that while He *does* desire to forgive sins, He wishes to do it in such a way as to maintain His moral government.

Ninth, and finally, as inadequate as the mystical theory[15] may be as a full explanation of the Atonement, there is an element of truth in it, for salvation *does* involve a mysterious spiritual union with Christ. Indeed, He *is* the absolute unity of divinity and humanity. In brief, God became man that man may become *like* God. Even Paul spoke of the "mystery" of the union of "Christ and the church" as Bridegroom and bride (Eph. 5:32).

VARIOUS VIEWS OF THE ATONEMENT

Theories	**God's Attribute**	**Basic Goal**	**Object**	**Key Verses**	**Proponent**
Recapitulation	Omnipotence	Reverse the Fall	Satan	Romans 5:15–21	Irenaeus
Ransom	Wisdom	Defeat Satan	Satan	Mark 10:45	Origen
Moral-Example	Love	Show God's love to us	Humanity	Romans 5:8; 5:17–19	Pelagius, Abelard
Necessary-Satisfaction	Majesty	Pay the debt of sin	God	1 John 2:1	Anselm
Optional-Satisfaction	Mercy	Restore the sinner	Humanity	Luke 19:10	Aquinas
Substitution	Justice	Appease wrath, release mercy	God	2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 3:21–25	Calvin

Governmental	Sovereignty	Keep moral order	God and humanity	Isaiah 42:21	Grotius
Mystical	Oneness	Unite us with God	Humanity	Ephesians 4:3–4; 5:30–32	Schleiermacher

A SUMMARY OF THE THEORIES OF THE ATONEMENT

Comparing and contrasting the main theories of the Atonement not only demonstrates the multifaceted realities contained in this momentous act of redemption, but it also puts them in focus with the foundation of all theological truth—the attributes of God. Each view of the Atonement appears to be related to one or more of God's attributes, showing how His redemptive actions are rooted in His very nature and not simply His arbitrary will.

The *recapitulation* view stresses God's omnipotence as He defeats Satan and reverses the effects of the Fall. The *ransom* view emphasizes God's wisdom as He out-strategizes Satan through the Cross, where Satan bites on the bait of Christ's humanity and gets caught on the hook of Christ's deity. The *moral-example* view focuses on God's love, revealed in Christ's self-sacrificial and exemplar love for us. The *optional-satisfaction* view showcases God's mercy in rescuing sinners and restoring them to Himself. The *necessary-satisfaction* view demonstrates the majesty of God, whose honor is violated and who must be appeased by His Son's death for us. The *substitution* view stresses God's justice, which must be satisfied to release His mercy on sinners. The *moral-influence* view demonstrates the motivating power of God's love in Christ's redemptive acts on our behalf. The *governmental* view is based on God's sovereignty, since, as King, He must keep the moral order of the universe. Finally, the *mystical* view zeroes in on that mysterious oneness between Christ and His church, which is based on God's attribute of unity.

While each of the aforementioned theories of the Atonement contributes some truth to the overall redemptive acts of Christ, the *substitution view*—meaning that Christ's death brought substitutionary satisfaction to God—fully explains the necessary *objective* basis (in God) for the Atonement: Without Christ, the God-man, paying the price for our sins, God could not be just and yet

also be the Justifier of the unjust, as Paul declared Him to be (Rom. 3:21–25).[16] Without the Just dying for the unjust, God's justice would not be satisfied, and without justice being appeased, God's mercy could not be released to declare the otherwise unjust sinners to be justified in His eyes and, hence, qualified for heaven.[17] Most theories of the Atonement, instead of centering on Christ and offering an objective response, lean more heavily on subjective elements and focus primarily upon the Atonement's effect on Satan (in defeating him) or on human beings (in delivering them and setting an example for them).

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CHAPTER NINE

THE NATURE OF SALVATION

As we have seen, there are many theories of the Atonement, and all of them contain an element of truth. However, only the necessary-satisfaction and substitution views provide an objective basis for understanding and explaining the work of Christ. In this chapter, the biblical, theological, and historical bases of an objective view of the Atonement will be explored.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR THE NATURE OF SALVATION (SUBSTITUTIONARY ATONEMENT)

The Bible is a salvific book, and what Paul told Timothy is its central message: “From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15).

Pre-Salvation Acts of God

Salvation is not a single act but is provided for believers in three major stages.[1] Further, there are pre-salvation acts of God that are important for our understanding of the salvific process.

Election

The word *election* (or *elect*) occurs fourteen times in the New Testament. An elect person is a chosen one; *election* (or *elect*) is used of *Israel* (Rom. 9:11; 11:28), of *angels* (1 Tim. 5:21), and of *believers*.[2] In relation to believers, election is the decision of God from all eternity whereby He chose those who would be saved. Paul wrote, "Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory" (2 Tim. 2:10). Peter said that the elect are those "who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father" (1 Peter 1:2).

Chosen (or Chose)

The words *chosen* and *chose* are used numerous times.[3] The terms are employed of *Christ* (Luke 23:35; 1 Peter 1:20; 2:4, 6), of a *disciple* (Acts 1:2, 24; 10:41; 22:14; John 15:10), and even of *Judas* (John 6:70; 13:18), who was chosen to be an apostle. Soteriologically, a chosen one is a person elected to salvation by God. Ephesians 1:11 is a key passage:

> In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.

Predestined

Just as God predetermined from all eternity that Christ would die for our sins (Acts 2:23), He also predestined who would be saved. As Paul says, "Those God foreknew he also *predestined* to be conformed to the likeness of his Son" (Rom. 8:29).

> He chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he *predestined* us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will. (Eph. 1:4–5)

Foreknowledge

Being omniscient, God also eternally *foreknew* those who would be saved: "Those God *foreknew* he also predestined" (Rom. 8:29). Indeed, they were "elect according to the foreknowledge of God" (1 Peter 1:2 KJV). Since His foreknowledge is infallible (He is omniscient), whatever God foreknows will indeed come to pass. Hence, His foreknowledge of who would be saved assures that they will be.

Calling

God's *calling* of persons to salvation is found in many passages.[4] Paul summarizes the place of calling in salvation in Romans 8:28–30:

> We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been *called* according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also *called*; those he *called*, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

Conviction

While the aforementioned acts are eternal, the next two are pre-salvation acts *in time*. The first is God's work in convincing a sinner of his sin (Gen. 6:3; John 8:9; 16:8). In the latter passage, Jesus promised: "When he [the Holy Spirit] comes, *he will convict the world of guilt* in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment." The act of convicting, then, is that by which God persuades a person that he is a sinner and, thus, is in need of the Savior.

Prevenient Grace

Prevenient means "before," and *prevenient grace* refers to God's unmerited work in the human heart prior to salvation, which directs people to this end through Christ. Paul speaks of it in Titus: "*The grace of God that brings salvation* has appeared to all men" (2:11). He adds in 2 Corinthians,

> You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. (8:9)

This grace is also seen in the fact that "the goodness of God leads you to repentance" (Rom. 2:4 NKJV). Thus, prevenient grace is God's grace exerted on our behalf even before He bestows salvation on us.

The Names Used of God's Saving Acts

Salvation is described by different terms in the Bible, the most prominent of which include the following.

Effectual Grace

God's grace is not only prevenient ("before" salvation), but it is also efficacious or effectual in *producing* salvation in the elect. That is, it accomplishes in the lives of believers the salvation God has foredetermined for them and by which He accomplishes what He has ordained.[5]

> So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. (Isa. 55:11)

Being all-knowing and all-powerful, God never attempts what He does not accomplish. Thus, "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1:6), "for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Phil. 2:13).

Sealing

Paul speaks of *being sealed* with the Holy Spirit as a salvific act that guarantees our ultimate salvation. He told the Ephesians that the Holy Spirit's presence in their life "is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory" (Eph. 1:14). Later he adds, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption" (Eph. 4:30). This seal of the Holy Spirit comes at the moment of justification (Rom. 8:9) and is the guarantee of our ultimate glorification.

Salvation (or Save)

The most common words for the process by which God fits someone for heaven are *salvation* or being *saved*. As Earl Radmacher notes,

> The word *salvation* has its roots in the Hebrew word *yasa*, [meaning] "to be wide or roomy" in contrast to "narrow or restricted." Thus words such as *liberation, emancipation, preservation, protection,* and *security* grow out of it. It refers to delivering a person or group of people from distress or danger, from a "restricted" condition in which they are unable to help themselves. (*S*, 3)

The Greek nouns for *salvation* are *soteria* and *soterion*; the adjective is *soterios*, from which we derive the word *soteriology*.

The meaning of *soteria* and *soterion* is "deliverance," "preservation," or "salvation." *Salvation* is often used of physical deliverance (cf. Luke 1:69, 71; Acts 7:25; 27:37), such as Paul's desire to be delivered or released from prison: "I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance" (Phil. 1:19).

Spiritually, salvation refers to the process by which God, through the work of Christ, delivers sinners from the prison of sin. Paul declared, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16; cf. Eph. 1:13). He later says, "It is with your heart that

you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved" (Rom. 10:10). Peter announced; "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

As mentioned previously,[6] *salvation* is a broad term that encompasses three stages: Salvation from the past penalty of sin, from the present power of sin, and from the future presence of sin. These are often called, respectively, *justification*, *sanctification*, and *glorification*.

Redemption

Another broad term, often used as the equivalent of *salvation*, is the term *redemption*. Several Greek words are translated *redemption*; one is *apolutrosis*, which means "to redeem," "to ransom," or "to deliver." *Apolutrosis* is used ten times in the New Testament, once of physical deliverance (Heb. 11:35) and nine times primarily of spiritual deliverance.[7]

Another Greek word for *redemption* is *lutron*, which is used twice (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45). *Lutron* means "to ransom," "to redeem," or "to buy back," and its spiritual application pictures sinners being redeemed (purchased) from the marketplace of sin.

An additional term for *redemption* is *antilutron*, which means "re-adoption price" or "ransom." In 1 Timothy 2:6, Paul speaks of Christ, "who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time."

Another word, *agoradzo*, which comes from the Greek word for the market (*agora*), carries the meaning of "buying," "purchasing," or "paying a price for" something. *Agoradzo* is used thirty-one times (usually of physical things—cf. Matt. 13:44, 46; 14:15).

Spiritually, *agoradzo* means "to redeem from the marketplace of sin," "to purchase our salvation" (cf. 1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; 2 Peter 2:1; Rev. 14:3–4; 5:9). In this final passage we read:

> They sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and *with your blood you purchased men for God* from every tribe and language and people and nation.

While some scholars have argued that the *purchase price* was paid *to Satan*,[8] since sinners are his slaves, most orthodox scholars reject this, insisting that the price Christ paid for sin was *to God*, since sin makes us a debtor to Him.[9] Without this price, which we couldn't pay and which Christ *did* pay for all humankind, we could never have been saved.

Mediation

As Savior, Christ is our *mediator*. The Hebrew word *yakach* is employed once in the Old Testament (Job 9:33): "If only there were someone to *arbitrate [mediate]* between us, to lay his hand upon us both."

A Greek word for *mediate, mesitas,* is used six times (Gal. 3:19–20—of Moses; Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24—of Christ; and 1 Tim. 2:5: "There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" [cf. John 10:9]).

There are three aspects of Christ's mediation: (1) As Prophet (Heb. 1:2ff.), He represents God to man; (2) as Priest (Heb. 9:15), He represents man to God; (3) and as King (Ps. 2), He reigns over man for God.

Regeneration

The Greek word for *regeneration* is *paliggenesia*, which means "regeneration," "rebirth," or "spiritual renovation." *Paliggenesia* is used twice in the New Testament (Matt. 19:28—of Messianic renovation; Titus 3:5—of salvation). In Titus it refers to the impartation of spiritual life to the soul:

> [God] saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. *He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit*.

Regeneration is the impartation of spiritual life, by God, to the souls of those who were "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1 KJV) and who were "saved" made alive by God "through faith" in Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:8 NKJV).

The *Source* of regeneration is God; the *result* of regeneration is sonship; the *means* of regeneration is the Holy Spirit; and the *duration* of regeneration is eternal:

> To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. (John 1:12–13)

"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26). Parallel ideas are expressed in many biblical texts.[10]

Born Again

Being *born again* or *born from above* is parallel to regeneration. *Rebirth* is the point at which a person "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1 KJV) receives spiritual life. Jesus said, "Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born

again' " (John 3:6–7). Peter adds, "You have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God" (1 Peter 1:23; cf. John 1:13; 1 John 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18.). This idea was expressed in the Old Testament by Ezekiel when he spoke of God giving a new heart to Israel if they repented (Ezek. 11:19).

Adoption

Adoption (Gk: *huiothesia*) means "placing as a son"; it signifies, literally, "a legal child" (Ex. 2:10) and is used five times in the New Testament.[11] Theologically, *adoption* (Gal. 4:5) refers to the act of God that places a person as a son in God's family.[12] *Adoption* is a term of position whereby one becomes a son by the new birth (John 1:12–13), is redeemed from the bondage of the law (Gal. 4:1–5), and, although only a child (Gk: *teknion*), is by adoption made an adult son (Gk: *huios*), which is fully manifested at the resurrection of the body (Rom. 8:23; cf. 1 John 3:2).

Reconciliation

One Greek word for *reconciliation* is *katallasso*, which means "to reconcile" or "to bring together" (cf. Matt. 5:23–24). *Katallasso* is used five other times in the New Testament.[13]

Another term for *reconciliation* is *katallage*, which means "bringing together." *Katallaga* is used four times.[14]

Also, *hilaskomai* is translated *reconciliation* (Heb. 2:17 KJV):

> In all things it behooved him to be made like unto [his] brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things [pertaining] to God, *to make reconciliation for the sins of the people*.

Being alienated from God by sin, fallen human beings need reconciliation with Him.

> All this is from God, who *reconciled* us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of *reconciliation:* that God was *reconciling* the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of *reconciliation*. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be *reconciled* to God. (2 Cor. 5:18–20)

There are two sides to reconciliation: the objective side, the potential for which Christ accomplished for all humankind (v. 19), and the subjective side, by which we actually become reconciled to God (v. 20). Once again, the whole

world is reconciled in the sense of being made *savable* by Christ (v. 19), but not in the sense of being *saved* (see Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:20).

It is also noteworthy that God is not reconciled to us; *we* are reconciled to *Him*. God does not move in relation to the sinner; the sinner moves in relation to Him. Both alienation and reconciliation are mentioned in Colossians 1:20–21, a powerful expression of what it means to be saved:

[It was God's purpose] through him [Christ] to *reconcile* to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. Once you were *alienated* from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.

Forgiveness

The Greek word for *forgiveness* is *aphesis*, which means "to forgive" or "to remit" one's sins. Hebrews declares that God cannot forgive without atonement, for "the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (9:22). Paul announced: "Through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you" (Acts 13:38). Forgiveness does not erase the *sin*; history cannot be changed. But forgiveness does erase the *record* of the sin. Like a pardon, the crime of the accused is not expunged from history but is deleted from his account. Hence, it is "in [Christ Jesus that] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace" (Eph. 1:7; cf. Col. 1:14).

Justification

Justification is the act of God by which we who are unrighteous in ourselves are nevertheless *declared* righteous before God. It is a judicial (legal) act of *pronouncing* one to be right in God's sight.

Several Greek words describe the act of justification. *Dikaios* means "just" or "righteous)"; it is used of *humans* (Matt. 1:19; 5:45; 9:13, etc.), of *Christ* (Acts 3:14; 7:52; 22:14; Rom. 5:7), of *God* (Rom. 3:26), and of *salvation* (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38).

Dikaiosune (righteousness) can refer to *practical justification*[15] or to *positional justification*.[16] Systematic theology speaks of it in the latter sense.

Dikaioo means "justify" or "justified." It sometimes refers to *God* (Luke 7:29; Rom. 3:4), to *Christ* (1 Tim. 3:16), or to *salvation*.[17] Romans 4:2–5 is a foundational passage:

> Was it because of [Abraham's] good deeds that God accepted him? If so, he would have had something to boast about. But from God's point of view Abraham had no basis at all for pride. For the Scriptures tell us, "Abraham believed God, so God declared him to be righteous." When people work, their wages are not a gift. Workers earn what they receive. But people are declared righteous because of their faith, not because of their work, (NLT)

God declares a sinner righteous before Himself on the basis of faith alone!

Dikaiosis is translated *justification* (Rom. 5:18); Paul says of Christ, "He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our *justification*" (Rom. 4:25). It is important to point out that *justification* means "to *declare* righteous" (not "to *make* righteous"), because:

(1) It is done apart from works (Rom. 1:17; 3:20; 4:2–5);
(2) It is done on sinners (Rom. 3:21–23); and
(3) It is a judicial act (Rom. 4:4–6; 5:18).

This is evident from words variously translated *imputed*, *counted*, or *credited* in regard to one's account with God (cf. Rom. 4:3, 6, 11, 22–24).

> What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was *credited* to him as righteousness." Now when a man works, his wages are not *credited* to him as a gift, but as an obligation.… David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God *credits* righteousness apart from works.… "Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never *count* against him." … We have been saying that Abraham's faith was *credited* to him as righteousness. Under what circumstances was it *credited*? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! … So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be *credited* to them.… This is why "it was *credited* to him as righteousness." The words "*it was credited to him*" were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will *credit* righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. (Rom. 4:3–4, 6, 8–11, 22–24)

Even James, who stresses the works that flow naturally *from* saving faith, speaks of credited righteousness (called *forensic righteousness*): "And the scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was *credited* to him as righteousness,' and he was called God's friend" (James 2:23).

In Paul's strong comparison between Adam and Christ (in Rom. 5), he uses the word *justification* twice to describe what Christ provided for all human beings:

> The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought *justification*. … Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was *justification* that brings life for all men. (vv. 16, 18)

Observe the following comparison of Romans 5:

Person	**Adam**	**Christ**
Act	Sin (vv. 12, 14, 16) Trespass (vv. 15–18) Disobedience (v. 19)	Grace (v. 15) Righteousness (v. 18) Obedience (v. 19)
Physical Results	Death for all (vv. 12, 14–15, 17)	Life for all (vv. 17–18, 21)
Moral Results	Sin enters for all (v. 12) Sin reigns on all (v. 21)	Grace enters for all (v. 15) Grace reigns for all (v. 21)
Legal Results	All made sinners (v. 19) Judgment for all (v. 18) Condemnation for all (16, 18)	All made righteous (v. 19) Gift for all (v. 18) Justification for all (16, 18)

Now, since it is evident from Scripture that not all people will eventually be saved,[18] Paul cannot mean that everyone is *actually* justified because of Christ's vicarious sacrifice, but rather is *potentially* justifiable, for many reasons.

First, Romans 5 clearly declares that some of the consequences of Adam's sin (like physical death) are actually passed on to all human beings (vv. 12–14).

Second, the phrase "not like" (vv. 15–16) shows that the parallel is not perfect.

Third, the phrase "those who receive" (v. 17) implies that not all receive the gift of salvation, and that only those who do receive it will be saved.

Fourth, this fits with the context of Romans 4, which declares that salvation only comes to those who believe (vv. 3–5; as does Rom. 5:1).

Fifth, and finally, if the phrase "made righteous" (v. 19) is taken as actual, then universalism follows. Universalism is not taught in the Bible;[19] hence, everything under "Christ" in the above chart is *potential* for all persons. It is available for all but is only appropriated by some.

It is also important to note in this connection that it does *not* follow from the preceding points, as some Arminians infer, that everything under "Adam" in the above chart is *also* only potential for all persons until they actualize it by their own personal sins.

First, again, the phrase "not like" (vv. 15–16) differentiates the two sides of the comparison.

Second, Romans 5 clearly says that some of the consequences of Adam's sins (such as physical death) are automatic, without any choice on our part (vv. 12–14).

Third, and finally, no such qualifying terms like *receive* (v. 17) are used of the consequences of Adam's sin, even though these terms are used in reference to the appropriation of the *gift* of salvation that Christ provided for all.

Propitiation (or Expiation)

The word *propitiation* appears in many English translations (e.g., KJV, ASV, NKJV), although others translate it *expiation* (e.g., RSV) or *atoning sacrifice* (e.g., NIV). *Hilasmos*, meaning "to satisfy God on behalf of the sinner," is found in two places: "He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2 KJV); "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son [to be] the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10 KJV).

Another Greek term for *propitiation*, *hilasterion*, is used in two texts. Hebrews 9:5 refers to the mercy seat in the Old Testament tabernacle, and Romans 3:25 (KJV) says, "God hath set forth [Jesus to be] a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God."

A third word, *hilaskomai*, means "to propitiate," "to satisfy," or "to expiate." *Hilaskomai* is used twice: once meaning "be merciful" (Luke 18:13) and the other pointing to Christ (Heb. 2:17):

> For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.

In the Old Testament, the mercy seat was the throne of grace where, once the sacrificial blood was sprinkled, God was satisfied and released His mercy upon the sinner in forgiveness. In the New Testament, Christ forever satisfied God on our behalf (1 John 2:2) by one sacrifice (Heb. 10:14).

Other Figures of Speech for *Salvation*

In addition to those above, the New Testament speaks of salvation by many other terms and phrases. Believers are said to be "in Christ" (Eph. 1:3; 2:6; 2 Cor. 5:17); be "baptized by one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:13);[20] be a "new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15), and be a "new man" or "new self" (Eph. 2:15; 4:24; Col. 3:10). The saved undergo purification (or cleansing—Titus 2:14; Heb. 1:3; 9:14; 10:22); have identification (or union) with Christ (Rom. 6:2–4; 1 Cor. 12:13);

experience healing (Isa. 53:5; Mark 2:17; 1 Peter 2:24); are offered enlightenment (John 8:12; 12:36; 2 Cor. 4:4–6; 1 Thess. 5:5); can live at peace with God (Rom. 5:1; 12:1; Eph. 2:14–15 [cf. 5:19, “aliens”; Col. 1:20); and are made alive (Eph. 2:1; John 5:21, 24; 1 Cor. 15:22; 1 John 3:14).[21]

Atonement

One of the most important expressions of salvation is the word *atonement*, translated from the Hebrew *kaphar*. Literally, *kaphar* means “to cover,” but it also carries a broader meaning of “expiation,” “condoning,” “wiping away,” “placating,” or “canceling.” The Authorized Version translates *kaphar* as “to appease,” “to disannul,” “to forgive,” “to be merciful,” “to pacify,” “to pardon,” “to purge,” “to put off,” and “to reconcile.” The key thoughts are “to cover over in God’s eyes” and/or “to wipe away.” *Kaphar* is used around one hundred times in the Old Testament (in verbal form).

The Greek term for *atonement* is *hiloskomai*, meaning “to propitiate,” “to expiate,” or “to conciliate.” It is used twice; once in Luke 18:13, when the penitent sinner asks God to “be merciful” to him,[22] and once in Hebrews 2:17, where again we read:

> Therefore he had to be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people, (RSV)

An elemental Old Testament text on atonement is Leviticus 4:14–21:

> When they become aware of the sin they committed, the assembly must bring a young bull as a *sin offering* and present it before the Tent of Meeting. The elders of the community are to *lay their hands on the bull’s head* before the LORD, and the bull shall be *slaughtered* before the LORD. Then the anointed priest is to take some of the bull’s blood into the Tent of Meeting. *He shall dip his finger into the blood and sprinkle it before the* LORD *seven times in front of the curtain*. He is to put some of the blood on the horns of the altar that is before the LORD in the Tent of Meeting. The rest of the blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. He shall remove all the fat from it and burn it on the altar, and do with this bull just as he did with the bull for the sin offering. *In this way the priest will make atonement for them, and they will be forgiven*. Then he shall take the bull outside the camp and burn it as he burned the first bull. *This is the sin offering for the community*.

Several facts are noteworthy about this prototype of Christ our High Priest, who made atonement for our sins.

First, Old Testament atonement involved more than merely passing over their sins. The text says they were “forgiven.”

Second, forgiveness in the Old Testament was by looking forward to the

Cross (John 8:56) on the basis that in God's eyes the Lamb (Christ) was slain before the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8; Eph. 1:4). Abraham was justified when he believed (Gen. 15:6; cf. Gal. 3:8).

Third, and finally, atonement involved a blood sacrifice (Heb. 9:22).

Another important verse in this regard is Leviticus 17:11: "The life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life."

Hebrews 10:4, 11–14 provides an inspired commentary on Old Testament atonement:

> *It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins* … Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers *the same sacrifices*, which *can never take away sins*. But when this priest [Jesus] had offered *for all time one sacrifice for sins*, he sat down at the right hand of God. Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, because *by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy*.

Sacrificial (Substitutionary) Atonement

Clearly contained in the many biblical passages on the Atonement is that it is *substitutionary:* Christ died in our place, punished for our sins that we might be set free. Consider the strong arguments in favor of substitutionary atonement.

First, God's absolute justice demands a perfect Substitute for us, since He cannot simply overlook sin. As we have seen, He is too holy to even look on sin with approval (Hab. 1:13); God is essentially just and cannot be otherwise, since He is unchanging by nature.[23]

Second, our total depravity[24] demands a sinless Substitute for our sins, because nothing we can do measures up to God's standard: "We know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God" (Rom. 3:19). The only way we can enter the eternal presence of an immutable, holy God is by the substitutionary sacrifice of humankind's perfection: the man Christ Jesus.

Third, the Old Testament sacrifices imply substitutionary atonement, since in the one offering he laid his hands on the animal, symbolizing a transfer of guilt:

> If the offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he is to offer a male without defect. He must present it at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting so that it will be acceptable to the LORD. He is to lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him. (Lev. 1:3–4)

Fourth, Isaiah 53:5–6 speaks explicitly about substitutionary suffering in

several phrases:

> [1] He was pierced *for* our transgressions, [2] he was crushed *for* our iniquities; [3] the punishment that brought us peace was *upon him*, and [4] by *his* wounds *we* are healed.…[5] The LORD has laid *on him* the iniquity of us all.

What Christ did was "for" us, and our sins were laid "on him"—substitutionary atonement.

Fifth, Jesus was presented as the Passover Lamb, a substitutionary sacrifice. Just as the Old Testament Passover lamb was sacrificed for their sins, even so "Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed" for us (1 Cor. 5:7). John the Baptist declared: "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

Sixth, Jesus claimed to be a fulfillment of Isaiah 53, which portrays a substitutionary sacrifice. He said, "It is written: 'And he was numbered with the transgressors'; and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment" (Luke 22:37).

Seventh, Jesus presented His death as a ransom (Gk: *lutron*), which usually meant (in the Greek Old Testament) "a deliverance from bondage in exchange for the payment of compensation or the offering of a substitute."[25] Again, He said, "Even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a *ransom* for many" (Mark 10:45).

Eighth, Christ presented Himself as a consecrated priest and sacrifice: "For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified" (John 17:19). The term *agiadzo* ("to sanctify"), used here, commonly carries this meaning. Many other passages likewise speak of Christ as our Sacrifice, which implies a substitution for us. The writer of Hebrews declares:

> [In Old Testament times] only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and *for* the sins the people had committed in ignorance.… How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died *as a ransom* to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant. (9:7, 14–15)

Similarly, the next chapter reads:

> Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, 'Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, O God.' " …

> And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Day after day every [Old Testament] priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice *for* sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. (10:5–7, 10–14)

Ninth, Christ's death was "for," that is, on another's behalf. The Greek word *for (huper)* often implies substitution; Luke 22:19–20, for example, says:

> He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given *for* you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out *for* you."

Likewise, in John 10:15, the word *for* implies substitution: "I lay down my life *for* the sheep." Many other passages also use *for* in a substitutionary sense.[26]

Tenth, in Christ's death *for* (Gk: *anti*, meaning "instead of") us, substitution is explicit. For example, as in Mark 10:45, Jesus said in Matthew 20:28, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom *for* many." In addition to the idea of ransom, the great Greek scholar A. T. Robertson (1863–1934) noted that "there is the notion of exchange also in the use of *anti*." Robertson reserved rebuke for those who reject this, declaring that "those who refuse to admit that Jesus held this notion of a substitutionary death … [take] an easy way to get rid of passages that contradict one's theological opinions" (*WPNT*, 1.163).[27]

Eleventh, *expiation* (or *atoning sacrifice*—NIV), used of Christ's death, implies a substitutionary sacrifice. For instance, in 1 John 2:2 we read: "He is the atoning sacrifice *for* our sins, and not only for ours but also *for* the sins of the whole world." This text makes little sense unless Christ gave His sinless life as a substitute for our sins.

Twelfth, and finally, appeasing God's wrath by Christ's death implies a substitutionary death. Paul affirms, "God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood" (Rom. 3:25). The Old Testament portrays the same idea (cf. Zech. 7:2; 8:22; Mal. 1:9), and numerous New Testament passages speak of God's wrath against sin,[28] which implies that it must be appeased by a substitutionary sacrifice.

Combined, these arguments present a powerful case for the orthodox concept of a substitutionary atonement. Christ died in our place: "God made him who had no sin to be sin *for us*, so that in him we might become the righteousness of

God" (2 Cor. 5:21). "Christ died *for* sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God" (1 Peter 3:18).

THE THREE STAGES OF SALVATION

Salvation begins with the judicial act of justification, proceeds through the lifelong process of sanctification, and is completed when we meet Christ in an act of glorification.

Salvation From the *Penalty* of Sin (Justification)

The first stage of salvation is called justification, salvation from the *penalty* of sin. Justification is an instantaneous, past act of God by which one is saved from the guilt of sin—his record is cleared and he is guiltless before the Judge (Rom. 8:1).

The heart cry of the Reformation was "justification by faith *alone*!" This formula was strongly opposed by the Roman Catholic counterreformation that insisted on justification by faith *and* works. Interestingly, some modern Catholics claim that "Luther's famous formula 'faith alone' … can have a good Catholic sense" (*CCA*, 199). However, this is not the same sense in which Protestants believe it, for in Catholicism the performance of progressive works is added to faith as a condition for ultimate justification.

In order to appreciate this significant contribution of the Reformers, it is necessary to examine the biblical background of the term *justification.* As we will see, there are solid biblical grounds, in both testaments, revealing that the Protestant doctrine of forensic justification, expounded clearly by the Reformers and their followers, is correct.

The Old Testament Use of Forensic Justification

The background for the doctrine of forensic justification (as with other New Testament doctrines) is found in the Old Testament. More often than not, the Hebrew term *hitsdiq*, usually rendered *justify*, is "used in a forensic or legal sense, as meaning, not 'to make just or righteous,' but 'to declare judicially that one is in harmony with the law' " (Hoekema, *SBG*, 154). George Eldon Ladd (1911–1982) remarked, "He is righteous who is judged to be in the right (Ex. 23:7; Deut. 25:1); i.e., who in judgment through acquittal thus stands in a right

relationship with God" (*TNT*, 440).

The majority of Reformed scholars would agree:

> In the Old Testament, the concept of righteousness frequently appears in a forensic or juridical context. A righteous man is one who has been declared by a judge to be free from guilt. (Erickson, *CT*, 955)

This thinking on the forensic nature of the Old Testament terms for *justification* and *righteousness* is not restricted to evangelicals. Hans Küng (b. 1928) agrees that "according to the original biblical usage of the term, 'justification' must be defined as a *declaring just by court order*" (*J*, 209).

The New Testament Use of Forensic Justification

Turning to the New Testament, the verb translated "to justify" is *dikaioó*. This word is used by Paul in a forensic or legal sense; the sinner is declared to be "righteous" (cf. Rom. 3–4). Justification is the opposite of condemnation; as observed by Anthony Hoekema (b. 1913), "The opposite of condemnation, however, is not '*making* righteous' but '*declaring* righteous.' " Therefore, by *dikaioó*, Paul means the "legal imputation of the righteousness of Christ to the believing sinner" (*SBG*, 154, emphasis added). When a person is justified, God pronounces him acquitted—in advance of the final judgment. Therefore,

> The resulting righteousness is not ethical perfection; it is "sinlessness" in the sense that God no longer counts a man's sin against him (2 Cor. 5:19). [Thus we find in the New Testament that] justification is the declarative act of God by which, *on the basis of the sufficiency of Christ's atoning death*, he pronounces believers to have fulfilled all of the requirements of the law which pertain to them. (Erickson, *CT*, 956)

A Theological Explanation of Forensic Justification

Next to Martin Luther, John Calvin is usually regarded as the most important figure in the Reformation. On the subject of forensic justification, Calvin stated:

> Man is not made righteous in justification, but is accepted as righteous, not on account of his own righteousness, but on account of the righteousness of Christ located outside of man. (As cited in McGrath, *ID*, 2.36)

The reason human beings need justification is that in our Christ-less state, we are totally depraved.[29]

First, corruption is present at the center of the human being.

Second, depravity extends to every aspect of humanity.

Third, depravity prevents humans from pleasing God unless enabled by grace.

Fourth, and finally, corruption extends to every corner and culture of the human race (ibid., 2.90).

However, "total depravity" does not mean that humans are destitute of all natural goodness; as we have seen, the *imago Dei* has been effaced but not erased. The Reformers acknowledged that humans *can* horizontally do good (i.e., socially), yet vertically (i.e., spiritually) they are dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1) and can initiate no meritorious action toward God on behalf of their sinful condition; eternal life is received by faith and faith alone.

Charles Hodge (1797–1878) indicated that sin has predisposed humanity against any move toward God and His wondrous salvation. Hence,

> Every man should bow down before God under the humiliating consciousness that he is a member of an apostate race; the son of a rebellious parent; born estranged from God, and exposed to his displeasure. (As cited in McGrath, *ID*, 2.92)

Likewise, for Calvin, the need for justification follows from the spiritual reality of total depravity, and this justification is *judicial*, or *forensic*, in nature.

"The term *justification* means 'a declaring just.' It really implies 'a declaring just,' in the sense of 'a leaving out of the account,' 'a not imputing' " (Küng, *J*, 212). In the Old Testament, King David puts it in this way: "Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Happy are those to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit" (Ps. 32:1–2 NRSV). Paul, in the New Testament, states that God was "reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them" (2 Cor. 5:19).

These valuable insights into the biblical doctrine of justification had been largely lost throughout much of Christian history, and it was the Reformers who recovered this Pauline truth. Although some contemporary Catholics are beginning to acknowledge the important Protestant emphasis on forensic justification, it was not spelled out by the counterreformational Council of Trent (1545–1563). Indeed, while there may be no logical incompatibility between forensic justification and the Roman Catholic idea of *initial* justification, nevertheless, there are other serious problems with the Roman Catholic concept of *progressive* justification.[30] In short, salvation within Catholicism is a merit-based system of works that tends to negate *in practice* what has been affirmed *in theory* about justification by grace.

Salvation From the *Power* of Sin (Sanctification)

The second stage of salvation is called sanctification, salvation from the *power* of sin. Unlike justification, sanctification is not an act of God *declaring* us righteous; rather, it is a continual process in the present by which God is *making* us righteous. Justification is the act by which God gets us out of sin (legally). Sanctification is the process by which God gets sin out of us (actually).

There are three areas of victory over the power of sin:

(1) Victory over the *world* (1 John 5:4);
(2) Victory over the *flesh* (Rom. 7:24–25); and
(3) Victory over the *devil* (James 4:7).

Three Steps to Sanctification

The path to sanctification is set forth in Romans 6:

(1) *Knowing* we are dead to sin through Christ (v. 6);
(2) *Reckoning* this to be a fact (v. 11); and
(3) *Yielding* ourselves to God's righteous demands (v. 13).

Thus, purification does not follow automatically from justification. It involves cooperation on our part; we must yield to God's sanctifying grace.

The Wesleyan Doctrine of a Second Work of Grace

Wesleyans, following John Wesley (1703–1791), hold to a special second work of grace called *entire sanctification*, *perfectionism*, or, more popularly, called by some, *baptism of the Holy Spirit/filling of the Holy Spirit*. This is based on Wesley's *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, in which he contended that one may attain a state of sinless perfection in this life. This state, according to Wesley, has been attained by only a few, but can and should be attained by all.

A Response to Wesleyan Perfectionsism

In reply, several comments. Many people do experience a *second work of grace* in their hearts; this has different names in different traditions. In addition to the titles listed above, some, for instance, call it *dedication* or *consecration*. With regard to the need for a deeper, higher, or more Christ-like experience, there is little but semantic disagreement between Wesleyans and those outside their tradition. Indeed, Wesley himself often described this phenomenon in terms

acceptable to almost all Christians, such as *loving God with all one's heart or being crucified with Christ*.[31]

However, Wesley went beyond this (as does subsequent Wesleyanism), describing this occurrence as an instantaneous second work of grace by which one reaches, in this life, a state of sinlessness. With this most non-Wesleyan theologians disagree, for many reasons.

First, for those who, like Pentecostals, call this *the baptism of the Holy Spirit*, several things should be noted. The scriptural use of this phrase is as an act that occurs *at justification* (cf. Acts 1:5; 1 Cor. 12:13; Rom. 8:9); *baptism of the Holy Spirit* is never repeated, any more than being *born again* is repeated. Paul said, "We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink" (1 Cor. 12:13). Baptism of the Spirit is a *completed* act[32] and an *unrepeated* act, one *by which* we are saved (placed into Christ body).

Second, such an alleged *second work of grace* should not be confused with *the filling of the Holy Spirit*, which can be a continual or repeated process. Unlike the *baptism* of the Holy Spirit, which (1) happens only once, and (2) we are not commanded to subsequently seek, "*filling*" *is both continual and mandated*. Paul ordered the Ephesians, "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18). This is in the present tense, implying that we should *keep on* being filled with the Holy Spirit. Indeed, in the book of Acts, those who were filled on the Day of Pentecost (2:4) were refilled later (4:31).

Third, those in the Wesleyan tradition who claim that one can reach a state of sinless perfection in this life (through a supposed "second work of grace") lack both biblical and experiential support.[33] Even saints with remarkable maturity confessed they never completely overcame sin. Take Paul for instance:

> We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. (Rom. 7:14–18)

The most devout of God's prophets and servants considered themselves woefully sinful when God revealed Himself to them (cf. Isa. 6:1ff.). We *can* get to the place where we are able not to sin, but we can never *in this life* reach the point where we are not able to sin. Those who claim that they *can* (and/or *have*)

often either redefine *intentional sin* to mean *unintentional mistakes* or are self-deceived.

Fourth, again, even the apostle Paul, well into his spiritual life, recognized his profound fallibility, claiming he was the chief among all sinners (cf. 1 Tim. 1:15). Indeed, there seems to be an inverse relation dictating that *the less sinful we think we are, the more sinful we are; the more sinful we think we are, the less sinful we are*. Like a person in a white suit who falls into a mud puddle in the dark but doesn't realize his true condition, the closer we get to the Light, the more dirty we appear. John admonishes believers emphatically:

> If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:8–9)

Fifth, even Wesley's criteria for what qualifies as *sin* reveal that those who claim to have reached this *state of sinless perfection* are still sinning, only under another name for it. For example, Wesley said that one could reach this supposed plateau of perfection and still commit numerous "mistakes," have many "infirmities," and possess "a thousand nameless defects" in one's life. What is this but a redefinition of sin so as to accommodate belief in an alleged state of sinlessness?

Sixth, Wesleyans are no doubt right in speaking of peak experience via dedication, obedience, or yielding to God (cf. Rom. 12:1–2; Eph. 5:18), but during these times *we do not get more of the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit simply gets more of us*. Sanctification is not an instantaneous act but a lifelong process (Rom. 7:13ff.). "Yielding to the Spirit is also a daily task, not a onetime action (cf. Rom. 6–7).

Seventh, Wesley does not explain how one can be in a sinless state (which he repeatedly said was possible) and yet still commit a sin so serious as to lose his salvation (which he believed could happen). In his *Journal* (August 1743), Wesley wrote: "I cannot believe … that there is a state attainable in this life, from which a man cannot finally fall" (in *WJW*, 1.427). But if one had attained a state where sin was no longer possible, how could he commit any sin by which he would lose salvation?

Eighth, and finally, while all believers should endeavor to have a higher, deeper, and more intimate relationship with God, experience is a notoriously faulty method for *testing* truth. Experience, rather, is a God-ordained method for *expressing* truth. We must always be careful to interpret our experience by the Word of Truth, never vice versa. Martin Luther wrote,

Feelings come and feelings go,
And feelings are deceiving.
My warrant is the Word of God,
Naught else is worth believing.

Once again, the biblical presentation of sanctification is as a continual, lifelong process in which we should grow to be more and more like Christ, awaiting our death or His return; then and *only* then will we reach true perfection. Paul reminds us, "When perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. … Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face" (1 Cor. 13:10, 12). John adds, "We know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2–3). Meanwhile, Peter says that we must "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever" (2 Peter 3:18).[34]

Salvation From the *Presence* of Sin (Glorification)

The third stage of salvation is called *glorification*. Unlike *justification* (which saved us from the past penalty of sin) and *sanctification* (which is saving us from the present power of sin), *glorification* is the future act that will save us from the very *presence* of sin.

A few primary passages make the point. In Paul's words:

> I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with *the glory that will be revealed in us*. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the *glorious freedom* of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. (Rom. 8:18–23)

John's vision of our future salvation includes this glorious description:

> I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.…
>
> And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal.… And the building of the wall of it

was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones.… And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass. And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. (Rev. 21:1–4, 10–11, 18–19, 21–22 KJV)

John also assures believers,

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure. Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. (1 John 3:2–4)

Consider again the insight of Paul:

What is perfect will someday appear, and what isn't perfect will then disappear.… Now all we can see of God is like a cloudy picture in a mirror. Later we will see him face to face. (1 Cor. 13:10, 12 CEV)

In view of this day, the hymn writer Charles H. Gabriel (1856–1932) declared,

O that will be glory for me,
Glory for me, glory for me;
When by His grace I shall look on His face,
That will be glory, be glory for me.

Several important events will mark this third and final stage of salvation.

First, our sinful nature will be abolished. *Currently*, "if we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). But *then* we will be "perfect" (1 Cor. 13:10)—"we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). On that day, Christ "will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body" (Phil. 3:21).

Second, the Beatific Vision (see vol. 4, chap. 9) will be accomplished. We will see God face-to-face. This is something that no mortal can do, for "no one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known" (John 1:18). Indeed, even Moses, the great mediator who spoke directly with God, was forbidden to see His face. When he asked, God replied, "You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live" (Ex. 33:20).

Nonetheless, while mortal man cannot see God and live, immortal man will see God and live forever. John says, "*They will see his face*, and his name will be on their foreheads" (Rev. 22:4). Jesus promises, "Blessed are the pure in heart,

for they will *see God*" (Matt. 5:8).

Third, our freedom will be perfected. While all freedom involves self-determination,[35] in order to test His creatures, God also gave them the freedom to do otherwise, that is, the (libertarian) power of contrary choice. This freedom is still retained in fallen humans; however, it will not exist in heaven, where our freedom will be perfect and made more like God's. Being absolutely perfect, God does not have the freedom to do evil (Heb. 6:18; James 1:13). Likewise, at the Beatific Vision, when we behold absolute Goodness, we too will no longer be able to sin.

Now, by God's grace we are *able not to sin* (1 Cor. 10:13), but *then* we will *no longer be able to sin*. This is not the loss of true freedom but the actualization of it.[36] Perfect freedom is not the freedom of being in *bondage to sin*; instead, it is the freedom of being *delivered from sin*. Again, heaven, like marriage, is not the deprivation of freedom but the fulfillment of it.[37]

We will one day be liberated from all bondage, including bondage to Satan. As we have seen, by His first coming Jesus defeated Satan *officially* (Col. 2:14; Heb. 2:14), but at His second coming He will defeat Satan *actually* and *finally* (Rev. 20:10; Matt. 25:41).[38]

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE NATURE OF SALVATION (SUBSTITUTIONARY ATONEMENT)

Salvation is rooted in several realities, including the nature of God and the nature of human beings. For reconciliation between God and His creation, salvation was necessary, since *He* is absolutely holy and *we* are completely sinful. Salvation is possible because God is loving and gracious, desiring all to be saved (cf. 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9).

Salvation Follows From the Nature of God As Completely Holy

Several attributes of God, both metaphysical and moral, serve as the background for salvation. God is not only holy, just, and perfect,[39] but He is also infinite and immutable.[40] Hence, God is absolutely holy and unchangeably just, and He cannot merely turn His head from sin and arbitrarily forgive it. He must

punish evil, or He would not be completely just, and He must punish it eternally, or He would not be eternally just.

Salvation Follows From the Nature of Humankind As Totally Imperfect

Not only is God morally perfect, but human beings are morally imperfect.[41] God is not only absolutely holy, but *fallen* human beings are completely unholy.

> As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one" (Rom. 3:10–12).

Thus, the entire world stands guilty before the Creator, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). All have broken His law and are culpable (cf. Rom. 2:12–15; 3:19). Even human "righteousness" is sinful before God:

> All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away. (Isa. 64:6)

Moses had earlier written, "The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time" (Gen. 6:5). Jeremiah proclaimed, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure" (Jer. 17:9). Whatever righteousness we have is *self*-righteousness, which Jesus condemned (Luke 18:10–14). Paul clarifies, "Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness" (Rom. 10:3).

Salvation Follows From the Nature of God As Wholly Loving

Given God's unchanging moral perfection and humanity's complete moral imperfection, salvation is *necessary*. And, granting that God is completely and unchangeably loving,[42] salvation is *possible*, for while His holiness makes it necessary that He punish sin, His grace moves Him to try to save all sinners. In His infinite wisdom, God found a way to do both—exchanging the substitutionary death of His perfect Son for our imperfections. In this manner, God was able to remain just and yet also be the Justifier of the unjust; His Son, the God-man, died—the Just for the unjust—that He might bring us to the Father.

In perhaps the most theologically significant and compact text in the Bible, the apostle Paul puts it this way:

> But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. (Rom. 3:21–26)

This is not to say there are no other dimensions of the Atonement, regarding which, as we have seen, most of the main theories have an element of truth. However, at the *heart* of the Atonement is the idea of a sacrificial substitute who paid the penalty for our sins that we might be free. He became sin for us that we might be declared righteous. Alvin Kelly's hymn says, "I gave him my old tattered garments; He gave me a robe of pure white."

ANSWERING OBJECTIONS TO SUBSTITUTIONARY ATONEMENT

Many objections have been leveled against the idea of the Atonement, particularly a substitutionary atonement. The most prominent ones are briefly discussed here.

Objection One—Based on the Alleged Unfairness of Punishing Another for Our Sins

It is argued by some that it is unfair to punish one person in place of another. After all, the very principle of just punishment is that each person bears his own sin:

> The soul who sins is the one who will die. The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous man will be credited to him, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against him. (Ezek. 18:20)

How, then, could justice be served in punishing Christ for our sins?

Response to Objection One

In reply, it is definitely unjust to punish an *unwilling* person for another's sin. But Christ was *willing* to die for us. He died voluntarily: "I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again" (John 10:17–18). Even in ordinary life, some people (like soldiers) are willing to die for others (like their countrymen). Such a deed is considered not only moral but noble.

Further, Christ is God.[43] The One who demanded the penalty (God) was the One who paid it. The Judge paid the fine for the defendant. Like an earthly judge who takes off his robe, reaches into his wallet, and pays the fine for his accused son, even so God did this for us. In such a case the complaint that it is unjust to pay the fine for another's sin vanishes.

In addition, as mentioned earlier, it is unjust to *charge* another person for my crime, but it is not unjust for him to voluntarily *pay* the fine. Once again, a voluntary substitutionary atonement is the apex of morality:

> Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Rom. 5:7–8)

In short, God's justice demands that *all sin be punished*, but not necessarily that *all sinners be punished* for their sin.

Finally, there is a priority within morality: Mercy triumphs over justice. Thus, while God's justice demands the punishment of the sinner, in the Cross, His love wins out and forgives his sin by faith. When there is an unavoidable conflict between two moral principles, the higher takes precedence over the lower. For example, Jesus taught that when the two unavoidably conflict, our love for God should take precedence over love for our parents (Matt. 10:37). Likewise, even though God's justice demands that all sin be punished, His love compelled Him to provide forgiveness for all sinners who will receive it.

Hence, while justice *as such* demands that the guilty pay for their own sins, when there is a conflict with love *as such*, the latter takes precedence over the former. By way of comparison, a child should always obey his or her parents. However, when this is transcended by a greater duty to obey God (as when a parent commands the child to sin), we are not dealing with obedience to parents *as such*—when there is a discrepancy between commands, God is preeminent. In substitutionary atonement, we are not dealing *only* with God's justice but *also*

with a conflict between God's love and God's justice. In this case, the obligation to what *as such* would always be wrong (viz., not to punish the guilty) is suspended in view of the higher obligation to what is always right (viz., to save the repentant sinner).

Objection Two—Based on the Alleged Implication of Universalism

Some object that substitutionary atonement implies that all will be saved (universalism),[44] since Christ is said to have been substituted for all. Many strong Calvinists (particularists) use this argument in defense of limited atonement,[45] insisting that since all for whom Christ died *will* be saved—and *not* all will be saved—then it follows that Christ did not die for all. Universalists, on the other hand, agree that all for whom Christ died will be saved, but they argue that Christ died for all, and, hence, all will be saved. Accordingly, universalists and particularists agree that there can be no substitutionary atonement without the effective salvation of *everyone* for whom Christ was a substitute; the former hold that Christ died for all, and the latter maintain that He died for some (the elect).

Response to Objection Two

Moderate Calvinists and Arminians who maintain substitutionary atonement can respond by making a substantial distinction: There is a difference between *procurement for all* and *application to some*. Christ achieved procurement of eternal life for everyone; application of salvation happens only to those who believe. All persons are saved *potentially* through Christ's death, but only some are saved *actually*—those who receive it.[46] Just as a prisoner who is given clemency is legally free but may actually die while still in jail, even so Christ's death has made all "righteous" potentially (Rom. 5:19), but not all have actually appropriated it. As the apostle states, Christ "is the Savior of all men [potentially], and especially [actually] of those who believe" (1 Tim. 4:10).

Objection Three—Based on an Alleged Double Jeopardy

Philosopher Eleonore Stump (b. 1947) objects to the substitutionary-atonement model based on the claim that the price for sins was paid *twice* for all who are lost ("AAA" in Morris, *PCF*, 61–91). According to the substitution

view, Christ paid the penalty in full so that no human has to pay it. However, those who go to hell pay for their own sins. If Christ has already paid that price, how is it just to demand that someone pay again? Isn't this double jeopardy?

Response to Objection Three

This contention, the error of universalism,[47] wrongly assumes that the Atonement is unconditionally applied to all sinners. *It is not*. The Atonement is applied only when it is received;[48] hence, again, the substitution is potentially available to all but is not automatically applied to all. Christ put more than enough funds in the account to cover the debt of all sinners to God. We must draw on the account by faith for this forgiveness to actually take place.[49]

Objection Four—Based on the Ability of God to Forgive

Substitutionary atonement implies a necessity for Christ to die in order for us to be forgiven. Nevertheless, God, as God, has the ability to forgive sins without Christ dying for those who commit them. After all, we can and do forgive people who sin against us without having to die in order to do so. Why couldn't God do the same, without the sacrifice of His Son?

Response to Objection Four

For one thing, this analogy is flawed. *Our ability to forgive is* based *on Christ's forgiveness*. As Paul said, we are to forgive one another "as Christ forgave you" (Col. 3:13 KJV). No mortal has the inherent ability to forgive; as the Pharisees recognized, only God can forgive sins (cf. Mark 2:7).

Also, even God, without atonement, cannot overlook or accept sin: "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong" (Hab. 1:13). Nor can He simply forgive sin arbitrarily. Sin has caused a debt with God, and the debt must be paid. *Christ paid that debt* and ransomed us. As we have repeatedly observed, God can no more wink at sin and turn His head than He can cease being holy, perfect, and absolutely unchangeable.

Objection Five—Based on an Alleged Internal Conflict Within God

The substitution view of the Atonement seemingly implies an internal conflict

within God. His love and wrath are at war with each other: One demands that all sinners be punished, and the other insists that they be set free. Hence, apparently, the wrath of God had to be poured out on Christ.

Response to Objection Five

This objection involves a misunderstanding. Christ was not sent out of God's wrath but because of His love: "God so *loved* the world that he gave his only Son" (John 3:16 NLT; cf. 1 John 3:16). Consequently, a wrathful God is not somehow made loving by Christ's death; instead, by the substitutionary atonement of Christ, a just and loving God has His justice satisfied (propitiated) so that His love could be released. The justice of the Justifier was satisfied by the Just dying for the unjust so that they could be justified (cf. Rom. 3:21–24).

Objection Six—Based on Alleged Nontransferability of Righteousness

According to this objection, righteousness can no more be transferred or imputed to another person than can guilt (cf. Ezek. 18:20).

Response to Objection Six

First of all, while people cannot suffer for the *guilt* of another's sin (Ezek. 18:20), nevertheless, they can (and do) suffer for the *consequences* of others' sins. Exodus 20:5 speaks of God "punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation." Abused children, for example, suffer from the consequences of parental sin, and the whole human race suffers from the consequences of Adam's sin.[50]

Further, the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us is *judicial* (legal), not *actual*. While the actual transfer of guilt from one person to another is *not* possible, the legal transfer *is*.

What is more, this perfect righteousness is what we are "in Christ," not in ourselves (2 Cor. 5:17): "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21). This is possible because in salvation we are united with Jesus:

> Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. (Rom. 6:3–4)

Therefore,

> What the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit. (Rom. 8:3–4)

Objection Seven—Based on an Alleged Incompatibility Between Forgiveness and Payment for Sin

Eleonore Stump contends that a substitutionary atonement is contrary to its own intention, since it does not really present God as *forgiving* sins but as *exacting a payment* for them. To forgive a debt is not to *demand atonement for it*, but rather *not to exact all that justice demands*. Even so, according to the substitution view, God *does* exact His due from every sin, since He allows no sin to go unpaid. Indeed, God Himself fully pays the debt, and, thus, does not overlook any of it. Allegedly, then, there is no real forgiveness in substitutionary atonement ("AAA" in Morris, *PCF*, 62).

Response to Objection Seven

This objection incorrectly assumes that the total debt of every sinner is automatically canceled by the Atonement. According to the Bible, the sacrifice must be received to be effectual. Christ's death was *sufficient* for all but only *efficient* for those who believe.[51] The actual canceling of the debt is conditional upon belief, i.e., upon actual acceptance of it. Hence, there is no contradiction, since there is no forgiveness of those who choose to attempt to pay for their own debt.[52] Likewise, those who are forgiven do not have to pay for their own debt, since Christ's payment has been applied to them. The only incompatibility between forgiveness and substitutionary atonement, then, comes when the Atonement is misconceived as an automatic and unconditional payment applied to everyone's sins.

For example, when one buys a bank, he buys all the debts owed to that bank as well. If he decides to cancel (forgive) these debts, the debtor does not have to pay them, but the debt has still been paid for by the one who purchased the bank. Hence, forgiveness and paying the debt are not contradictory.

Objection Eight—Based on the Alleged Inequity of the Payment for Sins

The substitution view of the Atonement claims that Christ paid the full penalty for the sins of all human beings so that they would not have to pay it. The substitution view also claims that the penalty for sin is everlasting damnation. However, no matter what agony Christ suffered, it certainly was not equivalent to eternal punishment, since while Christ's suffering came to an end, the suffering of sinners who choose hell will never be finished (see ibid., 63).

Response to Objection Eight

This argument wrongly posits that Christ's death had only temporal value. To the contrary, since Christ is God,[53] and because He suffered as the God-man, His death had *infinite* value. Hence, the sacrifice was more than enough to atone for a finite number of sins. Christ's death cannot be measured simply in quantitative, temporal terms—such as "how long did He suffer?"—but rather must be regarded in terms of the infinite quality of His suffering. Accordingly, the death of the infinite has infinite value, which is more than sufficient to atone for finite sins.

Further, this objection is misdirected in that it focuses only on the debt and the debtor; it fails to note the objective value for God of the death of Christ. The sacrifice of Jesus completely satisfied (propitiated) the Father, regardless of how many sins it would be applied to in forgiveness. Once God's justice is satisfied, He is free to release His love on the sins of all sinners.

Objection Nine—Based on an Alleged Inability to Change One's Life

It is further charged that substitutionary atonement does not accomplish what it intends, namely, overcoming our alienation with God and, thus, changing a sinner's life. Supposedly, nothing in the substitution view points to how the work of Christ redirects human behavior and alters our propensity to sin. This, it is said, is the whole point of salvation, and hence a substitutionary atonement misses the whole point of atonement itself, which is to bring at-one-ment with God (see ibid., 61–91).

Response to Objection Nine

First, this contention overlooks the fact that the primary objective of the Atonement is to *satisfy God*, not *transform the sinner*. Indeed, the word *atonement* does not mean "at-one-ment"; it means "to appease," "to placate," "to pacify," or "to cover over" in the eyes of God.[54] *Atonement* is a *God directed* term, for *God* must be propitiated (1 John 2:1), otherwise His justice is not satisfied so that He can release His mercy (Rom. 3:21–26).

Second, substitutionary atonement *does* lead to the transformation of a sinner in the most effective way possible; namely, *by the grace of God*. God's great love for us motivates us to love Him in return (1 John 4:19): Grace "teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions" (Titus 2:12), and "the love of Christ compels us" (2 Cor. 5:14 NKJV). Therefore, our understanding of the unparalleled sacrifice of Christ on our behalf provides the highest possible motivation to change our sinful lives.[55]

Third, and finally, nominal faith[56] in the Atonement will not effect change in the sinner; nominal faith is not saving faith (cf. James 2). *Saving* faith involves trust, dependence, and repentance—all of which bring change in—and of—one's life.[57]

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR THE NATURE OF SALVATION (SUBSTITUTIONARY ATONEMENT)[58]

From these numerous citations, it can be seen that the need for Christ's blood atonement and sacrifice for our sins is deeply rooted in Judeo-Christian history.

Biblical Writers

The Old Testament teaching of the Passover Lamb (Ex. 12) was fulfilled by Christ, "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29 NKJV): "Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed" (1 Cor. 5:7). Indeed, "the life of a creature is in the blood … it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life" (Lev. 17:11), and "the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Heb. 9:22).

Early Church Fathers

In spite of many different views on the Atonement among church leaders,[59] there was still a basic strain, from earliest times, that preserved elements of the substitution view.

Polycarp (fl. second century)

> Let us then continually persevere in our hope, and the earnest of our righteousness, which is Jesus Christ, "who bore our sins in His own body on the tree, who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth," but endured all things for us, that we might live in Him. (*EPP* in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, 1.8.)

Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)

> Thus, then, was the Word of God made man, as also Moses says: "God, true are His works." But if, not having been made flesh, He did appear as if flesh, His work was not a true one. But what He did appear, that He also was: God recapitulated in Himself the ancient formation of man, that He might kill sin, deprive death of its power, and vivify man; and therefore His works are true. (*AH* in ibid., 1.3.18.7)
>
> And not by the aforesaid things alone has the Lord manifested Himself, but [He has done this] also by means of His passion. For doing away with [the effects of] that disobedience of man which had taken place at the beginning by the occasion of a tree, "He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross;" rectifying that disobedience which had occurred by reason of a tree, through that obedience which was [wrought out] upon the tree [of the cross]. (*AH* in ibid., 1.5.1.36)

Medieval Church Fathers

Augustine (354–430)

> Now, if infants are not embraced within this reconciliation and salvation, who wants them for the baptism of Christ? But if they are embraced, then are they reckoned as among the dead for whom He died? … Nor can they be possibly reconciled and saved by Him, unless He remit and impute not unto them their sins. (*OFSB*, 1.44)
>
> But perhaps, through some special perception of my own, I have said that sin is a sacrifice for sin. Let those who have read it be free to acknowledge it; let not those who have not read it be backward; let them not, I say, be backward to read that they may be truthful in judging. For when God gave commandment about the offering of sacrifices for sin, in which sacrifices there was no expiation of sins, but the shadow of things to come, the self-same sacrifices, the self-same offerings, the self-same victims, the self-same animals, which were brought forward to be slain for sins, and in whose blood that [true] blood was prefigured, are themselves called sins by the law; and that to such an extent that in certain passages it is written in these terms, that the priests, when about to sacrifice, were to lay their hands on the head of the sin, that is, on the head of the victim about to be sacrificed for sin. Such sin, then, that is, such a sacrifice for sin, was our Lord Jesus Christ made, "who knew no sin" (*OGJ*, 41.6).
>
> So sin means a bad action deserving punishment, and death the consequence of sin. Christ has no sin in the sense of deserving death, but He bore for our sakes sin in the sense of death as brought on

human nature by sin.… By Christ's taking our sin in this sense, its condemnation is our deliverance, while to remain in subjection to sin is to be condemned. (*RFM*, 14.3)

Anselm

To remit sin in this manner is nothing else than not to punish; and since it is not right to cancel sin without compensation or punishment; if it be not punished, then is it passed by undischarged. (*CDH*, I.XII)

So heinous is our sin whenever we knowingly oppose the will of God even in the slightest thing; since we are always in his sight, and he always enjoins it upon us not to sin.… Therefore you make no satisfaction unless you restore something greater than the amount of that obligation, which should restrain you from committing the sin. (ibid., I.XXI)

[Thus,] the restoring of mankind ought not to take place, and could not, without man paid [paying] the debt which he owed God for his sin. And this debt was so great that, while none but man must solve the debt, none but God was able to do it; so that he who does it must be both God and man. And hence arises a necessity that God should take man into unity with his own person; so that he who in his own nature was bound to pay the debt, but could not, might be able to do it in the person of God.… Moreover, you have clearly shown the life of this man [Jesus] to have been so excellent and so glorious as to make ample satisfaction for the sins of the whole world, and even infinitely more, (ibid., I.XVIII.a)

Yes, it is of all things most proper that such a Father should acquiesce with such a Son in his desire, if it be praiseworthy as relates to the honor of God, and useful for man's salvation, which would not otherwise be effected, (ibid., I.X)

Reformation Leaders

John Calvin (1509–1564)

Wherefore, in order to accomplish a full expiation, he made his soul *asham*, i.e., a propitiatory victim for sin, (as the prophet says—Isa. 53:5, 10), on which the guilt and penalty being in a manner laid, ceases to be imputed to us. The Apostle declares this more plainly when he says that "he made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor. 5:21 KJV). For the Son of God, though spotlessly pure, took upon him the disgrace and ignominy of our iniquities, and in return clothed us with his purity. (*ICR*, II.XVI.VI)

To satisfy our ransom, it was necessary to select a mode of death in which he might deliver us, both by giving himself up to condemnations and undertaking our expiation. Had he been cut off by assassins, or slain in a seditious tumult, there could have been no kind of satisfaction in such a death. But when he is placed as a criminal at the bar, where witnesses are brought to give evidence against him, and the mouth of the judge condemns him to die, we see him sustaining the character of an offender and evil-doer, (ibid., II.XVI.V)

It is now clear what the prophet means when he says that "the Lord has laid upon Him the iniquity of us all" [Isa. 53:6]; namely, that as he was to wash away the pollution of sins, they were transferred to him by imputation. (ibid., op. cit)

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758)

The necessity of satisfaction for sin, and the reasonableness of that Christian doctrine, may appear

from the following considerations: Justice requires that sin be punished, because sin deserves punishment. (*WJE*, 2.565)

Hence, “the satisfaction of Christ by his death is certainly a very rational thing” (ibid, 2.569).

Christ is often represented as bearing our sins for us: Isaiah 53:4, “Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows.” Isaiah 53:11, “For he shall bear their iniquities.” Isaiah 53:12, “He bare the sin of many” (ibid., 2.570).

Further, “the laying on of hands on the head of the sacrifice was a token of putting the guilt of sin upon a person; agreeably to the customary signification of the imputation of guilt among Hebrews” (ibid.).

Post-Reformation Teachers

William G. T. Shedd (1820–1894)

It is Divine justice that demands satisfaction, and it is the Divine compassion that makes the satisfaction. God is the one who holds man in a righteous captivity, and He is the one who pays the ransom that frees him from it. God is the holy Judge of man who requires satisfaction for sin; and God is the merciful Father of man who provides it for him. (*DT*, 2.392–93)

Not until the Holy One has been “propitiated” by an atonement, can the penalty be “released.” Neither of these effects can exist without the antecedent cause. The Bible knows nothing of the remission of punishment arbitrarily: that is without a ground or reason. Penal suffering in Scripture is released, or not inflicted upon the guilty, because it has been endured by a substitute. If penalty was remitted by sovereignty merely, without any judicial ground or reason whatever; if it were inflicted neither upon the sinner nor his substitute; this would be the *abolition* of penalty, not the remission of it. (ibid., 2.392)

Charles Hodge (1797–1878)

According to this doctrine the work of Christ is a real satisfaction, of infinite inherent merit, to the vindicatory justice of God; so that He saves his people by doing for them, and in their stead, what they were unable to do for themselves, satisfying the demands of the law in their behalf, and bearing its penalty in their stead; whereby they are reconciled to God, receive the Holy Ghost, and are made partakers of the life of Christ to their present sanctification and eternal salvation.

This doctrine provides for both [of these great objects].… It shows how the curse of the law is removed by Christ’s being made a curse for us; and how in virtue of this reconciliation with God we become, through the Spirit, partakers of the life of Christ, [and] He is made unto us not only righteousness, but sanctification. We are cleansed by his blood from guilt, and renewed by his Spirit after the image of God. Having died in Him, we live in Him. Participation of his death secures participation of his life. (*ST*, 563–64)

Lewis Sperry Chafer (1871–1952)

> In all these temporary coverings of sin is anticipation of the final sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, the concept of covering is no longer accurate, and the New Testament uses other terms. While the Old Testament sacrifices provided temporary covering from divine judgment, the death of Christ takes away the sin of the world [John 1:29; 1 John 3:5]. (*ST*, 2.83–84)

Millard Erickson (b. 1932)

> We have seen that Christ's death is interpreted in a wide variety of ways. Each of the theories we have examined seizes upon a significant aspect of his work. While we may have major objections to some of the theories, we recognize that each one possesses a dimension of the truth. In his death Christ (1) gave us a perfect example of the type of dedication God desires of us, (2) demonstrated the great extent of God's love, (3) underscored the seriousness of sin and the severity of God's righteousness, (4) triumphed over the forces of sin and death, liberating us from their power, and (5) rendered satisfaction to the Father for our sins. All of these things we as humans needed done for us, and Christ did them all. (*CT*, 799)

CONCLUSION

The Bible is a soteriological book that begins in eternity with God's acts of foreknowledge, predestination, and election. Even before we are saved, God is at work in prevenient grace and conviction. When by faith one receives the initial act of salvation (justification), at that very instant he or she is sealed by the Holy Spirit, baptized into the body of Christ, redeemed, regenerated, born again, adopted into God's family, reconciled to God, and forgiven of sin based on the mediation and atonement of Christ. All of these saving acts are made possible only because of the substitutionary death of Jesus on behalf of our sins, whereby the Just died for the unjust in order that God's justice may be satisfied and His mercy justify the unjust.

Salvation does not end with a single act of justification; this is only the first stage, by which one is saved from the penalty of sin. Salvation also involves a lifelong process of *sanctification*, by which we are saved from the power of sin. At death, our redemption climaxes with an act of *glorification* that saves us from the very presence of sin. At this point we will see God face-to-face (in the Beatific Vision) and become like Him, for then we shall see Him as He is.

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CHAPTER TEN

THE EVIDENCE OF SALVATION

Virtually all Christian theologians believe that those who are saved should manifest their faith in good works. However, there is a significant intramural controversy as to (1) the scope and characteristics of this manifestation and (2) the actual connection between faith and works. The primary debate is between the Roman Catholic and Protestant views;[1] a secondary discussion continues between lordship-salvation proponents and the free-grace group.[2]

THE HISTORIC CONTEXT OF THE CATHOLIC/PROTESTANT DEBATE ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH AND WORKS

In spite of the common core of Augustinian belief in the necessity of God's grace for salvation, Catholics and Protestants have had strong disagreement over the relationship between faith and works. As we have seen, the heart cry of the Protestant Reformation was "justification by faith *alone*!" The Roman Catholic Church responded with the declaration that "by his good works the justified man really acquires a claim to supernatural reward from God" (from the Council of Trent, as cited in Ott, *FCD*, 264).

Even within Protestant circles there is considerable discrepancy on the topic. While most evangelicals believe that saving faith reveals itself through good

works, they differ as to the precise connection. Some hold that the performance of works *automatically* results from faith, while others claim that at times there is no observable evidence confirming that a person is saved. Some see good works as flowing *inevitably*, rather than automatically, from saving faith, while still others maintain that the doing of good works *accompanies* but does not result *by necessity* from it.

In contrast to all these Protestant views, Roman Catholics argue that performing good works is a *condition* for salvation rather than a *consequence* of it. Protestants insist that while we are saved *for* works, we are not saved *by* works.[3]

The Catholic position on the relationship between justification and works was made infallible dogma in the sixteenth century at the Council of Trent,[4] which was a reaction to Martin Luther's proclamation that "the just shall live by faith—alone." Luther was initially upset by the Roman Catholic sale of *indulgences*. In his region, an overzealous salesman named Johann Tetzel was promising potential purchasers that "when in the box the penny rings, the soul from purgatory springs." Luther's subsequent outcry (protest) sparked the Protestant Reformation.[5]

Luther's Position

Before Martin Luther, standard (Augustinian) doctrine stressed *intrinsic* justification: The believer was *made* righteous by God's grace. *Extrinsic* justification, by which a sinner is legally *declared* righteous, was less conspicuous in pre-Reformation Christendom.[6] With Luther, the situation did change dramatically; however, as noted by Peter Toon (b. 1939): "Luther does not employ forensic [legal] terms to explain this imputation of alien righteousness. This development will come later, from others" (*FFJS*, 58).[7]

Luther was directed by Johann von Staupitz (*c*. 1460–1524), an abbot who in some ways supported him, to lecture (from 1515 to 1517) on Paul's letters to the Romans and Galatians. The result of this study led Luther to a new view of God: The *All-Terrible* is also the *All-Merciful*. Luther found that in Paul's Greek usage, the word *justice* has different meanings:

> [The first meaning is a strict enforcement of the law, and the last is] a process of the sort which sometimes takes place if the judge suspends the sentence … and thereby instills such resolve that the [guilty] man is reclaimed, (in ibid., 49)

This second meaning of the word *justice* is necessary because

> the sinner cannot ever attain any righteousness of his own: he merits or deserves only condemnation.… [But God has] freely opted to receive us to Himself … to a fellowship that we from our side had broken and could never mend, (in Atkinson, *MLPCC*, 133)

When studying the meaning of Romans 1:16–17, Luther came to the following revolutionary discovery:

> Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that "the just shall live by faith." Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on new meaning, and whereas before the "justice of God" had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in great love. This passage became to me the gate to heaven, (in Bainton, *HISLML*, 65)

In spite of Luther's findings, it is sometimes forgotten that he, like Roman Catholics, believed in a progressive definition of *justification*.[8] For example, he said, "We understand that a man who is justified is not already righteous but moving toward righteousness" (*LW*, 34, 152). Further, "Our justification is not yet complete.… It is still under construction. It shall, however, be completed in the resurrection of the dead" (in Althaus, *TML*, 237). This sense of "progressive justification" is what many Protestants call "sanctification," the process by which one is *made* righteous (intrinsically), to be distinguished from an initial act (of justification from God) by which one is *declared* righteous (extrinsically). Toon adds,

> Justification by faith is both an event and a process. What later Protestants were to divide, Luther kept together. He is quite clear that there is a moment when a sinner is actually justified by faith. [The sinner] then possesses the righteousness of another, the alien righteousness of Christ, imputed to him.… [However,] this is the beginning of a journey toward a time (following the resurrection of the dead in the age to come) when he will in fact possess a perfect righteousness created in him by the Spirit of God. (*FFJS*, 58–59)

The Catholic Response to Luther

Again, the Council of Trent was the Catholic retort to Luther's belief that one is saved by faith alone, apart from works. Trent considered the following questions concerning justification:

(1) Is justification only judicial [or legal] in nature (extrinsic), or is there also an intrinsic (sanctifying) work involved?

(2) What is the relationship between faith and good works?
(3) Does the [human] will have an active role in justification?
(4) How are justification and sacraments such as the Eucharist, baptism, and penance related?
(5) Can the believer know with certainty that he is justified?
(6) Can man incline himself toward justification, and, if so, is this inclination to be understood as meritorious? (from ibid., 69)

Plainly, most of these speak to the relationship between faith and works.

On January 9, 1547, council participants agreed on a final formula for justification. We will examine their conclusions based on the six questions mentioned above.

First, although several members recognized an extrinsic element in justification (thereby approaching the view of the Reformers on this point), the consensus view was that "the opinion that a sinner may be justified solely as a matter of … imputation … is rejected" (ibid., 72). Therefore, "justification is thus defined in terms of a man *becoming*, and not merely *being* reputed as, righteous" (ibid., emphasis added).[9]

Second, in that Trent presented justification in two senses (the first being what Protestants [the Reformed] understand as *justification* and the second corresponding to the Protestant doctrine of *sanctification*), the latter (*second justification*) requires good works: "It is thus both possible and necessary to keep the law of God [for salvation]" (ibid., 84).

Third, Trent, taking original sin into account, stated that evil has affected the human race, and therefore, "man is incapable of redeeming himself. Free will is not destroyed, but is weakened and debilitated by the Fall" (ibid., 81). Luther rejected *debilitation* in his *Bondage of the Will.* According to Trent,

> If anyone shall say that man's free will moved and aroused by God does not cooperate by assenting to God who looses and calls… let him be anathema [i.e., "be hereby excommunicated, needing to either recant or go to hell"], (in Toon, ibid.)

So as one Catholic author put it, "The sinner indeed cooperates with this grace, at least in the sense of not sinfully rejecting it" (Anderson, *JF*, 34). While most Protestants agree, Calvinists quickly add (as would Catholic thomists)[10] that it is God, by His grace, who brings about this cooperation.[11]

Fourth, the subject of the sacraments was addressed at Session VII (March 3, 1547). In order to comprehend these pronouncements, we must remember that

Trent understood justification in two ways: The first phase and the second phase.[12] Baptism is operative in the first way, since grace to overcome original sin is "mediated" to us through baptism. Both the Eucharist and penance pertain to the second sense of justification, and Catholics hold that such justification (i.e., righteousness) is "increased" (or "enhanced") by participation in these sacraments.

Fifth, due to the Reformers' stress on the assurance of salvation, Trent was forced to deal with the matter. Alister McGrath (b. 1953) claims that they issued "an explicit condemnation of the Lutheran doctrine of assurance as an assertion contrary to proper Christian humility" (*ID*, 2.78). However, the "explicit condemnation" deals with "infallible certainty" of salvation, which many Catholic scholars point out is not necessary but perhaps possible. In fact, "in many ways Roman [Catholic] dogmatics have pointed out that Rome's rejection of personal assurance of salvation does not mean the proclamation of a religion of uninterrupted anxiety" (Berkouwer, *CWR*, 114). For the Roman Catholic, "there is an intermediate position between the assurance of faith and doubt. This position is that of moral certainty which excludes any anxiety and despair" (Bartmann, *LD*, 2.109, cited in ibid., 115). Thus, according to Catholicism, Christians can be said to have "relative" but not "absolute" (i.e., "infallible") certainty of their salvation.

Sixth, and finally, Trent stated that our initial (first) justification must be seen as a "gift." Therefore, it comes as a surprise to many Protestants that Roman Catholics believe "*If anyone shall say that man can be justified before God by his own works which are done … without divine grace through Christ Jesus: let him be anathema"* (in *Denzinger, SCD*, 811, emphasis added). Further, Catholics maintain,

> *Nothing that precedes justification, whether faith or works, merits the grace of justification. For if it is by grace, it is no more by works; otherwise, as the apostle says, grace is no more grace*, (in ibid., chapter 8, emphasis added)

In this connection it is only fair to point out that when Catholic scholars cite James 2:24 ("A man is justified by works" NKJV), they do not mean the initial, first justification (at baptism), which comes only by God's grace. Rather, they are referring to the second, progressive justification (growth in righteousness) that Protestants call *sanctification*. On the other hand, Trent did assert that the performance of works is necessary for salvation in the progressive and eventual senses, and with this Protestants disagree strongly. Indeed, as we have seen, it is

Catholic dogma that "by his good works the justified man really acquires a claim to supernatural reward from God" (in Ott, *FCD*, 264).

Since the defense of forensic (legal, judicial) justification is directly connected with Protestant rejection of the Roman Catholic teaching on merit, we must first discuss the Catholic doctrine of good works. As with previous chapters, the examination will be divided into biblical/theological and historical (traditional) arguments.

Catholic Appeals to the Bible for Meritorious Justification

Roman Catholic authority Ludwig Ott (b. 1906) argues, "According to Holy Writ, eternal blessedness in heaven is the reward for good works performed on this earth, and rewards and merit are correlative concepts" (ibid.). Ott offers the following Scripture in support:

> "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven" (Matt. 5:12 RSV); "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was hungry, and ye gave me meat" (Matt. 25:34–35 KJV).

He adds,

> St. Paul, who stresses grace so much, also emphasized, on the other hand, the meritorious nature of good works performed with grace, by teaching that the reward is in proportion to the works: "He [God] will render to every man according to his own labor" [Rom. 2:6] (ibid., 265).

Ott cites other similar passages (1 Cor. 3:8; Col. 3:24; Heb. 10:35; 11:6) and concludes, "The good works of the just establish a legal claim (*meritum de condigno*) to reward on God" [cf. Heb. 6:10] (ibid.).

Of course, this "claim" ('demand') is not intrinsic; our supposed right to reward is only real because God has placed Himself in this situation through His promise to compensate us for our good works. Nonetheless, eternal life[13] is given to us on the grounds of our good works.[14] Thus, the Council of Trent declared:

> To those who work well "unto the end" [Matt. 10:22], and who trust in God, life eternal is to be proposed, both as a grace mercifully promised to the sons of God through Christ Jesus, "and as a recompense" … faithfully given to their good works and merit. (in Denzinger, *SCD*, 809.257)

Read this statement (from Trent doctrine) again:

> If anyone shall say that the good works of the man justified are in such a way the gift of God that they are not also the good merits of him who is justified, or that the one justified by the good works … does not truly merit increase of grace, eternal life, and the attainment of eternal life (if he should die in grace), and also an increase of glory; let him be anathema, (in ibid., 842.261)

Catholic Appeals to History (Tradition) for Meritorious Justification

Catholic theology claims: "From the times of the Apostolic Fathers, Tradition attests the meritoriousness of good works" (Geisler and MacKenzie, *RCE*, 228). For example, Ignatius of Antioch wrote to Polycarp: "Where there is great effort there is rich gain" (*EP*, I.I.3). Justin Martyr is also cited in defense of merit, and Tertullian asserted, "The man who performs good works can be said to make God his debtor" (*OR*, 1.323.44–46). Of course, in Catholic belief, these works grow out of faith, but the performance of works is the stated basis for the merit necessary for obtaining eternal life. Ott claims,

> Natural reason cannot prove the reality of supernatural merit since this rests on the free Divine promise of reward.… [Nevertheless,] the general conscience of men bears witness to the appropriateness of a supernatural reward for supernaturally good deeds freely performed. (*FCD*, 265)

AN EVANGELICAL CRITIQUE OF THE DOCTRINE OF MERITORIOUS JUSTIFICATION

We have already noted the Catholic declaration that the doing of works prior to justification[15] is not meritorious. Nonetheless, with all due recognition to the shared Augustinian core of the necessity of grace, several substantial differences remain between the official Roman Catholic and orthodox Protestant views on salvation. Before stating the grounds for the Protestant position, we will respond to the Catholic arguments in favor of meritorious justification.

The Catholic View Confuses *Reward* and *Merit*

The English word *reward* has an equivocal sense that has led to confusion. While Catholic theology rightly points out that the Bible sometimes refers to eternal life as a reward (e.g., Gal. 6:8) that can be *inherited* (e.g., Luke 18:18), the New Testament also refers to eternal life regarding the *kind* or *degree* of reward that one will *inherit*. This *is* based on the works that one performs, and Galatians 6:6–10 seems to fit into this category, since it speaks of believers

reaping what they sow while on earth.

Nevertheless, in this sense the performance of works is not a *condition* but a *consequence* of salvation. No person *works* for an inheritance; an inheritance, by design, is graciously *given* by a benefactor. If a man is "rewarded" *with salvation* for his work, then eternal life is not truly and solely out of God's grace, despite Catholic protests to the contrary. When one is rewarded for works, the reward is not grace—payment is *owed* (at least in part) for services rendered.

In this way the New Testament emphatically rejects the idea of salvation as a reward (*wage*) for duty performed: A worker's wages "are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation" (Rom. 4:4). If the Catholic concept of merit[16] were accurate, the bestowal of the grace of sanctification would be on the basis of good works. Again, however, *what is worked for is not of grace, and what is given by grace is not obtained by works* (Rom. 4:4; Eph. 2:8–9). The Catholic belief in merit as a necessary condition for eternal life (or ultimate justification) is contrary to the clear affirmation of Holy Writ.

The Catholic View Makes Works a Condition of Eternal Life

As we have seen, the Council of Trent declared:

> To those who work well "unto the end" [Matt. 10:22], and who trust in God, life eternal is to be proposed, both as a grace mercifully promised to the sons of God through Christ Jesus, "and as a recompense" which is … to be faithfully given to their good works and merit, (in Denzinger, *SCD*, 809.257)

The Bible, by contrast, declares, "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).

Further, in direct opposition to the Catholic position, Scripture guarantees eternal life as a present possession of those who believe. Jesus said:

> Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me *has* [present tense] eternal life, and *does not come into judgment*, but *has* [already] passed out of death into life. (John 5:24 NASB)

This same truth—that eternal life is a present position of the believer—is frequently repeated: "Whoever believes in the Son *has* eternal life" (John 3:36); "I write these things to you … so that you may *know* that you *have* eternal life" (1 John 5:13). Catholic dogma excludes any believer from claiming that he can be sure, right now, that if he were to die he would have salvation; he must await

a final justification at death to have assurance that he possesses everlasting life and will not see God's condemnation.

In John's entire gospel, only one condition is laid down for obtaining eternal life: *belief* (3:16, 36; 5:24; 20:31; et al.).[17] If salvation were not by faith alone, the whole message of John would be deceptive in stating that there is only one condition (faith) when there are actually two (faith plus works). Indeed, John *overtly* states that the only "work" necessary for eternal life is the act of believing. When asked, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" Jesus replied, "This is the work of God, that you *believe* in Him whom He sent" (John 6:29 NKJV). There is simply nothing else we must do for our *justification*—Jesus did it all (John 19:31; cf. Heb. 10:14–15).[18] It is important to note that *belief* and *faith* are the *same*, coming from the Greek root *pisteuo*.

The Catholic View Makes Works of Sanctification a Condition of Salvation

Again, the Council of Trent affirmed:

> When he [Paul] characterizes the eternal reward as "the crown of justice which the Lord, the just judge, will render" (2 Tim. 4:8), he thereby shows that the good works of the just establish a legal claim to reward on God. (in Ott, *FCD*, 265)

Of course, as already established, this "legal claim" is not intrinsic to us but is a reality *because God has promised it*. Nonetheless, according to the Catholic argument, this is a promise to give us salvation based on our works; the fact is, *one cannot work for a gift:*

> When a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. (Rom. 4:4–5)

We work *from* our salvation but never *for* it (cf. Gal. 3:11; Eph. 2:8–10).

Even granting (as Catholicism teaches) that for baptized infants the performance of works is not a condition for receiving *initial* righteousness (justification), even so, according to Catholic theology it is a condition for *progressive* righteousness (sanctification). In other words, one cannot receive a right standing before God (by which he has the divine promise of eternal life) without engaging in works of righteousness. But that is precisely what Scripture says is not the case: It is "*not* by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to *His mercy* He saved us" (Titus 3:5 NKJV). This cannot, as

Catholics claim, apply only to initial justification, because the present tense (Gk: *anakainoseos, renewal*) is used in this verse. Righteousness before God comes by grace through faith alone: It is "not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Eph. 2:9 NKJV). Catholicism's overreaction to Luther obfuscated the purity and clarity of the gospel and conflicted with their own earlier Second Council of Orange (529), which denied semi-Pelagianism.[19]

Catholics have responded by pointing out that not all Protestants agree that a Christian has the promise of heaven on the basis of justification alone—Arminians, for example, maintain that a true believer can lose his salvation.[20] However, this objection misses the mark, for the question at hand is not how we *keep* salvation after we receive it but how we *obtain* it in the first place. That anyone believes a Christian can *lose* eternal life in no way validates or supports the Catholic insistence that eternal life cannot be *obtained* without meritorious works. Once again, eternal life—not just *initial* (or, as some say, *forfeitable*) justification—is a *present* gift to, and possession of, believers (cf. Luke 23:42–43; John 3:16; 5:24; Rom. 6:23).

After verbal ambiguity is cleared up, the official Catholic position is clearly unbiblical. Its insistence that the performance of works is necessary for salvation—a condition for receiving a right standing before God that entails the promise of heaven—is precisely what the Reformation rightly rejected.

The Catholic View Confuses Working *for* Salvation and Working *From* Salvation

Put in traditional terms, Catholicism fails to recognize the important difference between working *for* salvation and working *from* salvation. We do not work in order to obtain salvation; we work because we have already been given it. God works salvation *in* us by His justification, and we work *out* our salvation through sanctification by His grace (Phil. 2:12–13).

In spite of the fact that the Catholic understanding of salvation does not logically *eliminate* forensic justification, it does nevertheless *obscure* it. By failing to make a clear distinction between forensic (legal) *justification* and practical (applicational) *sanctification,* Catholic belief blurs the truth that the only necessary action required of us for justification is faith. Perhaps this is why hundreds of thousands of Catholics have come to personally know Jesus Christ outside of the Catholic Church. In fact, this may be why Catholicism has not produced any of the great evangelists[21] and has not widely circulated an outline

of the process of salvation.

The Catholic View Makes a False Distinction Between *Works* and *Works of the Law*

The New Testament teaching against the concept of salvation by works is starkly opposed to the Catholic doctrine that salvation can be merited. In order to counter this, Roman Catholic scholars have made an artificial distinction between keeping the *works of the law* (which they admit *is not* a condition for salvation) and the performance of *works* (which they insist *is* a condition for salvation). Nevertheless, Paul's statements against *works* for salvation cannot be limited only to *works of the [Mosaic] law* (such as circumcision)—they extend equally to *all* kinds of meritorious good works. *Every good work, in one way or another, is in accordance with God's law,* for no work is *good* unless it fulfills God's standard of goodness (His law).

Since God is the standard of all righteousness, it follows that all true works of *righteousness* will be according to His nature. It is only *our* righteousness (*self*-righteousness) that is abhorrent in God's eyes (cf. Isa. 64:6; Rom. 10:3). Catholicism holds that part of the basis for obtaining eternal life is meritorious works; it makes no difference whether or not a work is *prompted by grace*—if the accomplishment of meritorious works is a *condition* for eternal life, then salvation is not solely based on God's grace. According to His Word (Rom. 4:5), we are saved *only* through faith (Lat: *sola fidei*) and only by grace (Lat: *sola gratia*).

Further, when condemning the idea of works for salvation, Paul does not limit it to "works of the law" but sometimes simply refers to "works" or "works of righteousness" (cf. Eph. 2:8–9; Titus 3:5–7). Contrary to the Catholic view, the Ephesians passage is clearly aimed at "Gentiles" who had been "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel" (2:11–12 KJV), with no suggestion of works in adherence to Jewish law. Nor does the Jew-Gentile conflict diminish the reality that Paul is speaking to Gentiles about "works" other than those unique to Jewish law; the argument offered by some Catholics that "boasting" (in Eph. 2:9) refers to Jewish boasting (since they boasted about "works of the law") is implausible for several reasons.

For one thing, unbelieving Jews are not the only ones who boast in their good works. Pride is a condition of *all* fallen creatures (cf. 1 John 2:15).

Furthermore, in this very context Paul explicitly addresses alienated Gentiles

(Eph. 2:11–12), and the Titus text (3:5–7 NKJV) does not point to "works of the law" but rather "works of righteousness." That the Greek past tense is applied to "salvation" does not bolster the Catholic explanation that this passage refers only to what Protestants call *justification* (and not to *sanctification*), for Paul is speaking to people who have *already* been saved—use of the past tense is natural.

In addition, the Catholic claim that "works" is occasionally an abbreviation for "works of the law" (Rom. 3:27–28 KJV) fails.

First, that all "works of the law" are here summarized as "works" does not mean the reverse is necessarily true. All works of the law are works, but not all works are works of the law.[22]

Second, when Paul is speaking to Gentiles (who, as Romans 2:14 says, "have not the [Mosaic] law"), he does not note their performance of works of the Mosaic Law (e.g., Eph. 2:8–9)—they likewise are said *not* to be justified by works (Rom. 3:21–24). To be sure, "works" often arise in the New Testament in the context of circumcision (cf. Rom. 4; Gal. 3); this occurs when specific situations occasioned Paul's condemnation of *any* kind of works deemed necessary for salvation (cf. Acts 15:5). To limit all of Paul's rejections of "works" to "works of the law of Moses" is akin to limiting God's Old Testament condemnation of homosexual behavior to Israel because such passages occur only in the Pentateuch, written to Jews.[23]

Third, the same is true of Paul's rejection of meritorious "works" as a means of salvation. To limit Paul's condemnation to "works of self-righteousness" as opposed to "meritorious works" is an example of *eisegesis*.[24] What is more, if our works had even a small part in obtaining salvation, we *would* have grounds to boast and, hence, would still come under condemnation.

Fourth, and finally, the basic moral character of God expressed in the Ten Commandments is the same as that expressed through natural law to all humanity: That someone is not consciously or deliberately doing works according to the law of Moses does not mean the basic moral standard is different. Therefore, in this sense, *all* moral works are "works of the law," for they are in accord with the moral principles expressed in Mosaic Law.

This is why "when Gentiles, who do not have the law [of Moses], by nature do the things in the law [of Moses], these … show the work of the law written in their hearts" (Rom. 2:14–15 NKJV).

In the final analysis, when it comes to the *moral* demands of the law, there is no substantial discrepancy between "works of righteousness" and "works of the

law." Consequently, the Catholic contention that Paul meant the latter but not the former is a distinction without a difference. The simple truth is that no works of any kind merit salvation: Eternal life is a gift received only by faith (cf. John 3:16, 36; 5:24; Rom. 6:23).

The Catholic View Is Similar to the Error of Galatianism

By insisting that the achievement of works is not a condition for obtaining justification (*initial righteousness*) but only for obtaining sanctification (*progressive righteousness*), Catholics do not avoid the charge of serious soteriological error. The claim that sanctification is by works seems to be akin to the falsehood Paul addressed in the book of Galatians. The Galatians were already justified[25] or, to use Catholic terminology, had already received *initial justification*. They were "brethren" (1:11; 6:1 KJV); they were "in Christ" (2:4); hence, they would not be in danger of falling from grace (5:4) unless they were already within it. They were secure in their justification (initial righteousness) but were in danger of losing their sanctification (progressive righteousness).

Further, we argue that the apostle's warning to them related to their sanctification because his fear was not that they would lose their justification but that they would fall back into "bondage" to the law (2:4).[26] Paul was not afraid his Galatian children (4:19) would fall from grace in the sense of *obtaining* salvation; they had already received it (3:2). Rather, his concern was that they would lose sight of grace as a means of *continuing* in their Christian life (3:3). Paul's pivotal plea is "Having *begun* in the Spirit, are you *now* being made perfect by the flesh?" (3:3 NKJV). Their *initial* righteousness was given by grace through faith, so why should they think they could *progress* in righteousness through any other means than by grace through faith? (1:6). *Paul did not want them to fall from grace in their path to holiness and purity*. In other words, the central message of Galatians is: You are not only justified by grace, but you are also being sanctified by grace. Neither initial righteousness (justification) nor progressive righteousness (sanctification) is received by or conditioned on meritorious works. Both are received by grace through faith alone.

It should be noted in this connection that Paul's reference to "false brothers" (Gk: *pseudadelphos*) is not to the *believers* in Galatia who had adopted the Judaizers' erroneous teaching that converts needed to keep the law of Moses as a means of sanctification. Paul was actually pointing to the false *teachers* who

were “secretly brought in” from the outside (2:4 NKJV). Since the Galatians had already been justified by faith, the danger of the false teaching was that the true believers at Galatia would adopt the Judaizers’ additions or supplements to the gospel (1:7–9) as a means of progressive sanctification. This grave distortion was obscuring the pure grace of God that was as necessary for their progressive sanctification as it was for their initial justification.

The Catholic View Confuses the Reward of Salvation With Rewards for Service

The texts cited by Catholics about “reward for works” do not highlight the reward of *salvation* (whether justification or sanctification); they are talking about *service* rewards. It is true that all who are saved by God’s grace through faith (Eph. 2:8–9) will be rewarded for their works done in honor of Christ (1 Cor. 3:11ff.; 2 Cor. 5:10). These works, however, have no relation to *whether* we will be in heaven—they have to do with *what status* we will have once we are there (Luke 19:17, 19). *All believers will be in His kingdom*. By contrast, in Roman Catholic theology one’s progressive sanctification does bear on whether he will *make it* to heaven. For Catholics, what one obtains at the moment of initial justification does not suffice (unless, of course, he dies immediately after regeneration).

Further, works-for-reward comes under sanctification, not justification: We do works *as a result of* being saved, not *in order to become* saved (i.e., to receive eternal life). In other words, merit makes sense if understood in the context of someone already justified before God and *working out* salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12), but not in the context of *working for* it. Even here, the doing of works is not a condition for being sanctified but a manifestation of it. Catholicism, then, is left in de facto denial of the grace it officially claims is necessary for both justification and sanctification.

The Catholic View Loads Works Into Its Concept of Faith

Roman Catholic biblical scholars acknowledge that “the absence of any reference to sacraments and good works in Paul’s thesis in [Rom. 1:16ff.] has often been noticed.” To this they respond by redefining faith to include works:

> Omission causes no difficulty if faith be understood in the sense of dogmatic faith, which accepts all the doctrines of the Gospel as true and obeys all its precepts as divine commandments. For in this

faith sacraments and good works are included. (Orchard, *CCHS*, 1049)

This is another definitive instance of eisegesis.[27] Remember that Paul goes on to confirm "the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness" (Rom. 4:5 NASB) and "a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the LAW" (Rom. 3:28 NASB). Nevertheless, when commenting on this very verse, *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture* emphatically teaches:

> Another conclusion from [Rom. 3:28] that had to be rejected by the Council of Trent is that *before* justification only faith is necessary [for adults] as a preparation and no other good works. (Orchard, 1055)

The commentary insists that faith is only the "immediate" preparation for justification—a "remote" preparation is also necessary, including "a resolution to receive the Sacrament of baptism and *to keep the commandments*" (ibid., emphasis added). Nothing could be more contrary to the plainly evident meaning of the Romans text.

Consequently, in spite of commendable emphasis on the necessity of grace for salvation and the need for explicit faith as a precondition for our justification, Roman Catholics still maintain that even justification (in adults, not baptized infants) is preconditioned on faith *plus* works. Furthermore, for Roman Catholics, *ultimate* salvation—glorification, eternal life—always requires both faith and works.

The Catholic View Makes Works Necessary for Re-Justification

Catholic doctrine also makes it clear that the accomplishment of works is a condition for receiving re-justification, which is necessary after one commits a *mortal sin* (otherwise, salvation will be lost). Since the Roman Catholic Church does not believe in *re-baptism*, it must offer another way for a wayward soul to *come back into the fold*. This is provided by *penance*. The Council of Trent declared,

> This sacrament of penance, moreover, is necessary (normatively) for the salvation of those who have fallen after baptism, as baptism itself is for those as yet not regenerated. (Canon 6, in Denzinger, *SCD*, 895.273)

Penance is a form of works; hence, in this sense, the performance of works is

a condition for re-justification—the *re-saving* of those who have lost their initial justification by a mortal sin.[28] In view of this, one has to question why Catholics do not believe meritorious works are also necessary for *initial* justification. At least part of the answer lies in the teaching that justification (regeneration) comes at baptism, which is performed on infants who cannot yet believe. Infants are not even self-conscious (to say nothing of God-conscious), nor have they yet developed the power of moral choice, since they aren't morally aware. One must ask, then, "If baptism were only for adults, would works (e.g., penance) also be a precondition for salvation?" The answer seems to be yes, for "doing penance" is explicitly listed by the Catholic Church as a precondition for adults who wish to be saved. The Council of Trent cited both Jesus and Peter in proof of this point:

> The Lord also said: "Unless you do penance you shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3), and the prince of the apostles, Peter, recommending penance to sinners about to receive baptism, said: "Do penance and be baptized, every one of you" (Acts 2:38). (in Denzinger, *SCD*, 894.272)[29]

The Catholic View Mitigates Grace by Making Works a Condition of Progressive Justification

Another way to make the point is to note that while Catholic theology admits grace is necessary for the initial stage of salvation (which Protestants call *justification*), nonetheless, the doing of works is necessary for the subsequent stage of salvation (which Protestants call *sanctification*). To be sure, Catholics believe this transformation (which they call *progressive justification*) is not possible unless one is moved by God's grace. However, arguing for the necessity of works for sanctification negates *in practice* the doctrine of grace that Catholicism confesses *in principle*. Whether the doing of works is prompted by grace (Catholics and Protestants agree that it is) isn't the issue—when one cannot be saved without meritorious good works, these works become a condition to obtain eternal life.

Again, the Protestant view holds that the carrying out of good works flows from justification but is not a condition for sanctification, even though saving faith will be confirmed through action. Even Protestants (e.g., Arminians) who believe we can *lose* salvation do not believe the performance of works is necessary for *obtaining* salvation (whether justification or sanctification). Sanctification is not *obtained* by good works, it is *manifested* in good works; the sanctified life results from faith prompted by *grace* (Rom. 4:4; cf. Gal. 3:3), and we do not work *for* God's grace but *from* it.

The Protestant presentation of *the way of salvation*, following the unmistakable biblical distinction between justification (in the forensic sense) and sanctification (in the practical sense), is more cogent, much more purely preserving the doctrine of grace. Once a believer knows he has right standing before God (i.e., is justified) by faith alone, his mind is not cluttered with works he must perform in order to be assured that all his sins (past, present, and future) are forgiven and that he has been promised eternity with the Lord. While Catholics acknowledge that there is an initial act of justification,[30] they also maintain that one must work to faithfully avoid *mortal sin* in order to achieve final justification. This is *not* conducive to the assurance of salvation by which we "know … [we] have eternal life" (1 John 5:13) and by which we are inseparably connected with God by His love (Rom. 8:1, 36–39).

The Catholic View Decreases Motivation to Perform Good Works

Ironically, Catholic insistence on good works to *attain* progressive and final justification does not provide the proper motive toward good works: *Knowing we are justified by grace alone through faith alone is the highest motivation to sanctification*. In recognizing God's grace, which declares one righteous apart from any merit, a believer is most highly energized for service. The love of Christ "controls us" (2 Cor. 5:14 NASB), and "we love him because [we realize that] He first loved us" (1 John 4:19 NKJV); the grace of God not only brings us salvation (Titus 2:11) but also "*teaches* us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions (2:12). *Keeping laws to obtain grace only brings one into further bondage* (cf. Col. 2:22; Rom. 8:2–3; Gal. 4:3–4). In the words of the chorus, those who recognize they are saved *only* by grace can sing,

> How can I do less
> than give Him my best
> and live for Him completely
> after all He's done for me.[31]

The Catholic View Argues for Sacramental Salvation

While Roman Catholic theology claims there is no salvation apart from God's grace, its view of the sacraments tends once more to take away with the left hand in practice what it has affirmed with the right hand in principle. The Catholic view of a sacrament, unchanged by the Council of Vatican II (1962–1965),[32] is

that it is given “not merely as a sign but as a cause of grace” (in Ott, *FCD*, 325). Catholic dogma maintains:

> If anyone shall say that the sacraments of the New Law do not contain the grace which they signify, or that they do not confer that grace on those who do not place any obstacle in the way, as though they were only outward signs of grace or justice, received through faith … let him be anathema, (in Denzinger, *SCD*, canon 6, 849.262)

Furthermore, according to Catholic doctrine, it is anathema to believe that “grace is not conferred from the work which has been worked” but has come from “faith alone” (in ibid., canon 8, 851.263). This being the case, *according to Catholic doctrine, salvation is by sacraments—God’s normative method of saving sinners is through the Catholic sacramental system*. This is, in effect and for the most part, an institutionally mediated salvation, piece by piece, until the sacraments are received throughout the course of life.[33]

Roman Catholics believe that sacraments are effective *objectively* regardless of whether their efficacy is experienced subjectively: “Sacraments confer grace immediately, without the mediation of fiducial faith.”[34] In order to designate this, Catholic theology coined the phrase *ex opere operato* (Lat: “by the work that is worked”); meaning, “the Sacraments operate by the power of the completed sacramental rite” (in ibid., canon 8, 851.263). Trent’s adoption of *ex opere operato* was vigorously opposed by the Reformers, for the phrase means the sacraments “move God to bestow the grace by their objective value. As soon as the sacramental sign is validly accomplished God bestows the grace” (Ott, *FCD*, 331). In other words, *salvation is dependent on performing the works of the sacramental system—it does not come by grace alone through faith alone*.

The Catholic View Holds That the Roman Catholic Church Is the Institution of Salvation

The sacraments, of course, are mediated through the Church, which is believed to bestow the grace of God on its recipients in stages from birth (baptism) to death (extreme unction). Catholicism does recognize the validity of two sacraments—baptism and marriage—that are widely practiced outside its jurisdiction and also allows that grace can be dispensed through the Lord’s Supper.[35] *The institutionalized sacraments are necessary for salvation* (Denzinger, canon 4, 847.262).

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that “except for Baptism and

Matrimony, a special priestly or episcopal power, conferred by Holy Orders, is necessary for the valid ministration of the Sacraments" (Ott, *FCD*, 341). While both Catholic laypersons (e.g., nurses or doctors) and even Protestant ministers may administer baptism in the name of the Trinity, the Council of Trent soundly condemned the belief that "all Christians have the power to administer all the sacraments" (ibid.). *Only* the Roman Catholic Church has the right.

Trent made it infallible dogma that Catholicism is God's chosen organization to mete out God's sacramental grace, bit by bit, from birth to death. Consequently, the Roman Catholic Church is the institution of salvation—something to which Protestants take strong exception. The Eucharist is a prime example: Not only does the Church (through its priesthood) claim to be the only divinely appointed organization that can administer this sacrament, but it also insists it has the God-given power to actually transform the physical elements of bread and wine into the literal body and blood of Christ (transubstantiation).[36] Perhaps one must stand outside the Roman Catholic system to be appropriately impressed by the utter inappropriateness of this presumption about the institutionalization of salvation.

The Catholic View of the Eucharist As Sacrifice Vitiates Salvation by Grace

Roman Catholics view the Eucharistic Feast as an "unbloody sacrifice," an idea found in the writings of some early medieval Fathers (see Ott, ibid., 405–07). Gregory the Great (c. 540–604), considered "the father of the medieval papacy" (Cross, ed. *ODCC*, 594–95), held that at every mass Christ was sacrificed afresh, and "this notion of the mass as sacrifice eventually became standard doctrine of the Western church—until it was rejected by Protestants in the sixteenth century" (González, *SC*, 1.247).

Protestants reject "Eucharistic Mass as sacrifice." Lutheran theology, for example, declares: "Since Christ died and atoned for sin once and for all, and since the believer is justified by faith on the basis of that one-time sacrifice, there is no need for repeated sacrifices" (Luther, *BC*, 140).

Sacerdotalism[37] is also denied: "The presence of Christ's body and blood is not a result of the priest's actions. It is instead a consequence of the power of Jesus Christ" (ibid.).

Of course, Catholics argue that the priest does not consecrate by his own power but by the power of God invested in him. The Protestant objection does not stem from whether the priest is truly an efficient cause or merely an

occasional cause of God's power;[38] the problem is the Catholic belief that such divine power is given to the administration of the Roman priesthood. Here again, Catholicism has institutionalized salvation and thus corrupted the pure grace of God by placing it under the control of a human hierarchy.

SUMMARY OF AGREEMENTS AND DIFFERENCES

In terms of justification (righteousness), the areas of agreement and disagreement between Protestants and Roman Catholics may be summarized as follows:

Roman Term Protestant Term	**Initial Justification** **Justification**	**Progressive Justification** **Sanctification**	**Final Justification** **Glorification**
Legal (forensic)	Catholics allow Protestants affirm	Catholics allow Protestants deny	Catholics affirm Protestants deny
Actual (practical)	Both affirm	Both affirm[39]	Catholics affirm Protestants deny
Behavioral change	Both affirm	Both affirm	Both affirm
Necessity of grace	Both affirm	Both affirm	Both affirm
Necessity of works[40]	Both deny	Catholics affirm Protestants deny	Catholics affirm Protestants deny

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH AND WORKS[41]

Now that we have studied the historic battle between Catholics and Protestants, we will examine the intramural debate among Protestants on the relationship between faith and works.[42] All agree that the performance of works is not a *condition for* but a *result of* salvation. It is the precise connection between faith and works that awaits discussion.

Whatever the connection between faith and works, it is clear that the Bible repeatedly emphasizes the believer's need to manifest good works: "In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your *good deeds* and praise your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). "God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every *good work*" (2 Cor. 9:8). "We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do *good works*, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Eph. 2:10). "[I am] confident of this, that he who began a *good work* in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1:6). "We pray [for you to receive wisdom and understanding] in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every *good work*, growing in the knowledge of God" (Col. 1:10). "I also want women … [to practice] *good deeds*, appropriate for women who profess to worship God" (1 Tim. 2:9–10). "No widow may be put on the list of widows unless she … is well known for her *good deeds*" (1 Tim. 5:9–10). "*Good deeds* are obvious, and even those that are not cannot be hidden" (1 Tim. 5:25). "Stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to *doing what is good*" (Titus 3:8).

True Believers Manifest Their Faith in Good Works

There are crucial differences between the proponents of various Protestant views on the relationship between faith and works. Many strong Calvinists hold that as a believer is moved by God's grace, saving faith *automatically* produces good works. Other Protestants hold that doing good works flows *inevitably* from saving faith but not automatically (a free choice is involved). Still others prefer to say that works flow *naturally* from saving faith. Some free-grace proponents claim that the accomplishment of good works usually *accompanies* saving faith, even though it is not a direct (or mandatory) result. Others insist that works are *neither automatic nor necessary*.

Why Works Do Not Flow Automatically From Saving Faith

There are many reasons for rejecting strong Calvinism's insistence that works flow automatically from saving faith.

First, sanctification is a process involving obedience, and obedience is not automatic but is an act of the will (cf. Rom. 6:16; Eph. 6:5; 1 John 2:3, 22, 24). Even the strong Calvinist acknowledges that grace works cooperatively (with

our free will) after justification. Accordingly, it cannot be automatic.

Second, sanctification is a manifestation of our love for God, and love is not an automatic act but a free one (cf. Matt. 22:37–39; John 15:10; 1 John 5:3).

Third, again, strong Calvinists admit that sanctification involves cooperative grace, which signifies a synergistic ("working together") act of God's grace and the human will.

Fourth, Romans 6:16 describes sanctification as a free action in which we are directed to "*offer [our] selves*."

Fifth, other acts of goodness are described as free and uncoerced—such as "*entirely on their own*" (2 Cor. 8:3) or "*spontaneous and not forced*" (Philem. 1:14; cf. 1 Cor. 7:37, 39).

Sixth, sanctification is a duty, and every responsibility implies the ability to respond, if not in our own strength, then by God's grace.[43]

Seventh, we are rewarded for good works (cf. 1 Cor. 3:11ff.; Rev. 22:12), and it is meaningless to reward someone for actions that come automatically (i.e., without choice).

Eighth, and finally, we suffer loss of rewards for bad actions (cf. 1 Cor. 3:11ff.), and it is senseless to punish someone for what could not have been avoided (since, again, it allegedly came automatically).

Why Works Do *Flow* Naturally *From Saving Faith*

While works do not flow *automatically* from saving faith, they do flow *naturally*, just as buds come naturally from a living bush. As Charles Ryrie (b. 1925) correctly observes,

> Every Christian will bear fruit.… Otherwise he or she is not a true believer.… *Fruit, then, furnishes evidence of saving faith*. The evidence may be strong or weak, erratic or regular, visible or not, but *a saving faith works*. (SGS, 42–43, emphasis added)

Even if circumstances put faith into a dormant state of survival for a time, there will be signs of life. With a true believer, as with other kinds of vitality, spiritual life can neither hide completely nor for long—it naturally blooms forth. Of course, to be fruitful it must be cultivated (2 Peter 3:18), and this is supported by many lines of scriptural evidence.

First, saving faith is likened to a seed that grows naturally in good soil (Luke 8:11–18; cf. 1 Peter 1:23).

Second, activity follows naturally from one's nature, and the true believer receives a new nature (2 Cor. 5:17; Col. 3:10).

Third, true believers are "born again" (John 3:3, 7), and, as such, they manifest a desire to grow by their hunger for nourishment.[44]

Fourth, the undeniable biblical connection between faith and works indicates that the achievement of works flows naturally from the faith that saves.[45]

Fifth, it is widely acknowledged, even by free-grace proponents,[46] that saving faith involves trust.[47] Trust leads naturally to good actions toward the one who is trusted.

Sixth, saving faith involves true repentance (Acts 17:30–31; 20:21; cf. 19:4),[48] and true repentance will naturally lead to good works (Matt. 3:8; Acts 26:20).[49]

Seventh, that true faith involves love for God (Matt. 22:37; John 4:7) reveals that it will result in actions. True love naturally expresses itself (1 Cor. 13:1ff.).

Eighth, true faith is not mere mental (intellectual, mind-based) assent. Since true faith also includes the emotions and will (Ryrie, *SGS*, 110–11), good works flow from the genuine belief of the whole person.

Ninth, that true faith involves obedience shows that belief naturally expresses itself in action.[50]

Tenth, James says explicitly:

> What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? [No.] … In the same way, *faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead*.… You see that *[Abraham's] faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did*. (James 2:14, 17, 22)

Eleventh, and finally, we are sanctified the same way we are justified—by faith (see Gal. 3:4, 11). However, *sanctification* is conditioned on our "obedience, which leads to righteousness" (Rom. 6:16; cf. Eph. 6:5; 1 John 2:3, 22, 24).

Some have objected that if doing good works naturally flows from faith, then the Bible has no need to exhort us in that regard (which it does—e.g., Titus 3:8). The reason Scripture so encourages us is that while the accomplishment of good works does come *naturally* from saving faith, it does not come forth *automatically*. Furthermore, while *some* actions come naturally, *additional* fruit comes by the arduous work of cultivating, fertilizing, watering, and pruning (cf. John 15:2). Again, without these actions, spiritual life can become dormant and stunted.

Similarly, some have observed that grace is said to be a teacher of godliness (Titus 2:11–12) and subsequently argued that if godliness follows naturally from saving faith, one has no need of grace to teach him to do good works. However, *teaching helps to produce better fruit* (John 15:2); also, *nature* will *naturally* produce some fruit, but not as much as if it is lovingly tended (cf. 1 Cor. 3:6; 2

Peter 3:18). As Ryrie states, "*Saving faith is a working faith,* and those works justify believers in the courtroom on earth [as opposed to "in heaven"].… Unproductive faith is a spurious faith" (*SGS*, 121, emphasis added).

True Believers Can Fall Into Sin

All of this is not to say that true believers cannot "backslide" (Jer. 3:14 NKJV) or be "overtaken in any trespass" (Gal. 6:1 NKJV) or commit "sins" (1 John 1:8–9). David did (2 Sam. 11), and he paid dearly (2 Sam. 12). Lot, who lived in Sodom, was "a righteous man" (2 Pet. 2:7), but he fell into sin, as did Noah, a great man of faith (Gen. 9). Likewise, Abraham, "the father of many nations," was beset by deceit and unbelief (Gen. 20–21).

In the New Testament, even John the Baptist, the herald of the Messiah, had his doubts (Luke 7:19), but Jesus said he would be in the kingdom of God (Matt. 11:11). Peter, who denied the Lord three times, did not lose his salvation (John 21:15–19; cf. Matt. 26:34–36). He was still "wheat,"[51] and he still had his "faith" (cf. Luke 22:31–32). Paul speaks of "carnal" believers (1 Cor. 3:1, 3 KJV); indeed, the Corinthian church as a whole was living in various kinds of sin, yet Paul addressed them as "saints" (1:2 KJV). Even the believer who committed incest was rescued (5:5). Of course, not all Christians will receive rewards in heaven (3:12–14); some will be saved "as through fire" (v. 15 NKJV).

True Believers Are Disciplined When They Sin

Sometimes the *sola gratia* view is confronted with the charge that it leads to a libertine or licentious life. Paul himself faced this accusation and asked, "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! *We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer*?" (Rom. 6:1–2). Grace does not prompt godlessness by godliness.

For one thing, as we have seen, true grace gives us the motivation to live righteous lives. Paul says:

> The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and *to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age*. (Titus 2:11–12)

Further, believers who fail to avail themselves of God's grace receive His discipline as His children. Hebrews tells us: "The Lord disciplines those he

loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son" (12:6). God spanks His wayward children: "What son is not disciplined by his father? *If you are not disciplined* (and everyone undergoes discipline), *then you are illegitimate children and not true sons*" (vv. 7–8).

"The Lord knows those who are his," and, "everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness" (2 Tim. 2:19). In short, when a believer falls into sin he is disciplined, and if he persists, God may even take his physical life so as to save His Name from further dishonor. Paul told the Corinthians that their abuse of the Lord's Table had resulted in the deaths of some among them (1 Cor. 11:30; cf. 15:20). This may be what John was referring to in saying, "*There is a sin that leads to death*."[52] I am not saying that [the interceding brother] should pray [on behalf of his fallen brother for this sin] (1 John 5:16). Perhaps the one who'd sinned had gone so far that God would no longer entertain prayer to save his life. This also may be what James was warning about when he said, "Remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will *save him from death* and cover over a multitude of sins" (James 5:20).[53]

Pointing out one Corinthian Christian's horrific sin, Paul instructed the congregation to "hand this man over to Satan, *so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord*" (1 Cor. 5:5). Two things are evident here: First, in spite of his great sin, he would be ultimately saved (cf. Heb. 12). Second, he was to receive severe discipline for his sin (cf. 1 Cor. 11:30–32). Paul was also writing to believers when he said, "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. *A man reaps what he sows*" (Gal. 6:7; cf. v. 8).

In brief, no believer gets away with sin: "*We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ*, that each one may receive what is due to him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). At this judgment seat,

> [Our] work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and *the fire will test the quality of each man's work*. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. *If it is burned up, he will suffer loss*; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames. (1 Cor. 3:13–15)

Note (from v. 15) that all who have been truly saved will *always* be saved.[54] God does not renege on His promises (Rom. 11:29), nor does He begin a project He does not complete (Phil. 1:6). There isn't anyone declared righteous by God who has cause to doubt eternity: "Those he predestined, he also called; those he

called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified" (Rom. 8:30).

Can True Believers Ever Lose their Faith Completely?

One question not yet specifically addressed, one that divides even proponents of *sola gratia*, is whether continual faith in Christ throughout one's life is a necessary indication that one is truly saved. Or, put negatively: Can one be a ture believer (i.e., be saved) and "lose" his faith?

Continued Faith Is Not a Condition for Keeping One's Salvation

In distinction from Arminians and Roman Catholics, Calvinists of different varieties answer no: There are *no* conditions of any kind on our eternal security. Salvation is an unconditional gift (Rom. 11:29), and while continued faith and its fruit in good works is a *manifestation* of true faith, it is not a *condition* of it.

Continued Faith Is *a Natural Manifestation of One's True Salvation*

Zane Hodges (b. 1932),[55] Charles Stanley (b. 1933), and other freegrace proponents agree that continued faith is not a necessary sign of the elect. Stanley affirms that "God does not require a *constant attitude* of faith in order to be saved—only an *act* of faith" (*ES*, 80). With this we concur, but that is not the issue at hand—the question is "Must a believer exercise continual belief in Christ throughout his whole life in order to be shown to be one of the elect?" Hodges and Stanley again say no: "Hodges argues that "*Satan can completely shipwreck a believer's faith but that this in no way affects the believer's security*" (ibid., 91, emphasis added). Stanley asserts, "The Bible clearly teaches that God's love for His people is of such magnitude that *even those who walk away from the faith* have not the slightest chance of slipping from His hand" (ibid., 74, emphasis added).

True faith *may* become dormant for a time, as has been presented above. In addition, the true believer's eternity is unquestionably secure. However, it is highly doubtful that, as Stanley suggests, a *true* believer *can* ever totally lose his faith.

First, as already shown, continued works are the natural result of saving faith.

Second, true faith is the kind that produces (manifests itself in) good works. James (see 2:14–22) states this overtly: Faith without works is dead.[56]

Third, as Jesus said in the parable of the soils, saving faith is not in those "who believe for a while" but in those who "bear fruit" (Luke 8:13, 15 NKJV).

As Ryrie says, faith is not a work, but true faith continues to work.

Fourth, true faith will persevere to the end because it is "*through faith* [we] are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:5; cf. Phil. 1:6).

Fifth, the Bible records that true believers who did falter didn't lose eternal hope (cf. Matt. 11:11; John 21:15–19). Once again, Peter denied to several people that he knew Christ, but he never stopped believing in Him (Luke 22:32). John the Baptist had questions about whether Jesus was the Messiah (Matt. 11:1–4), but he didn't reject Him and turn away; rather, he sent messengers to ask his question and have his wavering faith confirmed.

Sixth, the Bible declares, "*No one who is born of God will continually sin* because God's seed abides in him; he cannot go on sinning because he has been born of God" (1 John 3:9).[57] To avoid continual sin one must be in continual faith, for faith is the victory that overcomes the world (1 John 5:4).

Seventh, and finally, those who "depart from the faith" entirely were never truly within it: "[The false teachers] went out from us, but *they did not really belong to us*. For *if they had* belonged to us, *they would have remained with us*" (1 John 2:19).

Charles Ryrie clarifies,

> To be sure, justification is proved by personal purity, [for] once justified, we show this by changes in our lives. "He who has died is freed [literally, 'justified'] from sin" (Rom. 6:7).… Justification before the bar of God is demonstrated by changes in our lives here on earth before the bar of men. (*SGS*, 132)

True Believers Are Not Always Faithful

Continuing in faith and *continuing in faithfulness* are not the same: One can continue to believe in Christ, and manifest a modicum of good works springing from that faith, without being a faithful and fruitful Christian. *True believers are not always faithful*, but when they are unfaithful to the Lord they do not lose their salvation: "If we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself" (2 Tim. 2:13).

The true believers of the biblical era *were* unfaithful at times. They were untrue to one or more of God's commandments, but none of them was without faith in the God of the commandments. No matter how dormant or suppressed anyone's faith may have become, *there are no undisputed scriptural examples of anyone known to be saved who completely gave up his faith in God*. People who permanently turn from the faith are professing, not possessing, Christians; that is, they were never saved. They fall into the category of those about whom Jesus

said, “I *never* knew you” (Matt. 7:23).

Good Works That Are Evidence of Personal Salvation

While the doing of good works is an *evidence* of (not a *condition* for) salvation in general, nonetheless, certain specific kinds of works are scripturally singled out. These are sometimes taken as tokens of one’s assurance of having eternal life; the apostle John enumerates several in his first epistle with the introductory phrase, “By this you know” (cf. 2:3; 3:14, 19, 24; 4:2, 13; 5:2, 13, 18–20). Biblically, these include love for the brethren, keeping God’s commandments, and the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22–23), which is “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”

A more extensive discussion on this point is reserved for chapter 11. Two brief observations will suffice here.

First, whatever role these kinds of works may play in providing assurance, they are all the *fruit* and not the *root* of salvation.

Second, these are at best the subjective grounds for knowing we are saved; the objective basis is the saving work of Jesus Christ on our behalf.

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH AND WORKS

There are many theological arguments beneath the evangelical view that the carrying out of good works is the evidence of, but not a condition for, saving faith. First, we will look at three theological reasons for works not being a condition for salvation, then we will present two theological reasons for works being a natural result (evidence, manifestation) of true faith.

The Nature of God’s Grace

The God of Scripture is the totally self-sufficient, uncaused Cause of all things.[58] He is *the* Source and Sustainer—He created all, and He sustains all.[59] We have nothing we did not receive from Him, and we cannot give to Him what He has not already given to us: God “is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else” (Acts 17:25). “From him and through him and to him are all

things" (Rom. 11:36). "Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand" (1 Chron. 29:14).

Eternal life, then, cannot be of our works: "Salvation is of the Lord" (Jonah 2:9 NKJV). Even though it must be received by faith (Eph. 2:8; Acts 16:31; Rom. 3:25), nonetheless, salvation does not originate with our will (cf. John 1:13; Rom. 9:16) but with Him who is the Source of all that has been created. Without grace initiating and executing the plan of salvation, no one would ever be saved: Our eternal life finds its origin only in grace (*sola gratia*).

The Nature of Human Depravity

Total depravity means (among other things) that fallen humanity—the whole human race—is *totally* incapable of achieving salvation. If humans are to be justified before God, *He* must both initiate and accomplish it.[60]

The Nature of Faith

Faith is the only condition (*sola fidei*) for receiving God's gracious gift of salvation (Rom. 4:5; cf. Eph. 2:8–9; Titus 3:3–7).[61] Saving faith involves dependence only on God for our salvation, acknowledging that He and He alone is the Source and Sufficiency of eternal life.

The Nature of the Results of Faith

Saving faith involves trust and commitment, so naturally doing good works flows from it. As we have seen, an act of trust or commitment, by its very nature, is one that tends to result in a change of *action (behavior, work*). Persons we trust are persons *toward* whom we act appropriately (because we trust them, we respond in ways that signify trust) and *for* whom we act beneficially (because we trust them, we act in ways that convey and proliferate goodness). Persons we are committed to are persons *toward* whom we act positively and *for* whom we respond lovingly and sacrificially.

The Nature of Salvation

Salvation, once again, is an act of God's grace, and grace, by its very nature, tends to soften the heart and change the actions of the one receiving it. This

softening change causes us to be more favorably disposed—grateful and responsive—to the Gracious One. “The goodness of God leads you to repentance” (Rom. 2:4 NKJV), and “the love of Christ controls us” (2 Cor. 5:14 NASB); our Lord said that those who are forgiven much will love much, “but to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little” (Luke 7:47 NKJV). It follows, then, that the intrinsic nature of salvation as a gracious and loving act of God tends naturally to produce good works in the lives of those who receive it (cf. Titus 1:11–13).

Relation of Faith, Works, and Salvation: Four Views

	Lordship	**Moderate Calvinism**	**Free Grace**	**Wesleyanism**
Must accept Christ as Lord for salvation	Yes	No	No	Yes
Need to repent for salvation	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Obedience is necessary for salvation	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
“Belief *that*” and “belief *in*” are the same	No	No	Yes	No
“Belief *that*” can save	No	No	Yes	No
Faith involves commitment	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Abiding in Christ is necessary for salvation	Yes	No	No	Yes
Continual faithfulness is necessary for salvation	Yes	No	No	Yes
Necessary to continue in faith as *condition* of salvation	No	No	No	Yes
Necessary to continue in faith as *evidence* of being saved	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Faith *naturally* produces works	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Good works *automatically* follow from faith	Yes	No	No	No
All saved should be disciples	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
One must be a disciple to be saved	Yes	No	No	Yes

All the regenerate will be saved	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Salvation can be lost	No	No	No	Yes
One can lose all faith in Christ and still be saved	No	No	Yes	No
The performance of good works is a necessary *condition* for keeping salvation	No	No	No	Yes[62]
Continual faith is a necessary *sign* of salvation	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Those who *fall* into serious sin are still saved	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
One can die in serious[63] sin and be saved	No	Yes	Yes	No[64]
Those who continue in sin can be saved	No	No	Yes	No
We can know we are saved while in serious sin	No	Yes	Yes	No

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH AND WORKS —WORKS ARE NOT A *CONDITION* OF SALVATION

There is a firm and continuous tradition from the beginning of Christian teaching that while true faith should (and naturally does) result in good works, the performance of works is not a condition of salvation. *All who are ever saved are saved apart from their good works and in spite of their bad works.*

Early Fathers

According to the patristic Fathers, salvation cannot be earned. Nothing we can do merits God's gracious gift of salvation.

Clement of Rome (c. A.D. first century)

> We, therefore, who have been called by His will in Christ Jesus, are not justified by ourselves, neither by our wisdom or understanding or piety, nor by the works we have wrought in holiness of heart. (*LC* in *FEF*, 1.9.16 as cited in Oden, *ACCSNT*)

Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)

> Vain, too, are Marcion and his followers when they seek to exclude Abraham from the inheritance, to which the Spirit through many men, and now by Paul, bears witness, that "he believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness" (*AH* 4.8.1 in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, 1:470).

Origen (c. 185–c. 254)

> We hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the law. If an example is required I think it must suffice to mention the thief on the cross, who asked Christ to save him and was told: "Truly I say to you, this day you shall be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43 NASB).… A man is justified by faith. The works of the law can make no contribution to this. (*CER*, on Rom. 3:28, 2.132–34 in Oden, *ACCSNT*, 6:104)
>
> God is just, and therefore he could not justify the unjust. Therefore he required the intervention of a propitiator, so that by having faith in him those who could not be justified by their own works might be justified. (2.112 in ibid., 6:102–03).

Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 315–c. 387)

"Just as a writing-pen or a dart has need of one to employ it, so also does grace have need of believing hearts.… It is God's part to confer grace, but yours to accept and guard it" (*CL*, 1.3–1.4 in *FEF*, 1:348.808; ibid.).

John Chrysostom (347–407)

> The man who boasts in his works is boasting about himself, but the man who finds his honor in having faith in God has a much better reason for boasting, because he is boasting about God, not about himself. (*HR* in Schaff, *NPNF*, 1.11:385–86; ibid., 6:110)
>
> In order to stop anyone from asking: "How can we be saved without contributing anything at all to our salvation?" Paul shows that in fact we do contribute a great deal toward it—we supply our faith! (ibid., on Rom. 7 in Schaff, *NPNF*, 1.11:377; ibid., 6:100)
>
> So that you may not be elated by the magnitude of these benefits, see how Paul put you in your place. For "by grace you are saved," he says, "through faith," then, so as to not do injury to free will, he allots a role to us, then takes it away again, saying, "and this not of ourselves" (*HE*, on Eph. 2:8 [*IOEP* 2:160] in ibid., 8:13).

"This is God's righteousness, that we are not justified by works (for then they would have to be perfect, which is impossible), but by grace, in which case all our sin is removed" (*HEPC*, 11:5 in Schaff, *NPNF*, 1.12:334; ibid., 7:252). "The righteousness is not ours but belongs to God, and in saying this, Paul hints to us

that it is abundantly available and easy to obtain. For we do not get it by toil and labor but by believing" (*HR*, 2.17 in Schaff, *NPNF*, 1.11:349; ibid., 6:32).

Theodoret of Cyrrhus (c. 393–c. 466)

> All we bring to grace is our faith.… For [Paul] adds, "and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8–9). It is not of our own accord that we have believed, but we have come to belief after having been called. (*CEP* as cited in *FEF*, 3:248–49.2163)

"The Lord Christ is both God and the mercy seat, both the priest and the lamb, and he performed the work of our salvation by his blood, demanding only faith from us" (*ILR*, 82 in Oden, *ACCSNT*, 6:102).

Caius Marius Victorinus (c. fourth century)

"The fact that you Ephesians are saved is not something that comes from yourselves. It is the gift of God. It is not from your works, but it is God's grace and God's gift, not from anything you have deserved" (*EE*, 1.2.9.152 in ibid., 8:134). "He did not make us deserving, since we did not receive things by our own merit but by the grace and goodness of God" (1.2.7.152 in ibid., 8:132).

Ambrose (339–397)

> "For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.' " Abraham believed God. Let us also believe, so that we who are the heirs of his race may likewise be heirs of his faith. (*ODHBS*, 2.89 in *FC*, 22:236; ibid., 6:111)

Ambrosiaster (c. fourth century)

> [God] justifies him who has faith in Jesus.… God gave what he promised in order to be revealed as righteous. For he had promised that he would justify those who believe in Christ, as he says in Habakkuk: "The righteous will live by faith in me." Whoever has faith in God and Christ is righteous. (*CPE* in *CCL*, 81; ibid., 6:103)

Again, "They are justified freely, because they have not done anything nor given anything in return, but by faith alone they have been made holy by the gift of God" (*CCL*, 74 in ibid., 6:104).

Medieval Fathers

The medieval Fathers were no less definite about the impossibility of works

being the basis of salvation. In this way they carried on the salvific tradition from the apostles and the patristics.

Jerome (c. 340–420)

"We are saved by grace rather than works, for we can give God nothing in return for what he has bestowed on us" (*EE [PL]* 26:468B [574] in ibid., 8:132). "[Paul] says this in case the secret thought should steal upon us that 'if we are not saved by our own works, at least we are saved by our own faith, and so in another way our salvation is of ourselves' " (26:470A–B in ibid., 8:133). "Paul shows clearly that righteousness depends not on the merit of man, but on the grace of God, who accepts the faith of those who believe, without the works of the Law" (*AP*, 2.7 in *FC*, 53:306; ibid., 6:106).

> Some say that if Paul is right in asserting that no one is justified by the works of the law but from faith in Christ, the patriarchs and prophets and saints who lived before Christ were imperfect. We should tell such people that those who are said not to have obtained righteousness are those who believe that they can be justified by works alone. The saints who lived long ago, however, were justified from faith in Christ, seeing (John 8:56) that Abraham saw in advance Christ's day. (*EG* [*PL]* 26:343C–D [412] in ibid., 8:30)

Augustine (c. 354–430)

> Grace is given, not because we have done good works, but in order that we may have power to do them, not because we have fulfilled the Law, but in order that we may be able to fulfill it. (*OSL* in *LCC*; ibid., 8:206)

"Paul's intention is perfectly clear—to accost the pride of man, that no one should take glory in human works, and that no one should glory in himself" (*PS*, 5.9 in *FC*, 86:228; ibid., 7:18). "It is not that the will or the deed is not ours, but without his aid we neither will nor do anything good" (*OGC*, 26 in *PL*, 44:373; ibid., 8:258). "It is certain that when we do a deed, the deed is ours; but he is the one who makes us do the deed by giving us strength fully sufficient to carry out our will" (*OGFW*, 32 in *PL*, 44:900–01; ibid., 8:258).

> [It is not God's will that] anyone should be forced against his will to do evil or good but that he should go to the bad, according to his own deserts, when God abandons him. For a person is not good if he does not will it, but the grace of God assists him even in willing. It is not without cause that it is written, "God is the one who works in you to will and to do, of his own good will" (*TLP*, 1.36 in *PL*, 44:567; ibid., 8:258).

Cyril of Alexandria (375–444)

“We do not say that Christ became a sinner, far from it, but being righteous (or rather righteousness, because he did not know sin at all), the Father made him a victim for the sins of the world” (*L*, 41:10 in *FC*, 76:174; ibid., 7:252).

> Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On the principle of works? No, but on the principle of faith.… For who will glory, or for what, when everyone has become worthless and gone out of the right way, and nobody does good works any more? Therefore he says that all glorying is excluded. (*CR*, 74 in ibid., 6:104)

Prosper of Aquitaine (c. 390–c. 463)

> Just as there are no crimes so detestable that they can prevent the gift of grace, so too there can be no works so eminent that they are owed … that which is given freely. Would it not be a debasement of redemption in Christ’s blood, and would not God’s mercy be made secondary to human works, if justification, which is through grace, were owed in view of preceding merits, so that it were not the gift of a Donor, but the wages of a laborer? (*CAN*, 1.17 in *FEF*, 3:195.2044)

Fulgentius (c. 467–533)

> The blessed Paul argues that we are saved by faith, which he declares to be not from us but a gift from God. Thus there cannot possibly be true salvation where there is no true faith, and, since this faith is divinely enabled, it is without doubt bestowed by his free generosity. Where there is true belief through true faith, true salvation certainly accompanies it. (*OI* in *CCL*, 91:313 as cited in Oden, *ACCSNT*, 8:133–34)

“Law without grace, then, can expose disease, but cannot heal. It can reveal the wounds but does not administer the remedy. But so that the law’s precepts may be fulfilled, grace provides assistance within” (*OTP*, 1.41 in *CCL*, 91A:485, 980–83; ibid., 8:49).

Caesarius of Arles (c. 470–543)

“What does it mean to receive the grace of God in vain except to be unwilling to perform good works with the help of his grace?” (*S*, 126.5 in *FC*, 47:219; ibid., 7:254).

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)

> When [Paul] next says “and that not of yourselves,” he clarifies what he had spoken of: First, regarding faith, which is the foundation of the whole spiritual edifice. Secondly, regarding grace ([Eph.] 2:10).… Since he had said we are saved by faith, anyone can hold the opinion that faith itself originates within ourselves and that to believe is determined by our own wishes. Therefore to abolish this he states “and that not of yourselves.”
>
> The second error he rejects is that anyone can believe that faith is given by God to us on the merit of our preceding actions. To exclude this he adds “Not of preceding works that we merited at one time to be saved; for this is the grace,” as was mentioned above, and according to Romans 11:6, “If by grace, it is not now by works; otherwise grace is no more grace.” He follows with the reason why God saves

man by faith without any preceding merits, that no man may glory. (*CE*, 95–96)

Reformation Leaders

Martin Luther (1483–1546)

"To want to merit Grace by works which precede faith is to want to appease God by sins; which is nothing but adding sins to sins, laughing at God, and provoking His Wrath" (*WLS*, 604).

John Calvin (1509–1564)

"The reader now perceives with what fairness the Sophists of the present day cavil at our doctrine, when we say that a man is justified by faith alone" [Rom. 4:2] (*ICR*, 3.11.19).

> "Faith is imputed for righteousness," and therefore righteousness is not the reward of works, but is given without being due. Because "we are justified by faith," boasting is excluded. "Had there been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe" (Gal. 3:21–22). Let them maintain, if they dare, that these things apply to ceremonies, and not to morals, and the very children will laugh at their effrontery. The true conclusion, therefore, is that the whole Law is spoken of when the power of justifying is denied to it. (ibid.)
>
> Since a great part of mankind imagine a righteousness compounded of faith and works, let us here show that there is so wide a difference between justification by faith and by works that the establishment of the one necessarily overthrows the other. The Apostle says, "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" (ibid., 3.33.13).
>
> The conclusion, therefore, is that [Abraham] was not justified by works. [Paul] then employs another argument from contraries, viz., when reward is paid to works, it is done of debt, not of grace; but the righteousness of faith is of grace: therefore it is not of the merit of works. Away, then, with the dream of those who invent a righteousness compounded of faith and works. (*ACT*)

Therefore, "no man is justified by works unless he has reached the summit of perfection, and cannot be convicted of even the smallest transgression" (*ICR*, 1.3.15.1).

> Thus when the publican is said to have gone down to his house "justified" (Luke 18:14), it cannot be held that he obtained this justification by any merit of works. All that is said is that after obtaining the pardon of sins he was regarded in the sight of God as righteous. He was justified, therefore, not by any approval of works, but by gratuitous acquittal on the part of God. Hence Ambrose elegantly terms confession of sins "legal justification" (Ambrose on Psalm 118, Sermon 10; ibid., 3.11.1).
>
> The Gospel differs from the Law in this, that it does not confine justification to works, but places it entirely in the mercy of God. In like manner, Paul contends, in the Epistle to the Romans, that Abraham had no ground of glorying, because faith was imputed to him for righteousness (Rom. 4:2); and he adds, in confirmation, that the proper place for justification by faith is where there are no works to which reward is due. "To him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt" (ibid., 3.11.18).

Post-Reformation Teachers

John Wesley (1703–1791)

> "By grace are ye saved": Ye are saved from your sins, from the guilt and power thereof, ye are restored to the favour and image of God, not for any works, merits, or deservings of yours, but by the free grace, the mere mercy of God, through the merits of his well-beloved Son: Ye are thus saved, not by any power, wisdom, or strength, which is in you, or in any other creature; but merely through the grace or power of the Holy Ghost, which worketh all in all. (*MG*, sermon 16)

Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892)

> What is the heresy of Rome, but the addition of something to the perfect merits of Jesus Christ, the bringing in of the works of the flesh, to assist in our justification? And what is the heresy of Arminianism but the addition of something to the work of the Redeemer? Every heresy, if brought to the touch-stone, will discover itself here. ("DC" in *CHSA*, 5a)

Earl Radmacher (b. 1933)

> Everyone prefers the feeling of being able to do something to be saved. And once the door is open to his kind of thinking, the whole emphasis shifts from salvation as a gift from God.
>
> That kind of thinking accounts for the fact that none of the major religions of the world, with the exception of Christianity, offers salvation as a gift apart from any human effort at all. (*S*, 115)

Millard Erickson (b. 1932)

> Even faith is not some good work which God must reward with salvation. It is God's gift. It is not the cause of our salvation, but the means by which we receive it. And, contrary to the thinking of some, it has always been the means of salvation. (*CT*, 959)

"Another difficulty is that when humans do accept the principle that they do not have to work to receive salvation, there frequently is a tendency to overreact, all the way to antinomianism" [Rom. 6:1–2; Gal. 5:13–15] (ibid.).

> Despite the fairly common opinion that there is tension between Paul and James, both make essentially the same point: that the genuineness of the faith that leads to justification becomes apparent in the results which issue from it. If there are no good works, there has been no real faith nor justification. We find support for this contention in the fact that justification is intimately linked with union with Christ. If we have become one with Christ, then we will not live according to the flesh, but rather by the Spirit. [Rom. 8:1–17] (ibid., 960)

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR THE

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH AND WORKS —WORKS ARE A *MANIFESTATION OF* SALVATION

The fathers of the church were unanimous in supporting the view that saving faith ought to and naturally does manifest itself in good works. As this has already been documented at length, a few citations will demonstrate the point.

John Chrysostom

> God's mission was not to save people in order that they may remain barren or inert. For Scripture says that faith has saved us. Put better: since God willed it, faith has saved us. Now in what case, tell me, does faith save without itself doing anything at all? Faith's workings themselves are a gift of God, lest anyone should boast. What then is Paul saying? Not that God has forbidden works, but forbidden us to be justfied by works. No one, Paul says, is justified by works, precisely in order that the grace and benevolence of God may become apparent! (*HE,* 4.2.9 (*IOEP*) 2:140 as cited in Oden, *ACCSNT*, 8:134).

Anselm (1033–1109)

> Hence, with however great confidence so important a truth is believed, the faith will be useless and, as it were, dead, unless it is strong and living through love. For that faith which is accompanied by sufficient love is by no means idle, if an opportunity of operation offers [itself], but rather exercises itself in an abundance of works. (*M*, LXXVII)
>
> It is not absurd to say that operative faith is alive, because it has the life of love without which it could not operate; and that idle faith is not living, because it lacks that life of love, with which it would not be idle, (ibid.)

"It may, therefore, be said with sufficient fitness that living faith believes *in* that *in* which we ought to believe; while dead faith merely believes that which ought to be believed" (ibid.).

John Calvin

> The faith by which alone, through the mercy of God, we obtain free justification, is not destitute of good works; and also to show the true nature of these good works on which this question partly turns … the concept of justification. (*ICR*, 1.3.11.1)
>
> In the same manner, a man will be said to be justified by works, if in his life there can be found a purity and holiness which merits an attestation of righteousness at the throne of God, or if by the perfection of his works he can answer and satisfy the divine justice. On the contrary, a man will be justified by faith when, excluded from the righteousness of works, he by faith lays hold of the righteousness of Christ, and clothed in it appears in the sight of God not as a sinner, but as righteous,

(ibid., 1.3.11.2)

Charles Hodge (1797–1878)

> On this subject there has never been any real difference of opinion among Protestants, although there was in the early Lutheran Church some misunderstanding.
>
> First, it was universally admitted that good works are not necessary to our justification; that they are consequences and indirectly the fruits of justification, and, therefore, cannot be its ground.
>
> Secondly, it was also agreed that faith, by which the sinner is justified, is not as a work, the reason why God pronounces the sinner just. It is the act by which the sinner receives and rests upon the righteousness of Christ, the imputation of which renders him righteous in the sight of God.
>
> Thirdly, faith does not justify because it includes or is the root or principle of good works; not as, *fides obsequiosa*.
>
> Fourthly, it was agreed that it is only a living faith, i.e., a faith which works by love and purifies the heart, that unites the soul to Christ and secures our reconciliation with God.
>
> Fifthly, it was universally admitted that an immoral life is inconsistent with a state of grace; that those who willfully continue in the practice of sin shall not inherit the kingdom of God.…
>
> The "Form of Concord," in which this and other controversies in the Lutheran Church were finally adjusted, took the true ground on this subject, midway between the two extreme views. It rejects the unqualified proposition that good works are necessary to salvation, as men may be saved who have no opportunity to testify to their faith by their works. On the other hand, it utterly condemns the unwarrantable declaration that good works are hurtful to salvation; which it pronounces to be pernicious and full of scandal. (*ST*, 3.18.5)

Earl Radmacher

> Many Christians either overemphasize works by saying they are essential for a person to be saved from sin's penalty, or they de-emphasize works, failing to see that works give evidence of faith and of ongoing salvation from sin's power. (*S*, 172–73)

Millard Erickson

"Good deeds done to others are represented as what follows from salvation, not as what we must do to receive it" (*CT*, 1013). "Genuine faith will necessarily issue in works. Faith and works are inseparable" (ibid., 1014).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Roman Catholicism argues that, in addition to faith, one must work for salvation, but the Bible is clear that this is false: We cannot work *for* our salvation but only *from* it. We are not saved *by* works but *for* works. In other words, it is impossible to work for grace; we can work only from grace (Rom. 11:6).

As for orthodox Protestants, there is general agreement that salvation is by

faith alone, apart from any works. There is also wide consensus that while we are saved by faith alone, *the faith that saves us is not alone—it is accompanied by good works*.

Even though there is considerable intramural disagreement on whether works flow *automatically, inevitably,* or merely *naturally* from saving faith, an examination of the biblical evidence favors the view that works flow naturally from saving faith. Faith *can* sometimes be dormant, like life in a cut-down bush; but if the bush is still alive, it will naturally bud out somewhere—given the right soil and sustenance.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

In this chapter the assurance of salvation is both objectively and subjectively discussed. The first question is, can a truly regenerate person ever lose salvation? The second question is, if such a person *cannot*, then can he or she have assurance of salvation in this life?

TERMS FOR ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

The primary terms that relate to the certainty of salvation are *assurance* and *security*. However, there are other words or phrases often used, such as *the perseverance of the saints; eternal security; once saved, always saved*; and *the assurance of the believers*.

Perseverance

The traditional phrase *perseverance of the saints* represents the *P* in Calvinism's acrostic T-U-L-I-P.[1] *Perseverance of the saints* illustrates the strong Calvinist belief that those who are truly among the elect will persevere in faith unto the end.

Eternal Security

Another term for the certainty of salvation is *eternal security*. This label is often used by moderate Calvinists to show that a true believer has more than present assurance of salvation. Christians can have current confidence that they will never lose their salvation—they are eternally secure.

Once Saved, Always Saved

More popularly, many believers speak of *once saved, always saved*. This phrase has the advantage of clarity, even though it is somewhat cumbersome.

The Assurance of the Believer

Another contemporary phrase in some circles is *the assurance of the believer*. However, this can be misleading—while Calvinists and Arminians agree that present assurance of salvation is possible, the latter insist that both assurance of eternal life and eternal life itself can be lost.

More precisely, the assurance of salvation is the *subjective* side of the issue, and eternal security is the *objective* side. *Assurance* deals with a feeling or sense or experience that one is saved, while *security* relates to the ultimate fact (truth, reality) about the matter.

Since most on both sides (Calvinist and Arminian) of the internal debate about eternal security hold that present assurance of salvation is possible for Christians, the focus here will be on the differences between the two, particularly whether one can actually lose salvation.

DIFFERENT VIEWS OF THE ASSURANCE OF SALVATION[2]

Among evangelicals, there are at least four views on the topic of eternal security. We will briefly describe each before examining the related biblical data. There are some substantial intramural discrepancies; the two basic views, of course, are Calvinist and Arminian—the former affirms eternal security and the latter denies it.

In the words of the *Westminster Confession of Faith, perseverance* means:

> They whom God hath accepted in his Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace; but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved. (17.1)

In other words, all who are truly regenerate *will* enjoy eternity with God—"once saved, always saved."

Strong Calvinism on the Assurance of Salvation

Strong Calvinists believe in the security of the elect. Nevertheless, they cannot, at present, be absolutely sure that they are among the elect. Each person, it is argued, can only prove his or her election by persevering to the end.

Moderate Calvinism on the Assurance of Salvation

Moderate Calvinists hold that they are eternally secure *and* can be presently sure of it. Hence, they claim to have both eternal security and present assurance.

Classical Arminianism on the Assurance of Salvation

Those who believe salvation can be lost are called Arminians. They are divided into two basic camps: Classical Arminians, who follow Jacob Arminius (1560–1609), and Wesleyan Arminians, who follow John Wesley (1703–1791). Classical Arminians maintain that a saved person can lose salvation but only by the sin of apostasy—a complete denial of Christ. Once someone has apostasized, he can never be saved again.

Wesleyan Arminianism on the Assurance of Salvation

Wesleyan Arminians argue that salvation can be lost through any serious intentional sin. John Wesley addressed the issue in several places: "I cannot believe … that there is a state attainable in this life from which a man cannot finally fall" (*J* [Aug. 1743] in *WJW*, 1.427); "I find no general promise in holy writ 'that none who once believes shall finally fall' " ("PCC" in ibid., 9.242); "On this authority [Ezek. 18:24], I believe a saint may fall away; that one who is holy or righteous in the judgment of God himself may nevertheless so fall from God as to perish everlastingly" ("STPS" in ibid., 9.28). However, unlike classical Arminians, Wesleyans hold that one can regain salvation by repentance

of that sin.

A Final Contrast

Ironically, Arminians and strong Calvinists have much in common on this issue. Both assert that professing believers living in gross, unrepentant sin are not truly saved. Both insist that a person cannot be living in serious sin at the end of his life if he is truly saved. And both maintain that no one living in grave sin can be sure of his salvation.

In regard to security and assurance, three primary views may be contrasted as follows:

Strong Calvinism	**Arminianism**	**Moderate Calvinism**
Security, but no Assurance	Assurance, but no Security	Security and assurance

Some strong Calvinists insist that they believe assurance is possible before death. However, this claim is seriously undermined by several factors within their own view.

First, they acknowledge that there can be "false grace" and "false assurance," whereby one believes he is one of the elect when in fact he is not (Brooks, *HE*, 49).

Second, the very name of the doctrine of *perseverance* suggests that some who claim to be believers will not persevere to the end and, consequently, will not be saved.

Third, some of them admit to the possibility of apparent believers falling away before they die and thus being lost forever. They hold that all true believers *will* endure in their faithfulness to the end; those who do not endure in holiness were not true believers. This being the case, there *is* eternal security for the elect, but the catch is this: *No one can really be sure he is one of the elect unless he remains faithful to the end*.

This is different from what we present as the moderate Calvinist view (that all believers can be sure they are saved and *will* continue in their faith to the end). Scripture says that the presence of "faith" is "evidence" that one is truly saved (Heb. 11:1); faith is implanted in the heart by the Holy Spirit upon believing the Word of God (Rom. 10:9, 17). Strong Calvinists, though, argue that in addition to continuing to have *faith*, believers must continue to the end in *faithfulness* to God as evidence (proof) of salvation. Again, even though strong Calvinists say

they believe assurance of salvation is possible, Puritan Thomas Brooks (1608–1680), for instance, maintained that *true* perseverance involves perseverance

(1) in a holy profession of our faith;
(2) in holy and spiritual principles; by abiding and continuing in the doctrine of Christ; and
(3) by continuance in gracious actions. (*HE*, 272–74)

Fourth, and finally, these very elements offered by strong Calvinists as *signs* of true and enduring assurance make it impossible for one to know with certainty, before he dies, that he is saved.[3] The truth of the matter is that it is practically impossible for anyone to be certain he has persevered faithfully in all of these to the point of death. To put it another way, anyone who is not doing all of this up to the time he dies cannot be sure he is one of the elect.

Assurance vs. Security

Another contrast is that while moderate Calvinists believe in both temporal assurance on earth and eternal security in heaven for the elect, some strong Calvinists hold only to the latter, since one cannot be really sure that he is one of the elect until he perseveres to the end. As Brooks noted,

> Being in a state of grace will yield a man a heaven hereafter, but seeing himself in this state will yield him both a heaven here and a heaven hereafter.… [For] it is one thing for me to have faith, and another thing for me to know that I have faith. Now assurance flows from a clear, certain, evident knowledge that
>
> I have grace, and that I do believe, (ibid., 14)

Again, there is such a thing as "false assurance," and "we may think that we have faith when in fact we have no faith" (Sproul, *CG*, 165–66).

A. A. Hodge (1823–1886) said,

> *Perseverance in holiness*, therefore, in opposition to all weakness and temptations, *is the only sure evidence of* the genuineness of past experience, of the validity of *our confidence as to our future salvation*.… [There can be a] temporary withdrawal of restraining grace [while an elect person is] allowed to backslide for a time, [nonetheless,] *in every such case they are graciously restored*. (*OT*, 544–45, emphasis added)

This seems to imply that if someone backslides and does not return to

faithfulness before he meets his Maker, it is proof that he was not truly saved. If so, then regardless of the evidence one may have manifested in his life for any number of years before this, he cannot have had true assurance that he was saved.[4] In brief, for strong Calvinists on the knowledge of salvation, the proof of the pudding is in the persevering.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR ETERNAL SECURITY

Not only are there significant differences on the subject of eternal security between strong and moderate Calvinists, there are even more prominent disagreements between moderate Calvinists and Arminians. For instance, as we have seen, Arminianism affirms that a person can lose salvation. Arminian theologian H. Orton Wiley (1877–1961) taught that a believer could become "*reprobate*" and, "*dying in such a state, may finally perish*" (*CT*, 344, 351).

Arminian theologian Richard Watson (1781–1833) believed he had "established" and "proved from Scripture":

> *True believers may turn back unto perdition,* [and be] cast away, [and fall into a state in which it were better for them] never to have known the way of righteousness, [and thus] the number of the elect may be diminished. (*CI*, 340, emphasis added)

On the contrary, there are many arguments in favor of eternal security, along with present assurance, for all believers.

Biblical Arguments in Favor of Eternal Security

Moderate Calvinists insist that Christians can have true assurance of eternal salvation. Indeed, the Bible exhorts us to obtain it. Paul urged the Corinthians: "*Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith*; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?" (2 Cor. 13:5). Peter teaches, "*Be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure*. For if you do these things, you will never fall" (2 Peter 1:10). Jude adds, "*Keep yourselves in God's love* as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life" (Jude 21).[5]

Just what is it that provides the basis of our assurance that we have saving faith? "Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that *through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have*

hope" (Rom. 15:4). John declared, "*I write these things* to you who believe in the name of the Son of God *so that you may know that you have eternal life*" (1 John 5:13).

The Bible is replete with affirmations that salvation can never be lost and that we can be sure of this while we are still living. Among them the following stand out.

Job 19:25–26

"*I know that my Redeemer lives*, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh *I will see God*."

Job was certain of two things: (1) that his Redeemer lived, and (2) that he would one day see God in his flesh (affirming resurrection). In other words, Job had present knowledge that he had been redeemed ("*my* Redeemer") and that he would see Him in his heavenly resurrected body: I "*know" (now*) that I "*will* see God" (*later*, in heaven). Such knowledge implies his assurance of eternal security.

Ecclesiastes 3:14

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the wisest man who ever lived said, "I know that *everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it*." Scripture's application of this principle to salvation (cf. Eph. 1:4) results in the doctrine of eternal security. If what God does is forever, and if salvation is a work of God (Jonah 2:10), then salvation is forever. If salvation can be lost, then it is not forever. Therefore, *salvation cannot be lost*.[6]

John 3:18

"*Whoever believes in him is not condemned*, but *whoever does not believe stands condemned already* because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."

The plain sense of this text is that if one believes *now*, he is not condemned (lost) now and will not be condemned later (cf. Rom. 8:1). John adds that *such a man "will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life*" (John 5:24, see below); likewise, if a man does not believe now, then he is "already" condemned (lost). In short, a present act of faith assures one of never being condemned. Just as one is condemned "already" for *not* believing in Christ, even so one is saved "already" *for* believing in Him.

John 5:24

"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and *believes* him who sent me *has* eternal life and *will not* be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life." That is, those who truly believe *now* can be certain *now* that they will be in heaven *later*. Everlasting life is a present possession the moment one believes, and this assures he will never be condemned.

John 6:37

"All that the Father gives me will come to me, and *whoever comes to me I will never drive away*." Not only is everyone who comes saved, but everyone who is saved is saved permanently! God's gift is a forever salvation.

John 6:39–40

This is the will of him who sent me, that *I shall lose none of all that he has given me*, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that *everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life*, and I will raise him up at the last day.

Jesus says everyone who *now* "believes" in Him will be resurrected to life—saved. Further, He emphatically declares that He will never lose anyone given to Him by the Father. Thus, those who believe are as eternally secure as the promise of Christ. *Believe now; be saved forever*.

John 10:27–28

> My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. *I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish*; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.

What makes our salvation sure is not only God's infinite love but also His everlasting omnipotence. We are not only saved by His unlimited love, but we are also kept by His unlimited power (1 Peter 1:5; cf. Jude 24). *No one*, not even ourselves, can pry us away from His promise.

Further, Jesus said His sheep (the saved) would *never perish*. Plainly, then, if any believer *does* lose his salvation, Jesus was wrong. If Jesus is the Son of God,[7] this is impossible. Accordingly, our salvation is as eternally secure as the Word (Gk: *logos*)—Jesus Himself (John 1:1), who said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away" (Matt. 24:35).

John 17:9–24

> *I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours*. … Holy Father, *protect them by the power of your name*—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one.… *I pray also for those who will believe in me*.… Father, *I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory*, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world, (vv. 9, 11, 20, 24)

It is noteworthy that Jesus' prayer included believers not yet born as well (see v. 20). We are assured here that all true believers will be saved, for He said "none has been lost" (v. 12). Only those, like Judas (v. 12), doomed to destruction by their own unwillingness to repent, will be condemned (cf. 2 Peter 3:9). Since Jesus' high-priestly prayer for us is efficacious (Heb. 7:25), as is His advocacy for us in heaven (1 John 2:1), it is impossible that any of His children will be taken from His hand. If they were, God would have failed to answer His Son's petition, in direct contradiction to His Word's assurance that He is pleased with what Jesus did for us (cf. Heb. 7:25–27; 1 John 2:1).

Romans 4:5–6

> To the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is *credited [imputed] as righteousness*. David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God *credits [imputes] righteousness* apart from works.

The doctrine of divine imputation, asserted here and elsewhere in Scripture,[8] powerfully argues for eternal security. If we are already accounted as completely justified (because of Christ's righteousness imputed to us), then there is no sin that can keep us out of heaven. We have been dressed in Christ's perfection (2 Cor. 5:21), which is all sufficient.

Romans 8:29–30

> For *those* God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son.… And *those* he predestined, he also called; *those* he called, he also justified; *those* he justified, he also *glorified*.

This "Golden Chain" is unbroken. The same persons who were foreknown and predestined were also called and justified and will be glorified (received into everlasting life). In order to discredit the doctrine of eternal security, one would have to insert the word *some* into the text—it isn't there. All who are justified

will eventually be glorified.[9]

Romans 8:33

"*Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies*." Charles Ryrie's comment is to the point:

> It makes no difference who in all the universe may try to charge us with whatever. It makes no difference as long as it is not God who charges us. And God does not. *[God] has already announced the verdict in all instances when we are and will be charged. And that verdict is "not guilty*" (*SGS*, 127).

Romans 8:35, 37–39

> *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ*? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? … No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that *neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons*, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, *nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord*.

This passage needs little comment, merely contemplation. There is literally nothing "in all creation" that can separate a believer from Christ! Because of His unconditional love, the Creator *won't* do it, and no creature *can* do it.[10]

1 Corinthians 12:13

"*We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body*—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink" (cf. Eph. 1:22–23; 4:4). As Charles Ryrie keenly notes,

> At conversion the believer is joined to the body of Christ by the baptism of the Holy Spirit. If salvation can be lost, then one would have to be severed from the body, and the body of Christ would then be dismembered. (*SGS*, 129)

Romans 11:29

"*God's gifts and his call are irrevocable*." Salvation involves both the gift (Rom. 6:23) and the calling (Rom. 8:30) of God. Paul here declares that both are "irrevocable"—salvation can never be undone.

2 Corinthians 5:1–2

"Now *we know* that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, *we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven*, not built by human hands." Paul says he not only knew he was destined for eternity with the Lord, but he knows

it *now*. This present assurance of his future place "in heaven" is the confidence of eternal security.

2 Corinthians 5:5–6, 8

> Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, *guaranteeing what is to come*. Therefore *we are always confident and know* that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord.… *We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord*.

Here Paul expresses his certain knowledge that were he to die, he would be with Christ. This is an emphatic expression of his present assurance of eternal security, for God's present "guarantee" is the Holy Spirit (see Eph. 4:30). To deny either the present assurance or the eternal security of the believer is to say that God's promise—God's very Spirit—is without value.

2 Corinthians 5:17, 21

> Therefore, *if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation*; the old has gone, the new has come! … God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him *we might become the righteousness of God*.

According to this text, we are already a new creation, which guarantees us a place in heaven. Indeed, we have been robed in "the righteousness of God"; thus, in His eyes, we are as perfect as we can be—not because of our merit but because of Christ's work. In turn, since our sins have been imputed to Him and His righteousness to us, if *anyone* is to be kept out of heaven, it must be *Christ*. In the same way, if anyone is received into heaven because of *Christ's* righteousness, it must be *us*.

Ephesians 1:4–5

> *He chose us in him before the creation of the world* to be holy and blameless in his sight. *In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons* through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.

Believers are adopted into God's family before the creation of time. God knew in advance everything that we would do, even after we had been saved, including all of our sins. Nevertheless, *there is nothing that can undo an eternal decree of God* (cf. Rom. 11:29). Hence, those who are adopted as His children are eternally secure—there is no such scriptural reality as *unadoption*. He chose us because He wanted us, even though He knew all things from eternity.

Ephesians 1:13–14

> *Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal*, the promised Holy Spirit, who is *a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance* until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory, (cf. 4:30)

Elsewhere Paul says that all who have the Holy Spirit belong to Christ (Rom. 8:9). According to this text, having the Holy Spirit is a guarantee of ultimate redemption. Therefore, to argue that we can lose our salvation is tantamount to saying that God's guarantee is no good (or can expire). Stated in the vernacular, God has placed His credibility on the fact that every believer is going to make it; He has guaranteed it with the presence of His own Spirit in our lives, who "himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children" (Rom. 8:16).

Ephesians 2:5–6

> *[God has] made us alive with Christ* even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And *God raised us up with Christ* and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.

According to this passage, the saved, *positionally*, are already in heaven. In addition, we are there not because we seated ourselves but because God confirmed our reservation. Again, our eternity is as secure as Christ's: We can no more be kicked out of our everlasting inheritance than can Jesus be kicked out of heaven. As we have made clear, *what we do practically should and will (at least to some degree) reflect this status, but it is in no way able to negate it*.

Philippians 1:6

"[I am] *confident* of this, *that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion* until the day of Christ Jesus." Paul expressed conviction that the God who initiated the salvific process would finish it. *All the regenerate will be in heaven*. God ends what He begins.

Philippians 4:3

Paul wrote:

> Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, *whose names are in the book of life*.

From this it is clear Paul taught that it is possible for us to know, *here and now*, whether we are on our way to heaven. Furthermore, since names in the Book of Life are there from eternity (Rev. 13:8), it is evident that God knows that the bearers are eternally secure. Indeed, John recorded that once one's name is in this book, it will *never* be taken out (Rev. 3:5). Again, both present assurance of salvation and eternal security are found in these passages.

1 Thessalonians 1:4–5

"*We know*, brothers loved by God, *that he has chosen you*, because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with *deep conviction*."

Here, as in Romans 8:16, one's "deep conviction" that he or she is among the elect (i.e., is a *chosen* one) results from the omnipotent work of the Spirit. The Thessalonian believers had this assurance immediately upon conversion.

2 Timothy 1:12

Paul proclaimed: "*I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day*." Since our salvation does not depend on our faithfulness but on God's (2 Tim. 2:13), our perseverance is assured. Hence, we can know now that we will be glorified later, when He returns.

2 Timothy 4:18

Paul was certain: "The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and *will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom*." This assurance would not be possible if a believer could lose his salvation. How else could Paul possess the Spirit-inspired conviction that he would one day be with the Lord? Scripture promises that God will preserve all believers (Phil. 1:6; 1 Peter 1:5).

Hebrews 10:14

"By one sacrifice *he has made perfect forever* those who are being made holy." According to this passage, the one-time self-offering of Christ *eternally* secured the salvation of the elect. Since this certainty was obtained by the Cross, almost two thousand years before we were even born, it follows that any true believer can be assured *now* that he will be in heaven later. He is as perfect now, dressed in Christ's righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21), as he will ever be or needs to be

for glorification in God's kingdom.

Hebrews 12:2

> Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, *the author and perfecter of our faith*, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

God is both the Creator and the "finisher" (KJV) of our saving belief. He begins it, and He completes it (Phil. 1:6). Indeed, what the author of Hebrews calls "eternal redemption" (9:12) could not be everlasting if it were potentially temporal and if a person could lose it.

1 Peter 1:5

Peter speaks of those "who through faith are *shielded by God's power* until the coming of the salvation that is *ready to be revealed in the last time*." Once a man places his faith in Christ, he is protected by God's strength until he reaches heaven. Since God is omnipotent, it follows that nothing can penetrate this divine safeguard. Of course, this salvation is accomplished "through faith,"[11] which is strengthened by God's grace and assured in advance by His foreknowledge that it will come to pass (1 Peter 1:2).

1 John 3:9

John affirmed that "no one who is born of God will continue to sin, because *God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God*."

This confirms moderate Calvinism's view of eternal security for two reasons.

First, anyone truly born of God cannot persist in evil. If someone does, then he is not born of God. That is, a Christian's perseverance in avoiding continual, habitual sin is a proof of his salvation.

Second, the word *cannot* indicates that a true believer has a divine nature that guarantees his ultimate salvation. God has planted a *seed* in each believer at conversion that will grow to fruition (cf. Phil. 1:6).

1 John 5:13

"I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that *you may know that you have eternal life*." Present knowledge of unending life in Christ is assurance of one's eternal security.

Jude 1–2

"Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that *are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ*, and called" (KJV).

Not only are the "beloved" (v. 3) believers "preserved" in Christ, but they are also already "sanctified" ("set apart") by the Lord.[12]

Jude 24–25

> To him who is able *to keep you from falling* and *to present you before his glorious presence without fault* and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore!

Whatever warnings the Bible may give about the potential for our falling,[13] we are assured that a true believer will experience no failure that will involve the loss of heaven. An all-powerful God is able to prevent it!

Revelation 3:5

Jesus said of the believer, "*I will never blot out his name from the book of life*." This being the case, there is no fear of losing salvation once we receive it. Indeed, as we have seen, the names of the saved were written there from eternity (Rev. 13:8). Further, it is God who before the dawning of time wrote (and will never erase) the names of the elect in the Book of Life. No one whose name is contained had done anything to either gain or lose salvation, and the Lord knows the end from the beginning (Isa. 46:10). In His omniscient foreknowledge, God knew about *every* sin that the elect would commit after salvation, yet He eternally secured them anyway. *He knew they would persevere in their faith.*[14]

Eternal Security and Present Assurance: Other Evidence of Salvation

Throughout his first epistle John lists ways we can know that we are one of God's elect:

(1) if we keep His commandments (2:3);
(2) if we keep His Word (2:4);
(3) if we walk in love (2:5);
(4) if we love the brethren (3:14);
(5) if we love in deed, not only in word (3:19);
(6) if we have the Holy Spirit within us (3:24);

(7) if we love one another (4:13); and
(8) if we don't continue in sin (5:18; cf. 3:9).

In short, if we manifest the fruit of the Spirit (cf. Gal. 5:22–23), we have the presence of the Spirit in our hearts and can be assured we are among the elect. *We do not have to wait until we meet Christ to know that we belong to Him*. The first fruit of the Spirit is agape love, and Paul details its unmistakable characteristics in 1 Corinthians 13.[15]

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR ETERNAL SECURITY

In addition to all of these passages that specifically support eternal security, there are many other Bible-based theological truths that ground this teaching. Some of the most prominent ones include the following.

Salvation Is of the Lord

Jonah (2:9 KJV) summarized the soteriology of Scripture: "Salvation is of the Lord." Salvation does not derive from our strength but from the Lord's will. The saved are "children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, *but born of God*" (John 1:13). As Paul said, "It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy" (Rom. 9:16). Once again, if salvation does not depend on our efforts but only on God, our security is as eternal as He is.

God Cannot Deny Himself

The apostle declares: "*If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny himself*" (2 Tim. 2:13 NKJV). This is a particularly poignant text in support of eternal security, for it directly addresses the Arminian challenge by declaring that even if our belief falters, the Lord's faithfulness will not. We can no more lose our salvation than God can cease being God.

Election Was From Eternity

Salvation was not decided or gained in time, and it cannot be dissolved or lost in time. "*[God] chose us in him before the creation of the world* to be holy and blameless in his sight" (Eph. 1:4). Christ was the "Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world" (Rev. 13:8). "This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time" (2 Tim. 1:9). Salvation was effected *in* eternity and *for* eternity.

God Has Infallible Foreknowledge

Both Calvinists and traditional (classical) Arminians agree that God has infallible foreknowledge (cf. Isa. 46:10). If this is correct, it seems unreasonable to assume (as Wesleyans do) that God regenerated people He knows will not persevere.[16] The idea that God starts what He does not finish is contrary to His knowable character and recorded works.

Salvation Was Completed by Christ

What hymnist Elvira Hill wrote is strongly supported by Scripture: "Jesus paid it all"! Jesus, on the cross, said so Himself: "*It is finished*" (John 19:30). Anticipating His sacrifice, He declared to the Father: "*I have finished the work which You have given Me to do*" (John 17:4 NKJV). Again, the writer of Hebrews promised, "By one sacrifice *he has made perfect forever* those who are being made holy" (10:14).

From God's perspective, the work of the Cross was an accomplished fact from all eternity (Rev. 13:8; Eph. 1:4). This means that in God's eyes—in the eyes of Him who sees with infallible foreknowledge—all our sins (past, present, and future) were already covered before we were born. This being true, even the sins Arminians deem to be worthy of "the loss of salvation" were paid for by Jesus prior to our arrival in this world. If the Arminian view of perseverance were accurate, the loss of a person's eternal life would by necessity also effect a loss in God's omniscient foreknowledge (that this person would receive the gift of salvation). Contrary to Arminian claims, never does the Bible qualify the "all sins" for which Christ died by asserting that it is only "all sins *up to the time believers were justified*." It is unwise to add to the Scriptures.

Salvation Is an Irrevocable Gift

As mentioned earlier, Paul emphatically states that “God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable” (Rom. 11:29), and he also says that salvation is “the gift of God” (Rom. 6:23; Eph. 2:9). Hence, God can never overturn salvation: He is bound by His own unconditional covenant to be faithful even if we are faithless (2 Tim. 2:13).

Salvation Is an Unconditional Promise

God’s unconditional promises are unbreakable, and salvation is an unconditional promise (Rom. 6:23; 11:29; Eph. 2:9). Hebrews declares:

> Because God wanted to make *the unchanging nature of his purpose* very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which *it is impossible for God to lie*, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. (6:17–18)

Salvation Cannot Be Gained or Lost by Our Good Works

We have seen, irrefutably, that salvation is not gained by good works (Eph. 2:8–9): “He saved us, *not because of righteous things we had done*, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5). *If salvation is not gained by our works, then how can it be lost by our works*? Bad behavior, even the kind Arminians argue is sufficient for salvific loss, can no more cause us to lose eternal life than good behavior can help us to obtain it.

To the objection that salvation is received by our free choice and thus can be relinquished by our free choice, we note once more that salvation is an unconditional gift (Rom. 11:29) and, as such, cannot be taken back by God. Like the gift of physical life, after eternal life is received it cannot be given away. Only God has the power to reclaim it, and His character guarantees that He will never renege on His promise. Further, some tangible acts of freedom are one-way actions—obviously we *can* choose to get into situations that we cannot subsequently choose (i.e., have the power) to get out of (e.g., suicide).

Likewise, the fact that salvation is *received* by faith does not mean it can be *lost* by lack of faith. As we have already shown, receiving the gift of salvation is not dependent on a believer’s *continual* faith; the *initial* act of faith is the means through which justification is applied (cf. Rom. 13:11). Thus, the gift of salvation (Rom. 6:23) is a present possession (John. 5:24), and God’s gifts

cannot be *retracted* (Rom. 11:29).[17]

Arminianism Presents an Implicit Denial of Salvation by Grace Alone

Closely associated with the previous point is the fact that if believers are *not* eternally secure and, thus, *can* lose everlasting life because of bad actions, then Arminianism is a tacit form of salvation by works. H. Orton Wiley admitted this when he said, "Arminians deny the merit of good works but insist upon them as a condition of salvation." He even notes, "Mr. Wesley's formula was, 'works, not as a merit, but as a condition' " (*CT*, 373). Why are works a condition? Because, according to the Arminian view, a believer must maintain good works in order to keep his salvation; to guarantee his glorification, he must not, after he is saved, perform the kind of actions that precipitate salvific loss.

In fact, the Arminian position on this issue is similar to the Roman Catholic view,[18] which demands that once one receives "initial justification" by grace alone, he must not commit a "mortal sin" or else he will lose his salvation. As already observed, if the performance of works is necessary for the maintenance of my salvation, how can I avoid the conclusion that I am saved by my good works?

ANSWERING ARGUMENTS AGAINST ETERNAL SECURITY

Arminians use certain texts and arguments to show that a Christian can lose his salvation; it is to these that a moderate Calvinist must respond. At the heart of the Arminian position is the contention that all of the biblical "salvation passages" are either implicitly or explicitly conditional.

The Argument That the Promise of Salvation Is Conditional

Noted Arminian Robert Shank (b. 1918) argues that there are at least eighty-five New Testament passages that establish the "Doctrine of Conditional Security."[19] He stresses texts that speak, for example, of "continuing," "abiding," and "holding fast." Colossians 1:22–23 teaches: "But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight … *if you continue in your faith*, established and firm, not moved from

the hope held out in the gospel." First Corinthians 15:2 says, "By this gospel you are saved, *if you hold firmly* to the word I preached to you." And Hebrews 3:12–14 affirms:

> See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. *We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.*

Moderate Calvinism counters that neither these nor any other passages assert that a true believer will ever lose his or her salvation. The context here indicates he is speaking about *practical, progressive* holiness rather than our *positional, perfect* holiness in Christ, though the former is to flow from the latter (cf. Eph. 1:4; Heb. 10:14). Paul speaks of being "presented blameless" and "irreproachable," terms reminiscent of those he used in Ephesians when he said:

> Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her *to make her holy*, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and *to present her to himself* as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. (5:25–27)

Further, Paul's reference to "continue in [the] faith" does not mean simply "to continue believing" but also "to continue to live out the Christian faith." For example, he mentions being "grounded and steadfast" (Col. 1:23 NKJV), images that he uses elsewhere for a *fruitful Christian life*: "Stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to *the work of the Lord*, because you know that *your labor in the Lord* is not in vain" (1 Cor. 15:58). Since these figures of speech refer to working for God, and since we are not saved by works, the Colossians exhortation to continue steadfastly in the faith seems to be best taken as implying that *if we so continue in the Christian faith, we will be rewarded by Christ when we are presented before His judgment seat* (2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Cor. 3:11ff.).[20]

Likewise, Paul's admonition to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 15:2), implying that they would only be "saved" if they "hold firmly" to the word, doesn't refer to positional justification (being saved from the penalty of sin) but to practical justification (being saved from the power of sin). This is clear from the context.

First, he is speaking to "brothers" (1 Cor. 15:1) who are already saved, not the unsaved, who need justification.

Second, they are "holy," those who have been positionally set apart in Christ (1 Cor. 1:2).

Third, their salvation (justification) is referred to as past—"which you received" (1 Cor. 15:1).

Fourth, Paul concludes the fifteenth chapter by exhorting them to "stand firm" in the Christian life giving "yourselves fully to the work of the Lord," the performance of which does not bring justification (Rom. 4:5; Eph. 2:8–9). John Walvoord (1910–2002) correctly noted that "the pres[ent] tense of the verb *saved* focuses on sanctification" (*BKC*, 2.542).

Also, other passages dealing with continued faithfulness in the Christian life also refer to faithfulness that yields rewards for service, not the gift of salvation (e.g., Rev. 2:10).

Finally, there is a difference between *having faith to the end* and *being faithful to the end:* Perseverance in faith entails the former but not necessarily the latter.[21] If one is a true believer, he *will* continue to believe in Christ to the end.[22] Jesus placed those who "believe for a while" among those who were not saved, in contrast to those who persevere in belief (cf. Luke 8:13, 15). Hence, while continuance in the faith is a *demonstration* of salvation, it is not a *condition* for being saved.

The Argument That Belief Is a Continual Process

Arminians observe that the Word of God employs the infinitive *to believe* (Gk: *pisteuo*) in the present tense rather than as a once-for-all, completed act when we were first justified.[23] For example, the texts in John's gospel that promise eternal life for "believing" speak of "belief" in the present tense, namely, as a continual process. As such, they can be translated, for example: "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that *whoever [continues to believe] in him* shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

In response to this, moderate Calvinists make several significant points.

First, the present tense does not necessarily mean *perpetual* action, only *current* action.[24]

Second, Jesus' use of the present tense in regard to drinking physical water (John 4:13) is an obvious example of an initial act that does not go on forever. No one who is continuously drinking gets thirsty again, but John 4:13 says they will thirst. If they will thirst again, they are not constantly drinking water.

Third, the present tense is sometimes used of a onetime event, like the Incarnation (cf. John 6:33, 38, 41–42). A present participle[25] is often used of

actions that have stopped (cf. Matt. 2:20; 5:16; 6:14; John 9:8; Gal. 1:23).[26] So then, there is no contradiction in maintaining that the act of saving faith, a necessary condition for receiving salvation, is a moment of decision: *It simply means that "one begins to believe in the present."*

Fourth, if an initial act of belief were not sufficient for salvation—that is, if salvation required belief as a continual process—then there is no way Scripture could pronounce that one has already received the gift of eternal life as a present possession, which it does (e.g., John 5:24). Perpetual faith after the initial obtaining of salvation is not a condition for *retaining* eternal life but a *manifestation* of its veracity. As Wiley noted, "The initial act becomes the permanent attitude of the regenerate man" (*CT*, 375), for God is able to keep us in a state of belief by His power (1 Peter 1:5; cf. Phil. 1:6).

Fifth, not all references to belief that brings salvation (salvific faith) are in the present tense. Some are aorist and do indicate a completed action (e.g., John 4:39–41). Romans 13:11 declares: "The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation [glorification] is nearer now than *when we first believed*." Indeed, the famous Acts 16:31 passage is an example: "*Believe* [aorist] in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved."[27]

Sixth, since salvation is in three stages, it should come as no surprise that the Bible stresses belief in the present. We *were saved* in the past from the penalty of sin (justification), we *are being saved* in the present from the power of sin (sanctification), and we *will be saved* in the future from the presence of sin (glorification). Again, even though we must work out our own salvation in the present (Phil. 2:12), it is God "who works in [us]" both "to will and to act according to his good purpose" (2:13). As Paul explained, "I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but *the grace of God that was with me*" (1 Cor. 15:10).

Seventh, and finally, nowhere does the Word say that anyone who once truly believed will ever lose his salvation; it says that those who believe should continue to refine the salvation they already possess (Phil. 2:13).

The Argument for the Symmetrical Nature of Belief and Unbelief

Arminians also insist that if we can exercise faith to become "in Christ," then we can use the same faith to become "out of Christ." Just as we can get on and off a city bus at will, we can exercise our freedom to get off the salvation transit anywhere along the way. Allegedly, if we *couldn't* do this, it would mean that once we are saved, we are no longer free. Freedom is symmetrical; if you have it

to get saved, then you also have it to get lost.

However, as was shown above, this perspective is not biblically based; it is *speculative*, and therefore should be treated as such. In addition, it is not necessary to accept this reasoning even on a purely rational basis. As already established, some of our life decisions are one-way, with no possibility of reversal.

Furthermore, by this same logic, the Arminian would have to hold that we can be taken out of God's hand even after we enter heaven; if he did not, he would have to deny that we are free in heaven.[28] If we *are* free in heaven and yet cannot be lost, then why is it logically impossible (as the Arminian insists) for us to be free on earth and yet be unable to lose our salvation? In both cases, the answer is that if we freely submit to God through saving faith, His omnipotent power will keep us from falling in accordance with our freedom (cf. Jude 24).

RESPONDING TO PASSAGES THAT ALLEGEDLY SHOW WE CAN LOSE ETERNAL LIFE

Many verses are used by Arminians to show that a believer can lose his salvation. Space does not permit a detailed explanation of each,[29] but all of them fall into two broad categories.

Verses That Refer to "Professing but Not Possessing Believers"

First, there are the verses that deal with professing believers who never actually possessed saving faith.

Matthew 7:22–23

> Jesus said, "Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, '*I never knew you*. Away from me, you evildoers!' "

In spite of their testimony and even wonders done in His name, it is clear from the emphasized words "*I* never knew *you*" that these people had not received salvation.

Matthew 10:1, 5–8

> [Jesus] called his *twelve disciples* to him and *gave them* authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.… These *twelve* Jesus sent out with the following instructions.… "Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, *preach this message:* 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' *Heal the sick, raise the dead,* cleanse those who have leprosy, *drive out demons*."

It seems evident that these gifts were given to all the disciples, *including* Judas (v. 4), who also preached the message of Christ. We know from other references that he was Jesus' treasurer (John 13:29) and that, after he betrayed Christ, he was lost, being called "the son of perdition" (KJV).[30] Jesus said it would have been better if Judas had never been born (Matt. 26:24), and Luke clarifies that, after hanging himself, he "left to go where he belongs" (Acts 1:25). Judas was obviously a professed follower of Christ, yet he finished in perdition (hell). Is this not an example of someone who received eternal life but then lost his salvation by betraying the Lord?

The answer is no. Judas was only a believer by profession (not by possession), a wolf in sheep's clothing. Jesus called him a "devil" (John 6:70) who was eventually indwelled by Satan himself (John 13:27). The Greek word used of his so-called *sorry* after his treachery against Christ (*metamelomai*) reveals that he was not a true believer—it means "regret," not "repentance."[31] Jesus, in His high priestly prayer, excluded Judas from those who were truly His own (John 17:12).

Matthew 24:13

"*He who stands firm to the end will be saved*." Matthew 10:22 says the same thing: "All men will hate you because of me, *but he who stands firm to the end will be saved*."

Some scholars take this as speaking of the perseverance of the saints. If this *were* accurate, it still wouldn't disprove eternal security but would merely affirm that the elect *will* persevere, since they are God's chosen ones. Again, their perseverance is a *sign* of salvation, not a *condition* of it.

However, in context it appears that these verses do not refer to losing either salvation *or* rewards—they likely point to the believers who live through the Tribulation that will come at the "end of the age" (cf. Matt. 24:3, 29). If this is correct, then Scripture is saying that only those who live through the Great Distress will live into the thousand-year reign of Christ (Rev. 20:4–5).

Luke 8:4–15

"Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. *They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away*" (v. 13). On the face of it, this passage would seem to favor the Arminian view, since the persons were believers "for awhile" but then backslid.

However, there are two kinds of faith: *nominal* (nonsaving) belief and *effectual* (saving) belief. The former is mere belief *that* something is so, and the latter is belief *in* it.[32] Again, James (in chapter 2) stresses that nominal faith does not lead to good works and is not saving faith. Zane Hodges, though, argues that James is not speaking of salvation from *hell* but from *death*; not justification but sanctification. Hodges believes the "dead" faith is the believer's faith that lacks vitality, and that the performance of works is necessary for God's blessing on our life. Therefore, he sees "justification" in James 2 as meaning justification *before men*, not *in the eyes of God*, as Paul meant in Roman 3–4 (*AF*, 74–75).

Nevertheless, even if this were so, James clearly says, "[Abraham's] faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did" (2:22), and James connects this with the same faith that alone justified Abraham. Where Hodges goes wrong is in assuming that we are justified by faith alone without works (true) but sanctified by faith plus works (false).[33] This is neither the biblical nor the Reformed position; contrary to Hodges, faith—the same faith that alone justifies us by God's grace—naturally and normally produces good works. *We are not saved by works but by a faith that works*.[34]

Peter said, true believers "*through faith* are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:5). Only the faith that takes "root" produces "fruit" (cf. Luke 8:13, 15 KJV). Seed that does not become grounded in a heart of true belief is no better than seed that falls by the wayside, in which case "the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, *so that they may not believe and be saved*" (v. 12).

2 Thessalonians 2:3

Paul warned of a great apostasy from the faith, saying,

> Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for *that day will not come until the rebellion [apostasy] occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction*. (cf. v. 8)

It would appear from the context that apostasy leading to ultimate doom and destruction (i.e., hell) not only can but *will* occur. However, Paul indicates that those who comprise the "doomed group" were not true believers from the

beginning, for this deception will take place *among "those who are perishing… because they refused to love the truth and so be saved"* (v. 10).

1 Timothy 4:1–2

> The Spirit clearly says that in later times *some will abandon the faith* and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.

Arminians point out that these people must have once had saving faith; otherwise they could not have later departed from it.

In response, "the faith" is used in the Pastoral Epistles (cf. 1 Tim. 3:9; 2 Tim. 2:18; Titus 1:13), in the Prison Letters (cf. 1 Cor. 16:13; Eph. 4:13; Phil. 1:27; Col. 2:7), and in Acts (cf. 6:7; 13:8; 14:22) as the equivalent of "the Christian faith," with all its essential doctrines (1 Tim. 3:9; 4:6) and ethics (1 Tim. 6:10). A person may give intellectual assent to *the* faith without making it *his* faith.

Further, in regard to "the faith," the New Testament speaks of those who have "wandered from" it (1 Tim. 6:10), "denied" it (1 Tim. 5:8), "destroyed" it in others (2 Tim. 2:18), "turned from" it (Acts 13:8), "rejected" it (2 Tim. 3:8), "departed" from it (1 Tim. 4:1 NKJV), and "overthrown" it (2 Tim. 2:18 NKJV). Why is it difficult to believe that these terms and phrases describe people who are truly lost? If there is identity between *the faith* and *the Christian faith*, what we are taught is that a person can depart from *the* faith without it being *his* faith.

Consequently, we need only ask if there is indisputable evidence that God's Word teaches that any of these individuals were ever true believers. An examination of these texts yields a negative answer. These were people who professed the Christian faith, but none of them were described as having once been actual Christ-followers. Like Simon the sorcerer, they may have "believed" and been "baptized" (Acts 8:13), but subsequent action demonstrated nominal (and not salvific) faith. Peter said:

> May your money *perish with you*, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! You have no part or share in this ministry, because *your heart is not right before God*. (vv. 20–21)

Thus, like all unsaved people (cf. 17:30), Simon needed to "*repent of this wickedness* and pray to the Lord," because he was *full "of bitterness* and *captive to sin*" (22–23).

Hebrews 12:14

"Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; *without holiness no one will see the Lord*." As a result, how can we avoid the Arminian

conclusion that sanctification is necessary for eternal life?

In response, there are several problems with taking this as a passage that teaches the possible loss of salvation. For instance, *how* holy does one have to be? Of whose holiness is Hebrews speaking? The answer is that *all true believers are positionally dressed in* Christ's *righteousness—they are as holy as anyone can become* (2 Cor. 5:21). Indeed, Paul assured a presently unholy Corinthian church that they were already "sanctified in Christ Jesus" (1 Cor. 1:2), and Hebrews mentions those who, in spite of currently "being sanctified," are nevertheless "perfected forever" (10:14 NKJV). If these passages are speaking of *our* righteousness (or holiness), then we are in eternal peril, for all of our supposed goodness is nothing but filthy rags in the eyes of God (Isa. 64:6).

It seems certain, despite Arminian claims to the contrary, that the New Testament does not mean every believer must attain perfection through practical holiness before he can be saved. Further, this would be a kind of salvation by works, which God's Word repeatedly condemns. Perhaps we can be enlightened by comparing the words *pursue* and *attain*. We should *pursue* practical holiness, though we cannot in this life perfectly *attain* it. Even if this concept is *not* in view in these specific passages, the idea that we should practically pursue what only Christ has positionally achieved (on our behalf) is biblical. One truth is without question: *Nowhere do these texts confirm that a believer will lose his salvation if he does not live a perfect life of holiness*. The Arminian conundrum, then, is "How *much* holiness is enough?" Once again, the answer is that salvation is not about our righteousness—the work of Jesus will forever be sufficient.

2 Peter 2:1–22

Peter speaks of those who *denied the "Lord who bought them"* (v. 1) and who had "*known the way of righteousness*" (v. 21). This would seem to indicate, as Arminians argue, that the people being discussed were once truly saved and that their denial still led to their ultimate doom, since the "blackest darkness is reserved for them" (cf. v. 17). They are *dogs* (a term used for unbelievers in Revelation), not *lambs* (see v. 22); they are called "slaves of corruption" (v. 19 NKJV) rather than a "new creation" of God (2 Cor. 5:17).

In reply, a closer look at the context reveals that those who are denying the Lord (v. 1) were never true believers but instead "false teachers" and "false prophets" (v. 1). Hence, their knowledge of the Lord (v. 20) was obviously one of mental assent rather than heart commitment. They knew Christ as "*the* Lord

and Savior" (v. 20 NKJV), not as *their* Lord and Savior. They were deceivers (Matt. 7:15).

Verses That Refer to True Believers Losing Rewards but Not Salvation

The second group of verses used by Arminians in regard to eternal security refers to those people who are truly saved but are said to be losing their rewards (fellowship, maturity, physical life) rather than their salvation.

Psalm 51:4, 9–12

After his terrible sins of murder and adultery, David prayed:

> *Against you [God], you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight,* so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.… Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. *Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation* and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

It is suggested by some that when David chose evil he feared losing eternal life, as his prayer of confession might seem to indicate. The wording of his petition, though, is extremely important. Even in these gross sins, he did not lose his salvation but the *joy* of it (v. 12). *Believers who are in sin lack happiness and peace; even though they are under the fatherly discipline of the Lord, they are still sons* (Heb. 12:5–11; cf. 1 Cor. 11:28–32).

Psalm 69:27–28

"Charge them with crime upon crime; *do not let them share in your salvation. May they be blotted out of the book of life* and not be listed with the righteous." Some believe this psalm is referring to the Lamb's Book of [everlasting] Life (Rev. 13:8), which records the names of all the saved (cf. Rev. 3:5; 20:15). If this is the case, then David is praying that these people will lose their salvation. This is unlikely, however, for several reasons.

First, these individuals were God's "enemies" (Psa. 69:4, 18–19) who did not "share in … [His] salvation" (v. 27). Thus, they were unbelievers, whose names were never in the Lamb's Book of Life.

Second, there are many "books" referred to in the Psalms. For instance, there

is the book, or register, that counts all the living (87:6); the book, or scroll, that recounts the events of our life, even every tear (56:8); the book that holds all the days ordained for us (139:16); and the book that records the deeds of our life (51:1). *None of these is the Lamb's Book of Life, wherein the names of the elect are recorded from all eternity* (Rev. 21:27).[35]

Third, Psalm 69:28 cannot be referring to the Lamb's Book of Life because Jesus promised no name can be removed from it (Rev. 3:5). Again, all the names of the elect have been in the Lamb's Book of Life from all eternity (Rev. 13:8); since God knows the end from the beginning (Isa. 46:10), why would He, at any rate, initially enter their names if He knew He would eventually erase them?

Thus, it seems best to understand Psalm 69:28 in its Old Testament context of a book that records those who are alive. In addition, as God is in control of all life (Deut. 32:39; Job 1:21), David is referring to His book of physical existence, not eternal security. Charles Stanley summarizes succinctly:

> First of all, the other things David asks God to do to his enemies are physical in nature (see vs. 22–26).… Second, to interpret "book of life" as the Lamb's book of life implies that David's enemies were believers.… Third, in the previous verse, David asks that his enemies "not come into God's righteousness" (see Ps. 69:27). If their names were in the Lamb's book of life, they would have already come into His righteousness. (*ES*, 189)

Matthew 10:33

"Whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven" (NKJV). Many Arminians believe this is proof that one can lose salvation by betraying Christ. There are other ways to understand this verse that better fit both the context and the rest of the New Testament.

The NIV translates *deny* (Gk: *arnesomai*) as *disown*, but this rendering is too strong, since it is the root of the same term used in 2 Timothy 2:12 (Gk: *arnesasthai*), where it is applied to believers whom God will *not* disown, due to His faithfulness.[36]

Also, a derivative of the same term is used of Peter's denial of Jesus (Gk: *aparnese*, Matt. 26:34–36), but as we have seen, he did not lose everlasting life as a result of his betrayal. He was restored to fellowship with God (John 21), but his relationship with God had never ceased—again, he was still considered "wheat" and not a "tare" (Matt. 13:25 KJV). Furthermore, he retained his "faith" in Christ (cf. Luke 22:31–32) even when he denied that he knew Him (vv. 47–62).

It should also be observed that these individuals (in Matt. 10:33) are "in

heaven"; they are being denied *special recognition* by the Father, not a *place in His family*. While they may not receive the approbation "Well done, good and faithful servant" from their Father (Matt. 25:23), they are His children and will forever live in His home.

Matthew 12:31–32

Jesus affirmed that there is unpardonable sin:

> So I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, *but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven*. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, *either in this age or in the age to come*.

Of the many facts that have been gleaned from this passage, nothing in them supports the Arminian position.

First, Arminians believe that one can regain salvation after losing it, but even if they were correct in maintaining that salvation can be undone, it is clear that eternal life could not, in any case, be "re-obtained" after a person has committed the unpardonable sin.

Second, there is no indication that believers *can* commit this sin. The context shows that what is unpardonable is done by *hardhearted unbelievers*, who attribute the work of the Holy Spirit through Christ to the devil (cf. Mark 3:30).

Third, it is possible that this sin cannot be committed today, that it was possible only when Jesus was physically present on earth and had the Holy Spirit working through Him.

Fourth, and finally, Jesus died for all our sins (John 1:29; 1 John 2:2). Consequently, if an unpardonable sin still exists, it must be the sin of not accepting Christ's forgiveness. Believers *have* accepted it, and Jesus has promised them that they will "never perish" (John 10:28).

1 Corinthians 3:11–15

> No one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, *he will suffer loss*.

The Arminian usage of this text doesn't require much in the way of reply. Paul says true believers can lose their *reward,* not their salvation. Further, it speaks of a Christian's "work," which is never part of the basis for salvation

(Eph. 2:8–9). In addition, Paul emphatically declares that he *will be saved*.

1 Corinthians 8:11

"This weak brother [who has a weak conscience], for whom Christ died, is *destroyed* by your knowledge [of freedom in the Spirit]." Also, "If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating [of something that may cause him difficulty] *destroy* [Gk: *apollue*] your brother for whom Christ died" (Rom. 14:15). The Greek *apollumi*,[37] translated *destroy* is sometimes (in the New Testament) used in regard to the condemnation of a person to hell (e.g., Matt. 10:28—*apolesai*). From this a careless interpreter might conclude that the "weak brother" can lose (or has lost) his salvation.

However, this is incorrect.

For one thing, grammatically the word *destroy* most often simply means to "lose something temporal," such as physical life (Matt. 26:52) or self-centered convenience (Matt. 10:39). Sometimes *apollumi* is used of the loss of a person's "reward" (Matt. 10:42) but never his salvation.

Further, the context in 1 Corinthians 8 (and Rom. 14) has to do with offending a weaker "brother" (v. 11) by partaking of food that had been offered to images of other gods. Paul is not referring to the loss of salvation because:

(1) He speaks of "wound[ing] their weak conscience" (v. 12), not eliminating their salvation and sending them to hell;
(2) This act of offense, while plainly a "sin against Christ," does not precipitate spirit-damning evil;
(3) The description describes a "stumbling block" (v. 9) in the weaker brother's life, not his eternal condemnation—it is unfathomable that the Arminian might truly mean to suggest that if he were to "stumble" (v. 13 NKJV) in his Christian life, he would be forever separated from God;
(4) The parallel passage in Romans 14 speaks of the offended brother being "made weak" (v. 21 KJV) or "distressed" (v. 15) (Gk: *lupeitai*) in his faith, not being stripped of (or relinquishing) everlasting life;
(5) Whatever it is that our unloving act causes the "weaker" one to do, he is still a "brother" in Christ—he has not been (and will not be) *unadopted*.[38]

1 Corinthians 9:27

"I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others,

I myself will not be disqualified for the prize." Again, Paul is speaking about loss of reward, not of salvation (cf. 1 Cor. 3:15; 2 Cor. 5:10)—note that he speaks of a "prize" to be won rather than a "gift" to be received (cf. Rom. 6:23). In any event, warnings to persevere are not inconsistent with our ability to have assurance of salvation any more than exhortations to "work out" our own salvation (Phil. 2:12) are contradictory to "God who works in you" (v. 13) to accomplish it (cf. 1 Cor. 15:10).

Galatians 5:4

"You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; *you have fallen away from grace*." Many Arminians insist that this means the Galatians had lost their salvation. A careful contextual examination reveals the opposite.

For one thing, they are called "brethren" (6:1 NKJV) who had placed their "faith" in Christ (3:2 NKJV) for their justification (3:8). They were already saved.[39]

For another, they had "begun in the Spirit" (3:3 NKJV) but were now "alienated" from the Spirit of Christ (5:4) as the means of their sanctification; they had gone back under the bondage of keeping the law (3:5, 10). They had not lost their salvation but had abandoned the true process of purification, since they were attempting to work *for* sanctifying grace rather than working *from* it.

Furthermore, if falling from grace means the loss of salvation, why does Paul not refer to hell? The threat mentioned is that of becoming subject to the "yoke of slavery" (5:1), not to eternal torment (cf. Rev. 20:10, 15).

1 Timothy 5:15

The apostle says, "*Some have in fact already turned away to follow Satan*." Even so, this verse does not support the Arminian view of salvific loss. "To follow Satan" is not a phrase that must mean a person is without eternal hope: Anyone who falls into sin, as all believers can (1 John 1:8), is following the devil's temptations (2 Cor. 2:11). For instance, Jesus responded to Peter's poorly motivated declaration with, "Get behind me, Satan!" for a sin nowhere close to apostasy (Matt. 16:22–23).

2 Timothy 2:12

"If we endure, we shall also reign with Him: *if we deny Him, He also will*

deny us" (NKJV). Some Arminians take this to mean that believers who deny Jesus will be denied heaven. There is a better way, though, to understand Paul's teaching.

The immediate context reveals that he is speaking about a denial of *reward*, not of eternal life. The preceding phrase says, "If we endure, we shall also reign with Him." Reigning is part of a believer's reward (cf. Rev. 20:6; 22:12), and he has already received eternal life, whether he is rewarded or not (cf. 1 Cor. 3:15). Further, once again, the very next statement makes it absolutely clear that we cannot lose our salvation (v. 13).

2 Timothy 2:17–18

> [The] teaching [of those who indulge in godless chatter] will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have wandered away from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and *they destroy the faith of some*.

This text does not point to a loss of salvation.

First, as we have demonstrated, only a few sentences earlier Paul gives one of the strongest biblical affirmations of eternal security (2 Tim. 2:13).

Second, the context focuses on resurrection faith; therefore, it may refer simply to loss of belief in resurrection as a future event (see v. 18).

Third, even if this passage does point to a loss of faith in general, it is not highlighting genuine faith (1 Tim. 1:5), which endures forever, but formal faith (2 Tim. 3:5), which even demons have (James 2:19), and which is not sufficient for salvation (cf. James 2:14ff.).

2 Timothy 4:7

"I have fought the good fight, *I have finished the race, I have kept the faith*." Paul seems to imply that there are those who do *not* keep the faith and, hence, will be lost. However, while he speaks of keeping the faith, he doesn't say that those who fail to do so won't be saved. Furthermore, in the very next verse he confirms that the result of keeping the faith is not salvation but reward—"the *crown* of righteousness." While those who aren't faithful won't receive this crown (1 Cor. 3:15) or other "crowns" awarded for faithfulness (Rev. 2:10), Paul by no means suggests that they have their salvation taken away (cf. Rev. 2:10).

Hebrews 2:1

"We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, *so*

that we do not drift away." As with the other warnings in Hebrews,[40] the context indicates that they are to believers and are once again about losing rewards, not salvation.[41] Hebrews calls them "heirs of salvation" (1:14 KJV) and "brethren" (2:17 KJV), and the use of "we" (2:1) signifies the author's inclusion. "Drift away" is not a figure of speech indicating an everlasting loss; later warnings to the same audience indicate the author is speaking of a depravation of "maturity" (6:1; cf. 5:13–14).

Hebrews 6:4–6

It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, *if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance*, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

First of all, note that it is problematic to take this passage as referring to unbelievers. The writer calls those he is warning "beloved," a term hardly appropriate for non-Christians. Further, while the description of their spiritual status differs from other New Testament expressions, some of the phrases are difficult to interpret in any other way than that the addressees were saved:

(1) They had experienced "repentance" (6:6), which signifies salvation (cf. Acts 17:30);
(2) They were "enlightened, and [had] tasted the heavenly gift" (6:4 NKJV);
(3) They were "partakers of the Holy Spirit" (6:4 NKJV);
(4) They had "tasted the good word of God" (6:5 NKJV); and
(5) They had experienced the "powers of the age to come" (6:5 NKJV).

Of course, if they were *believers*, the question then arises as to their status after they had "fall[en] away" (v. 6). In response, it should be observed that this term (Gk: *parapesontas*) does not indicate a one-way (irreversible) action, which means that the status of those who have fallen away is not hopeless. In fact, that it is impossible for a fallen believer to repent again indicates the once-for-all nature of repentance—his already having "changed his mind" about (or "reversed his direction toward"[42]) Christ has brought him "eternal redemption" (9:12).

What the text (6:6) seems to teach is that there is no more need for *drifters* (or *backsliders*) to *re-repent* and get *re-saved* than there is for Jesus to be *re-sacrificed* (cf. 7:27; 9:12, 25–27; 10:5–10). Few Arminians believe that once a person has *backslidden*, it is impossible for him to still be a Christian. In

summary, this passage points not to loss of salvation but loss of maturity (6:1) and growth (5:13–14), which is precisely the context of the whole discussion.

Hebrews 10:26–29

If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, *no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God*. Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?

This is likewise not a warning about loss of salvation but about loss of reward.

First, again, the persons involved are described as "brothers" (v. 19), "[God's] people" (v. 30), those who have a high priest (Christ—9:11), and those who have a confession of hope given only to the "faithful" (v. 23).

Second, the author explicitly speaks not of salvation but of a "*great reward*" (v. 35 NASB).

Third, they have "a better and an enduring possession … in heaven" (v. 34 NKJV).

Fourth, they had been "illuminated" by God (v. 32 NKJV) and possessed the "knowledge of the truth" (vv. 26, 32), indicating that they were believers.

Fifth, as believers they suffered with and had compassion for the author of the letter (vv. 33–34).

Sixth, they are described as those who were capable of doing the "will of God" (v. 36), something true only of believers (John 9:31).

Seventh, the reference to those who "insulted the Spirit of grace" (v. 29) implies that they were believers who had received Him.

Eighth, the illustration regarding those who died under the law of Moses (v. 28) speaks of physical death (an end of life in this world), not eternal death (everlasting separation from God), as a potential discipline for believers who disobey God (cf. 1 Cor. 11:30; 1 John 5:16).

Ninth, the "fearful expectation of judgment" (Heb. 10:27) fits the description of believers coming before Christ (2 Cor. 5:10), when their works will be tried by fire and they could suffer loss of reward (1 Cor. 3:13–14).

Tenth, if this passage *does* teach that salvation can be lost, then it does not

support the Arminian view at any rate, for it says, in such a case, that "no sacrifice for sins is left." In other words, if what Hebrews means is that whoever was saved and subsequently sins in this way cannot be restored but has lost his salvation eternally, then such a one cannot be restored from having fallen (or "backslidden").

Eleventh, and finally, Hebrews 10 ends with the writer confidently affirming that believers will not be lost: "*We are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved*" (v. 39).

2 Peter 2:20–21

> If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. *It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them*.

That these people knew Christ as Lord and Savior and had "escaped the corruption of the world" seems to indicate that they were once believers.

In response, it should be observed that Peter does not say Christ was "their" Savior—he portrayed Him as "our" Savior. Thus, their "knowing" could have been nominal knowledge rather than saving belief, just as faith can be nonsalvific (cf. James 2:19). As we have seen, many believe that Christ is *the* Savior without making Him *their* Savior.

The persons in verse 22 are pictured as *dogs* (a symbol of the unsaved), not *sheep* (an image of the saved). Indeed, every description of them in this chapter speaks of those who do not belong to Christ: "false prophets," "false teachers," "[deniers of] the Lord," "unjust," "natural brute beasts," those who have "forsaken the right way," and those for whom "the mist of darkness is reserved for ever" (KJV).

2 Peter 3:17

"Therefore, dear friends … *be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position*." This sounds very much like falling from one's salvation, which is a secure position.

Upon examining the text, however, it is clear that the "fall" would be from a position of *maturity* ("steadfastness," v. 17 KJV), not from salvation. The addressees are called "beloved" (vv. 14, 17 KJV), spiritual brothers of the apostle Paul (v. 15). Their potential failure was a loss of being able to "grow" (v. 18), not a lack of being saved.

2 John 1:8

John wrote to believers called spiritual "children" (1:2), saying: "Watch out that you do not lose what you have *worked for*, but that you may be *rewarded* fully."

That this is speaking about loss of rewards is obvious from the emphasized words. They were warned about losing what they "worked for," and salvation is not from works (cf. Rom. 4:5; Eph. 2:8–9; Titus 3:5–6).

Revelation 3:5

"He who overcomes will … be dressed in white. *I will never blot out his name from the book of life*, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels." Some take this to imply that it is possible to have one's name erased from the Book of Life—that is, those who do *not* overcome can lose their salvation.

In response, there are four other verses referring to the Book of Life (not counting Rev. 22:19 [see below], which may be rendered "tree of life"). Revelation 13:8 says, "All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—*all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world*." Revelation 20:12, 15 records:

> I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. *Another book was opened, which is the book of life*. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.… *If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire*.

And Revelation 21:27 confirms: "Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but *only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life*."

Several noteworthy observations about these texts:

For one thing, John affirmed that anyone's name, once written in the Book of Life, would *never* he erased (3:5). No believer, then, needs to fear losing salvation once he receives it.

Furthermore, as established previously, the names of the saved were written there from eternity (13:8); thus, there is literal eternal security for the elect. Once one knows that his name is there (viz., has personal assurance), he can be certain he will never lose his salvation.

In addition, as we have discussed, God indelibly entered the names of the elect into the Book of Life long before any of them did anything to either gain or

lose salvation: He knows the end from the beginning (Isa. 46:10).

Hence, again, in His omniscient foreknowledge, God knew all sins that the elect would ever commit, yet He promised them everlasting life. He knew they would persevere, through *everything*, in their faith.

Therefore, rather than being denials of eternal security, these words from the Revelation are strong affirmations. The names of the elect are in the Book of Life (20:15), and God will never erase them (3:5).

Revelation 3:15–16

"I wish you were either [hot or cold]! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—*I am about to spit you out of my mouth*." This caution from Jesus, which seemingly supports the Arminian view that God rejects those who reject Him, appears to be confirmed by the facts that (1) it was given "to the churches" (v. 22) and (2) that it references God's warning to "chasten" (v. 19 KJV) any who do not repent of their sins.

In reply, even if true believers are in view, "spit you out" is not a phrase that speaks of hell. More likely it is addressed to those believers who have turned tepid in their walk with the Lord and need their fellowship restored.[43]

This is reminiscent of another figure of speech (cf. John 15:4) where believers who are not abiding in Christ are said to wither on the vine and, hence, become useless to God. Jesus admonished, "If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned" (John 15:6). Notice He does not imply they are thrown by angels into the eternal flames (hell), but by men into a temporal "fire."[44] Paul spoke of such people as "castaways" (1 Cor. 9:27 KJV); they were like cracked vases that were put on the shelf because they were not serving their Master usefully.

Revelation 22:19

"If any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the *book of life*[45] and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book" (KJV).While some maintain that this indicates a loss of salvation, that conclusion does not follow for several reasons.

First, "book of life" is a disputed rendering; others (e.g. NIV,) render it "tree of life." One should not use a disputed passage to prove a doctrine.

Second, John says elsewhere that God will not blot anyone's name out of the book of life (Rev. 3:5).

Third, if "tree of life" is meant, then the warning is not about a loss of

salvation but of rewards, for it's not a question of *whether* they are in the holy city but *what part* they will have in it.

Fourth, if "book of life" is meant, then one can point to the indications that the warning is to unbelievers, since he also speaks of the "unjust" (v. 11) and those "outside" the city (v. 15). Regardless, it is not necessary to take this verse as proof that anyone can lose salvation.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR ETERNAL SECURITY

Eternal security is rooted in the Augustinian position on grace and predestination. However, *before the Reformation*, it was believed that only the *elect*, not all the *regenerate*, were secure.[46] In its present formulation, eternal security of all the elect is a Reformation teaching, springing from John Calvin.[47]

Early Fathers

Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)

> Unless it had been God who had freely given salvation, we could never have possessed it securely. And unless man had been joined to God, he could never have become a partaker of incorruptibility. For it was incumbent upon the Mediator between God and men, by His relationship to both, to bring both to friendship and concord, and present man to God, while He revealed God to man. For, in what way could we be partakers of the adoption of sons? (*AH*, 1.3.18.7 in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*)

Clement of Alexandria (150–c. 215)

> If one should captiously say, "And how is it possible for feeble flesh to resist the energies and spirits of the Powers?" well, let him know this, that, confiding in the Almighty and the Lord, we war against the principalities of darkness, and against death. "Whilst thou art yet speaking," He says, "Lo, here am I." See the invincible Helper who shields us. "Think it not strange, therefore, concerning the burning sent for your trial, as though some strange thing happened to you; but, as you are partakers in the sufferings of Christ, rejoice; that at the revelation of His glory ye may rejoice exultant. If ye be reproached in the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth on you." As it is written, "Because for Thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through Him that loved us" (*S*, II.IV.VII).

Tertullian (c. 155–c. 225)

Tell me, is not all mankind one flock of God? Is not the same God both Lord and Shepherd of the universal nations? Who more "perishes" from God than the heathen, so long as he "errs?" Who is more "re-sought" by God than the heathen, when he is recalled by Christ? In fact, it is among heathens that this order finds antecedent place; if, that is, Christians are not otherwise made out of heathens than by being first "lost," and "re-sought" by God, and "carried back" by Christ. So likewise ought this order to be kept, that we may interpret any such [figure] with reference to those in whom it finds prior place.…

Nay, but this whole world is the one house of all; in which world it is more the heathen, who is found in darkness, whom the grace of God enlightens, than the Christian, who is already in God's light. Finally, it is *one* "straying" which is ascribed to the ewe and the drachma (and this is an evidence in my favor); for if the parables had been composed with a view to a *Christian* sinner, after the loss of his faith, a *second* loss and restoration of them would have been noted.…

I admit that the sinner portrayed in each parable is one who is already a Christian; yet not that on this account must he be affirmed to be … one [that] can be restored, through repentance, from the crime of adultery and fornication. For although he be said to "have perished," there will be the *kind* of perdition to treat; inasmuch as the "ewe" "perished" not by dying, but by straying; and the "drachma" not by being destroyed, but by being hidden. In this sense, a thing which is safe may be said to "have perished." Therefore the believer, too, "perishes," by lapsing out of [the right path]. (*OM*, IV.VIII)

Origen (c. 185–c. 254)

Paul, when enumerating the innumerable causes which generally separate men from the love of Christ and from the love of God in Christ Jesus (to all of which, the love that was in himself rose superior), did not set down argument among the grounds of separation. For observe that he says, firstly: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? (as it is written, 'For Thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.') Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us."

And secondly, when laying down another series of causes which naturally tend to separate those who are not firmly grounded in their religion, he says: "For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Now, truly, it is proper that *we* should feel elated because afflictions, or those other causes enumerated by Paul, do not separate us [from Christ]; but not that Paul and the other apostles, and any other resembling them, [should entertain that feeling], because they were far exalted above such things when they said, "In all these things we are *more* than conquerors through Him that loved us," which is a stronger statement than that they are simply "conquerors." But if it be proper for apostles to entertain a feeling of elation in not being separated from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord, that feeling will be entertained by them, because neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor any of the things that follow, can separate them from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (*AC*, I.III–IV)

Medieval Fathers

Augustine (354–430)

When we come to Him, we come to the Father also, because through an equal an equal is known; and the Holy Spirit binds, and as it were seals us, so that we are able to rest permanently in the supreme

and unchangeable Good. (*OCD*, 1.34)

Of two pious men, why to the one should be given perseverance unto the end, and to the other it should not be given, God's judgments are even more unsearchable.… In respect of all these things, they were of us. Nevertheless, in respect of a certain other distinction, they were not of us, for if they had been of us, they certainly would have continued with us.… They were not of them because they had not been "called according to the purpose." They had not been chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world; they had not gained a lot in him. They had not been predestined according to his purpose who works all things. (*GP*, 9:21)

In short, "By free will, since [unbelievers][48] have not received the gift of perseverance, they are sent away in God's just and hidden judgment" (*AG*, 13).

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)

Whether man possessed of grace needs the help of grace in order to persevere, I answer that Perseverance is taken in three ways. First, to signify a habit of the mind whereby a man stands steadfastly, lest he be moved by the assault of sadness from what is virtuous. And thus perseverance is to sadness as continence is to concupiscence and pleasure.… Secondly, perseverance may be called a habit, whereby a man has the purpose of persevering in good unto the end. And in both these ways perseverance is infused together with grace, even as continence and the other virtues are. Thirdly, perseverance is called the abiding in good to the end of life. And in order to have this perseverance man does not, indeed, need another habitual grace, but he needs the Divine assistance guiding and guarding him against the attacks of the passions, as appears from the preceding article. And hence after anyone has been justified by grace, he still needs to beseech God for the aforesaid gift of perseverance, that he may be kept from evil till the end of his life. For to many grace is given to whom perseverance in grace is not given. (*ST*, 1.2.109–10)

As Augustine says [*ONG*, xliii]: "In the original state man received a gift whereby he could persevere, but to persevere was not given him. But now, by the grace of Christ, many receive both the gift of grace whereby they may persevere, and the further gift of persevering." … Thus Christ's gift is greater than Adam's fault. Nevertheless it was easier for man to persevere, with the gift of grace in the state of innocence in which the flesh was not rebellious against the spirit, than it is now. For the restoration by Christ's grace, although it is already begun in the mind, is not yet completed in the flesh, as it will be in heaven, where man will not merely be able to persevere but will be unable to sin. (ibid.)

Reformation Fathers

Martin Luther (1483–1546)

Although I had the merit of all saints, the holiness and purity of all virgins, and the piety of St. Peter besides, I would still consider my attainment nothing. Rather I must have a different foundation to build on, namely, these words: God has given His Son so that whosoever believe in Him whom that Father has sent of love shall be saved. And you must insist confidently (*trotzen*) that you will be preserved; and you must boldly take your stand on His words. (*WLS*, 67)

That I am to die and to be saved, I know for sure (praise God!), and neither the devil nor the gates of hell shall take this conviction from me.… This is certain; and miserable, aye, damned, is the person who allows this to be made uncertain to him. Since then, this is certain, we should not allow that other

matter, which is uncertain, to worry us, namely how God will take us out of this life.… We should, therefore, not worry about this matter but should thank His grace day and night for the fact that we are taken care of after this life, (ibid., 372)

John Calvin (1509–1564)

When the Apostle says to the Philippians, “Being confident of this very thing, that he which has begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6), there cannot be a doubt that by the good work thus begun, he means the very commencement of conversion in the will. God, therefore, begins the good work in us by exciting in our hearts a desire, a love, and a study of righteousness, or (to speak more correctly) by turning, training, and guiding our hearts unto righteousness; and he completes this good work by confirming us unto perseverance. (*ICR*, 1.2.3.6)

“That intermediate movement which the sophists imagine, a movement which every one is free to obey or to reject, is obviously excluded by the doctrine of effectual perseverance” (ibid., 1.2.3.10).

When we say that faith must be certain and secure, we certainly speak not of an assurance which is never affected by doubt, nor a security which anxiety never assails; we rather maintain that believers have a perpetual struggle with their own distrust, and are thus far from thinking that their consciences possess a placid quiet, uninterrupted by perturbation. On the other hand, whatever be the mode in which they are assailed, we deny that they fall off and abandon that sure confidence which they have formed in the mercy of God. (ibid., 1.3.2.17)

Paul says that, in the architecture of Christian doctrine, it is necessary to retain the foundation which he had laid with the Corinthians: “Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 3:11). What then is our foundation in Christ? Is it that he begins salvation and leaves us to complete it? Is it that he only opened up the way, and left us to follow it in our own strength? By no means, but as Paul had a little before declared, it is to acknowledge that he has been given us for righteousness. No man, therefore, is well founded in Christ who has not entire righteousness in him, since the Apostle says not that he was sent to assist us in procuring, but was himself to be our righteousness.

Thus, it is said that God “has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world,” not according to our merit, but “according to the good pleasure of his will”; that in him “we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins”; that peace has been made “through the blood of his cross”; that we are reconciled by his blood; that, placed under his protection, we are delivered from the danger of finally perishing; that thus ingrafted into him we are made partakers of eternal life, and hope for admission into the kingdom of God. (ibid., 1.2.15.5)

The whole, then, comes to this: As soon as the minutest particle of faith is instilled into our minds, we begin to behold the face of God placid, serene, and propitious; far off, indeed, but still so distinctly as to assure us that there is no delusion in it. (ibid., 1.3.2.19)

I deny not, as I lately said, that faith occasionally suffers certain interruptions when, by violent assault, its weakness is made to bend in this direction or in that; and its light is buried in the thick darkness of temptation. Still happen what may, faith ceases not to long after God. (ibid., 1.3.2.24)

Jacob Arminius (1560–1609)

Arminius never denied eternal security (his followers did), and he strongly

affirmed the assurance of believers.

> With regard to the certainty [or assurance] of salvation, my opinion is that it is possible for him who believes in Jesus Christ to be certain and persuaded, and, if his heart condemn him not, he is now in reality assured, that he is a son of God, and stands in the grace of Jesus Christ. Such a certainty is wrought in the mind, as well by the action of the Holy Spirit inwardly actuating the believer and by the fruits of faith, as from his own conscience, and the testimony of God's Spirit witnessing together with his conscience. I also believe that it is possible for such a person, with an assured confidence in the grace of God and his mercy in Christ, to depart out of this life, and to appear before the throne of grace, without any anxious fear or terrific dread: and yet this person should constantly pray, "O Lord, enter not into judgment with thy servant!" (*WJA*, 1.6).
>
> My sentiments respecting the perseverance of the saints are that those persons who have been grafted into Christ by true faith, and have thus been made partakers of his life-giving Spirit, possess sufficient powers [or strength] to fight against Satan, sin, the world and their own flesh, and to gain the victory over these enemies—yet not without the assistance of the grace of the same Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ also by his Spirit assists them in all their temptations, and affords them the ready aid of his hand; and, provided they stand prepared for the battle, implore his help, and be not wanting to themselves, Christ preserves them from falling.… It is not possible for them, by any of the cunning craftiness or power of Satan, to be either seduced or dragged out of the hands of Christ.…
>
> Though I here openly and ingenuously affirm I never taught that a true believer can either totally or finally fall away from the faith, and perish; yet I will not conceal that there are passages of Scripture which seem to me to wear this aspect; and those answers to them which I have been permitted to see are not of such a kind as to approve themselves on all points to my understanding. On the other hand, certain passages are produced for the contrary doctrine of unconditional perseverance which are worthy of much consideration. ("PS" in *WJA*, I.254)

The Synod of Dort

> Just as God himself is most wise, unchangeable, all-knowing, and almighty, so the election made by him can neither be suspended nor altered, revoked, or annulled; neither can his chosen ones be cast off, nor their number reduced. (*CD*, article 11)
>
> Assurance of this, their eternal and unchangeable election to salvation, is given to the chosen in due time, though by various stages and in differing measure. Such assurance comes not by inquisitive searching into the hidden and deep things of God, but by noticing within themselves, with spiritual joy and holy delight, the unmistakable fruits of election pointed out in God's Word—such as a true faith in Christ, a childlike fear of God, a godly sorrow for their sins, a hunger and thirst for righteousness, and so on. (ibid., article 12)
>
> In their awareness and assurance of this election God's children daily find greater cause to humble themselves before God, to adore the fathomless depth of his mercies, to cleanse themselves, and to give fervent love in return to him who first so greatly loved them, (ibid., article 13)

Post-Reformation Teachers

Charles Hodge (1797–1878)

> [One] effect attributed to faith in the Scriptures is security, or certainty of salvation. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but

have everlasting life" (John 3:16). "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24). "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever" (John 6:51). "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.… And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:37, 40). "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand" [John 10:27–28] (*ST*, 3.110).

The whole of the eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans is designed to prove the certain salvation of all who believe. The proposition to be established is that there is "no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." That is, they can never perish; they can never be so separated from Christ as to come into condemnation. The Apostle's first argument to establish that proposition is that believers are delivered from the law by the sacrifice of Christ. The believer, therefore, is not under the law which condemns, as Paul had before said (Rom. 4:14).…

His second argument is that they have already within them the principle of eternal life. That principle is the Spirit of God; "the life-giving" as He was designated by the ancient Church. To be carnally minded is death.…

The third argument for the security of believers is that they are the sons of God. As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. That is, they are partakers of his nature, the special objects of his love, and entitled to the inheritance which He gives. If sons then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. According to the Apostle's mode of thinking, that any of the sons of God should perish is impossible. If sons, they shall certainly be saved.

The fourth argument is from the purpose of God. Those whom He has predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son, them He calls to the exercise of faith and repentance; and whom He thus calls He justifies, He provides for them and imputes to them a righteousness which satisfies the demands of the law, and which entitles them in Christ and for his sake to eternal life; and those whom He justifies He glorifies. There is no flaw in this chain.…

Paul's fifth argument is from the love of God. As stated above, the apostle argues from the greatness, the freeness, and the immutability of that love that its objects never can be lost. "He that spared not his Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" "If He has done the greater, will He not do the less? If he gave even his Son, will He not give us faith to receive and constancy to persevere even unto the end?" A love so great as the love of God to his people cannot fail of its object.…

The sixth argument of the Apostle is that as the love of God is infinitely great and altogether gratuitous, it is also immutable, and, therefore, believers shall certainly be saved. Hence the conclusion, "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

It will be seen that the Apostle does not rest the perseverance of the saints on the indestructible nature of faith, or on the imperishable nature of the principle of grace in the heart, or on the constancy of the believer's will, but solely on what is out of ourselves. Perseverance, he teaches us, is due to the purpose of God, to the work of Christ, to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and to the primal source of all, the infinite, mysterious, and immutable love of God. We do not keep ourselves; we are kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation. [1 Peter 1:5] (ibid., 3.110–18)

Earl Radmacher (b. 1933)

[The] eleven works of God demonstrate that a person who truly believes in Jesus Christ is eternally safe and will never lose his or her salvation. Four of these works relate to God the Father, three to God

the Son, and four to God the Holy Spirit. *The sovereign purpose of God.… The infinite power of God.… The immeasurable love of God.… The work of the Father.… The promise of the Son of God.… The Prayer of the Son of God.… The work of the Son of God.… The Holy Spirit regenerates us.… The Holy Spirit protects believers.… The Holy Spirit indwells His Church. The Holy Spirit seals His believers.* (*S*, 190–200)

CONCLUSION

In contrast to Arminianism, moderate Calvinism demonstrates that there is strong biblical, theological, and historical support for the doctrine of eternal security. In distinction from the implication of strong Calvinism, moderate Calvinism shows that a believer can have real assurance that he is among the elect, that the issue is not his faithfulness but God's. Moderate Calvinists reject the view that there is security for the elect but no assurance that one *is* of the elect unless he endures.

In this regard, it is ironic that Arminians are more "Calvinistic" than strong Calvinists, for Arminianism holds that a believer can have assurance that he is now saved,[49] even if he does not have security that he will ultimately be saved. *By contrast, moderate Calvinism holds that we can have both present assurance* and *eternal security*.

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CHAPTER TWELVE

THE EXTENT OF SALVATION (LIMITED OR UNLIMITED ATONEMENT)

While there is wide evangelical agreement on the origin, nature, and purpose of the Atonement, there is considerable difference on its extent: Strong Calvinists maintain limited atonement, while the rest insist that the Atonement is unlimited in its availability. That is, the former believe that Christ died only for the elect, and the latter contend that Christ died for the sins of all human beings. Since this work defends the unlimited view of atonement, this chapter will begin with the evidence for that perspective and will then respond to the arguments for limited atonement.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR AN UNLIMITED ATONEMENT

The grounds for unlimited atonement fall into three categories: biblical, theological, and historical. We will begin with the biblical basis, addressing along with it the alternative textual understanding by strong Calvinists.
Isaiah 53:6

Isaiah wrote of the Messiah, “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and *the* LORD *has laid on him the iniquity of us all*.” The evident meaning of “all” is everyone in the human race since in the beginning of the sentence the same word *all* is used of those who go astray and are in need of salvation. Likewise, he uses the word *many*, which means *all* here and elsewhere (in Rom. 5:19), saying, “He bore the sins of many” (v. 12). Even John Calvin, commenting on this verse, said, “I approve of the ordinary reading, that he alone bore the punishment of many, because *on him was laid the guilt of the whole world*. It is evident from other passages, and especially from the fifth chapter of the epistle to the Romans, that *many* sometimes denotes “all.” (Calvin’s comments on Isaiah 53:12, emphasis added).

Matthew 22:14

Jesus said, “Many are called but few are chosen” (KJV). While God foreknew that only the elect would believe (Acts 13:48), He desired all people to be saved (2 Peter 3:9; 1 Tim. 2:4). Thus, “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son” (John 3:16 NKJV) to provide an atoning sacrifice for the sins of “the whole world” (1 John 2:2). God provided salvation for all and requires that all repent (Acts 17:30) and believe (Acts 16:31). It would be both deceptive and absurd for God to command everyone to be saved if He had not provided salvation for all.

Arguing for limited atonement, John Owen (1616–1683) offered the unlikely suggestion that “God’s commands and promises had revealed our duty, not his purpose; [that is, they revealed] what God would have us to do, and not what he will do” (*DDDC*, 200). However, this eloquent turn of phrase conceals hidden errors. For one thing, it implies that God commands the impossible, which would make the Omniscient irrational. For another, it overlooks the obvious, namely, that there is another alternative: God commands *not only* what He would have us to do *but also* what He desires (wills) to be done.[1]

Matthew 23:37

Weeping over the city, Jesus lamented:

> O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, *how often I have longed to gather your children together*, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.

How could it be more obvious that God wanted *all* of them, including the unrepentant, to be saved?

Extreme Calvinist John Gill (1697–1771) claimed that these words of Christ are to be understood not of *gathering to salvation* but only of *gathering to hear Him preach* and thus to be brought to historical faith "sufficient to preserve them from temporal ruin." Likewise, the desire of Christ for them to come to Him "is not to be understood of his divine will… but of his human will, or of his will as a man; which … [is] not always the same with [his divine will], nor always fulfilled."[2]

A clear exposition of this desperate interpretation is perhaps its most effective refutation: Its conclusion would have us believe that God's concern for our temporal condition is greater than His concern for our eternal souls! Some try to blunt this result by maintaining that such a view merely confirms Jerusalem's unwillingness to allow her "children" to respond positively, but this scarcely solves the problem. The truth remains: People who are not responding positively are doing so because of *their* unwillingness, not because *God* does not long for them to positively (willfully) respond to Him.

John 1:29

"The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, *who takes away the sin of the world*!' " In light of the context and other usage of the word *world* in John's gospel,[3] it is evident that the text does not mean only *the church* or *the elect* but *all human beings*. Again, Jesus said that "God so loved the *world*" that He gave His only Son, and He clarifies His use of *world* only three verses later: "This is the verdict: Light has come into *the world*, but men loved darkness instead of light because *their deeds were evil*" (3:19). Jesus also said (16:8) that "when [the Holy Spirit] comes, he will convict *the world* of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment."

Some extreme Calvinists have claimed that "often the Bible uses the words *world* and *all* in a restricted, limited sense.… It is clear that *all* is not 'all' " (see Palmer, *FPC*, 52). In attempting to resist the biblical teaching of unlimited atonement, they cite passages (e.g., Luke 2:1–2) from another book, in another context, that use *world* in a geographical (rather than *redemptive*) sense. However, if *all* does not mean "all" in regard to God's desire for our salvation, then what does it mean in Romans 3:23? "*All* have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." *Every* human has sinned; evil is clearly not restricted to the elect.

John 3:16–17

> *God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son*, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the *world* to condemn the *world*, but to save the *world* through him.

The plain statement is that God loved the world, and the clear implication is that Christ was given to die for the world (cf. v. 14). What is more, verse 17 makes it evident that *world* here means the whole fallen world, for it is the same world that is under God's condemnation.

John Owen offered an astoundingly blunt retranslation on behalf of limited atonement: "God so loved his elect throughout the world, that he gave his Son with this intention, that by him believers might be saved" (*DDDC*, 214). For those who accept the clear meaning of the text, this needs only God's own reminder: "*Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it*" (Deut. 4:2; cf. Rev. 22:18–19).

John 12:47

"I did not come to judge *the world*, but to save *the world*." In both cases, *world* signifies the same fallen, sinful world that will be judged in "the last day" (v. 48).

As elsewhere, strong Calvinists claim that *world* is used in a limited sense, meaning "part of the world," namely, the elect. They point to John 12:19 as an illustration: "The Pharisees said to one another, 'See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!' " Nonetheless, this comparison fails.

For one thing, *world* in John 12:19 (Gk: *kosmos*) is used geographically, not generically.

For another, these are not the words of Jesus but of His opponents.[4]

Furthermore, the words of the brothers of Jesus in John 7:4 are obviously hyperbole, and even extreme Calvinists admit this is not true of John 12:47, where it is *Jesus'* statement that *does* refer to the whole fallen world.[5]

Romans 5:6

Paul writes, "Christ died for the ungodly," and in verse 10 he adds, "When we were God's *enemies, we were reconciled* to him through the death of his Son." Both the elect and the non-elect were ungodly enemies; therefore, either Christ died for the non-elect as well as for the elect, or Christ did not die for all His ungodly enemies. Further, if Paul meant to teach that Christ died only for the elect, he could easily have said so and thus avoided any potential

misunderstanding.[6]

The response of particularists (proponents of limited atonement) is that *indefinite* is not to be confused with *unlimited* (or *universal*). This misses the point: The issue is not whether everyone is *actually* saved[7] but whether the sacrifice of Jesus made salvation *available* to all. For instance, Paul affirms that God "justifies the ungodly" (Rom. 4:5 NKJV), yet no one in this dispute believes that all the ungodly are actually justified. The context of Romans 5 indicates that Paul is speaking of *all* and *all men* as lost (5:12) and in need of salvation (v. 5:18).

Romans 5:18–19

> Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for *all men*, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for *all men*. For just as through the disobedience of the one man *the many* were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man *the many* will be made righteous.

Once again, observe the following comparison:

Person	Adam	Christ
Act	Sin (vv. 12, 14, 16) Offense (vv. 15–18) Disobedience (v. 19)	Grace (v. 15) Righteousness (v. 18) Obedience (v. 19)
Physical results	Death for all (vv. 12, 14–15, 17)	Life for all (vv. 17–18, 21)
Moral results	Sin enters for all (v. 12) Sin reigns on all (v. 21)	Grace enters for all (v. 15) Grace reigns for all (v. 21)
Legal results	All made sinners (v. 19) Judgment for all (v. 18)	All made righteous (v. 19) Gift for all (v. 18)

Verse 18 makes a direct contrast between those who were condemned because of Adam's sin and those who were provided life by Christ's death. In both cases they are called *all men*. Hence, by every valid rule of interpreting a phrase—by the same author, in the same book, in the same context, in the same passage, and

in direct parallel—the *all men* for whom Christ provided salvation is the entire human race who received condemnation as a result of Adam's disobedience.

Paul's reiteration of the point in verse 19 through the term *the many* clearly means "all," because:

(1) It is used in parallel with *all* (in v. 18);
(2) It is *the many* in contrast to *the few*, not *the many* in contrast to *the all*; and
(3) It is *the many* that is used of *all* in verse 15—or else we would have to conclude that only some humans die because of human sin, which is contrary to what Paul affirms in this very text (cf. v. 12).

Attempts to avoid this conclusion are even less convincing than those on other texts. Some otherwise articulate commentators don't truly address the point of what *all* means. John Gill's assertions are contradictory, since he refers to "both as extending to the whole of their several respective offspring—condemnation through Adam's offense to all his natural seed, and justification of life through Christ's righteousness to all his spiritual seed—the text makes no such distinction" (*EONT*, on Rom. 5:18). The passage does *not* say this; rather, it says *all men*, not merely all the elect, benefit from Christ's death. Insisting that only some people benefit from the work of Christ clearly is reading limited atonement into the text—*all men* means everyone.

Others, like John Calvin himself, saw that Paul's words taught unlimited atonement:

> Paul makes grace common to *all men*, not because it in fact extends to all, but because it is *offered to all*. Although *Christ suffered for the sins of the world*, and is offered without distinction to *all men*, yet not all receive Him. (*CC*, 8.117–18)

Paul's contrast of Adam and Christ reveals that the Atonement is both *unlimited in its extent* and *limited in its application*. That is, all are savable, but only those who believe will be saved.[8] Paul twice uses the word *justification*[9] to describe what Christ provided for all human beings:

> The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought *justification*. … Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was *justification* that brings life for all men. (Rom. 5:16, 18)

Since it is scripturally evident that not all people will be saved,[10] Paul must

have meant, as already established, that because of what Christ did for them, everyone is *potentially* justifiable, not *actually* justified.

First, he clearly declares that some of the consequences of Adam's sin (such as physical death) are passed on to all human beings (5:12–14).

Second, as mentioned previously, the phrase "not like" (vv. 15–16) shows that the parallel is not exact.[11]

Third, the phrase "those who receive" (v. 17) implies that not all *do* receive the gift of salvation and that *only* those who do will be saved.

Fourth, all of this fits with the context of the preceding chapter (cf. 4:3–5), which declares, as does the first verse of this chapter (5:1), that salvation only comes to those who believe.

Fifth, and finally, if the phrase "made righteous" (v. 19) is taken as *actual*, then universalism follows. Universalism is unbiblical;[12] hence, everything on the right side of the chart above (under "Christ") is *potential* for all persons: It is *available* for (offered to) all, but is only *appropriated* by (received by) some.[13]

2 Corinthians 5:14–19

According to the apostle Paul,

> Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that *one died for all*, and therefore all died.… God was *reconciling the world* to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them.… And *he died for all*, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again, (vv. 14, 19, 15)

From this it seems evident that this reconciliation of all ("the world") did not guarantee the *salvation* but the *savability* of all. Paul goes on to say that on the basis of what Christ accomplished through the Cross, we must still plead with the world: "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: *Be reconciled to God*" (2 Cor. 5:20). Thus, reconciliation by Christ makes salvation *possible* (v. 14); it is our faith that makes it *actual*.

In spite of this, strong Calvinist Edwin Palmer (d. 1980) seems to have imposed his own theological system onto the text:

> Obviously, the *all* in both cases means all the believers—*not the whole world*, reprobate as well as elect.… The "all died" refers to the spiritual death of the believer.… [Hence,] the "all died" cannot refer to the natural death of all men, for Christ's death is not the cause of man's physical death. (*FPC*, 49)

This interpretation is eisegetical and extremely unlikely.

First, whatever the "all died" means in 2 Corinthians 5:14, it is clear that Paul identifies the object of Christ's reconciliation in verse 19 as "*the world*," not believers only (or "the elect").

Second, verse 15 contrasts the "those who live" (Christians) with the "all" for whom Christ died: "He died for *all*, that *those who live* should no longer live for themselves."

Third, the connection in verse 14 between the "one [Christ] died for all" and the "all [who] died" is to show why Christ's love should compel us to reach them with a message of reconciliation, pleading with "the world" to be reconciled to God (vv. 19–20). Paul isn't teaching about our spiritual death but about our compassion for "the world," which is spiritually dead and needs to be restored to a right relationship with God.

1 Timothy 2:3–4

"*God our Savior … wants all men to be saved* and to come to a knowledge of the truth." Even Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892), who believed in limited atonement, found it difficult to deny the clear meaning of 1 Timothy 2:3–4. Nonetheless, this text has been widely misconstrued by extreme Calvinists rooted in the later Augustine. Spurgeon summarized their attempts to avoid the obvious:

> [Here is how] our older Calvinistic friends deal with this text. "All men," say they—"that is, some men": as if the Holy Ghost could not have said "some men" if he had meant some men. "All men," say they—"that is, some of all sorts of men": as if the Lord could not have said "All sorts of men" if he had meant that. The Holy Ghost by the apostle has written "all men," and unquestionably he means "all men" ("CT" as cited by Iain Murray, *SHC*, 150).

Spurgeon added,

> I was reading just now the exposition of a very able doctor who explains the text so as to explain it away: he applies grammatical gunpowder to it, and explodes it by way of expounding it. I thought when I read his exposition that it would have been a very capital comment upon the text if it had read, "Who *will not* have all men to be saved, nor come to a knowledge of the truth" (in ibid., 151).

Of course, the problem is that this is what the text *should* say if limited atonement were true—*but it does not*. Spurgeon was aware of his apparent inconsistency here, saying, "I do not know how that squares with this," and adding, "I would sooner a hundred times over appear to be inconsistent with myself than be inconsistent with the word of God."[14]

1 Timothy 2:6

Paul affirms that Christ "gave himself as *a ransom for all men*—the testimony given in its proper time." Whatever doubts one may have about Mark 10:45,[15] it is plain here (in 1 Tim. 2) that Christ is a ransom for *all*. That is, He paid the price with His own precious blood (1 Peter 1:19) for the sins of *everyone*.

John Owen, who again offered the standard particularist view that *all* does not mean "all," tactically diverted the issue to other passages where *all* is used geographically or hyperbolically.[16] However, no one has produced a single biblical text where *all* is used limitedly or narrowly when it applies to a generic or redemptive (rather than geographic or hyperbolic) sense. At any rate, even if they *had*, the interpretation *here*, in 1 Timothy 2, must be determined by what it means in *this* context, regardless of what *all* may be intended to mean anywhere else. That Paul refers to the entire human race in 1 Timothy 2:4–6 is amply evidenced.

First, he could have chosen to use the word *some*, but he did not.

Second, his reference to *men*[17] in verse 5 is clearly generic—meaning "all people"—since it is used as the opposite pole from God that the Mediator, Jesus Christ, brings together with Him. Generic utilizations of *all* in a redemptive context are usually, if not always, of the entire human race.

Third, God's desire for "all" to be saved is parallel with that same desire expressed elsewhere (cf. 2 Peter 3:9).

Fourth, and finally, the Bible tells us that what hinders God's desire from being fulfilled is not the lack of a universal scope in His love (cf. John 3:16) but rather the willful rejection of Him by some of His creatures (Matt. 22:37).

1 Timothy 4:10

"For this we labor and strive, that we have put our hope in the living God, who is *the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe*." This verse does not support limited atonement because the limited group is designated by the phrase "especially of those who believe." These are the elect to whom the blessings are *actual*, since they "believe" and, hence, have had the benefits of Christ's death applied to them. The word *believe* indicates that this text is to be understood soteriologically; thus, those who believe in Christ as Savior are the ones who are *actually* (not just *potentially*) saved (cf. Acts 16:31).[18]

The *outside* or *broader* group is called "all men." Since Paul clearly refers to more than the elect, there is no reason to believe it is any less than what he says —*all*. Christ is, in one sense, the Savior of *everyone*; however, as we have seen, He cannot be *actually* the Savior of all, since all are not saved. Indeed, Paul has

just urged prayer for “all men” (v. 1 KJV), because God “desires all men to be saved” (v. 4). Therefore, because Christ died for all, it seems reasonable to conclude that all are saved *potentially*.

Some proponents of limited atonement don’t respond to this reasoning at all. Those who do often say things similar to the words of John Gill: “[Jesus] is the ‘Savior of all men’ in a providential way, giving them being and breath, upholding them in their beings, preserving their lives, and indulging them with the blessings and mercies of life.” Gill added, without support: “That he is the Savior of all men, with a spiritual and everlasting salvation, is not true in fact” (*EONT*, on 1 Tim. 4:10). This implausible interpretation is ruled out:

(1) By its comparison to those who “believe” unto salvation;
(2) By the reference to the “promise of the life to come” in the immediate context (v. 8);
(3) By the standard New Testament meaning of the word *Savior*;
(4) By the earlier reference to pray for the salvation of all men (2:1–2);
(5) By the reference to Christ as the salvific Mediator (2:5);
(6) By the whole context of 1 Timothy (e.g., 1:1; 2:3–6), which is speaking about spiritual salvation, not social preservation; and
(7) By all the verses (given above) that support the unlimited *provision* (not *application*) of salvation.

Only raw theological dogmatism could be bold enough to contradict the plain meaning of this text: Christ’s redemptive work was for *everyone*.

Hebrews 2:9

“We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God *he might taste death for everyone*.” It is plain from this that Christ died for everyone, not only the elect.

Responses to this conclusion follow the same line as those just discussed; it will suffice to add here only a few words about the context. First of all, it is a generic use of *everyone* (humanity), as is indicated not only by the contrast of humans to angels (2:7) but also by the reference to human “flesh and blood” (i.e., infleshed human nature—v. 14). Also, since the result of the death (and resurrection) of Christ destroys death and defeats the devil (v. 14), it must have reference to all of Adam’s race; otherwise, Christ would not have been

victorious in reversing what Satan did. His victory would not have been complete, and therefore, God could not have been propitiated (satisfied) with His offering—but He is (2:17; cf. Rom 3:25; 1 John 4:10).

2 Peter 2:1

Here Peter speaks of Christ purchasing the redemption even of those who are apostate. Since all Calvinists agree that those who have truly been saved[19] will never lose their salvation—and since this passage speaks clearly of lost persons—when Peter affirms that Christ "bought" these lost souls, he means *the Atonement is not limited to the elect:*

> There were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even *denying the sovereign Lord who bought them*—bringing swift destruction on themselves.

As mentioned previously, the terms used to describe these individuals leave little doubt that they are lost souls—none of these are scriptural descriptions of the elect.[20] What is more, even though for them "the nether gloom of darkness has been reserved" (v. 17 RSV), it is these apostate, reprobate, non-elects that Christ "bought" with his own precious blood! (cf. 1 Peter 1:19).

John Owen skillfully but unsuccessfully attempted to shift the burden of proof onto those who acknowledge that (1) *Lord* (Gk: *despotan*) refers to Christ and/or that (2) *bought* (Gk: *agorazo*) refers to our salvific redemption (*DDDC*, 250–56).

As to the first point, Owen admitted that *Lord is* used elsewhere of Christ, and, as a matter of fact, other than the few times it is used of earthly masters (cf. 1 Tim. 6:1–2; Titus 2:9; 1 Peter 2:18),[21] all other instances of *despotan* refer to Christ or God the Father.[22] In the parallel book of Jude (v. 4), the reference is made clear:

> Certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and *deny Jesus Christ* our only Sovereign and *Lord* [*despotan*].

Two truths are evident: one, Jude *is* speaking of Christ, and two, Jude *is* speaking in a redemptive context, not just of earthly deliverance from the corruption of idolatry (as Owen suggests).[23] Owen, in disputing that *despotan* refers to Jesus in 2 Peter 2:1, still affirmed that the word *Lord* is used of God,

which amounts to the same thing. The Bible also speaks of *God's* blood that was shed for our salvation (Acts 20:28),[24] and even if it technically was not, since Christ *is* God,[25] His blood is the blood of God in the same sense that the blood of Mary is the blood of the mother of God (cf. Luke 1:43). Christ's blood is the blood of the person (Jesus) who is God, and Mary was the human mother of the person (Jesus) who is God.

As to the second point (whether *bought* [Gk: *agorazo*] refers to Christ's redemptive work), why should the lost ones be lost unless they had denied Christ's atoning sacrifice on their behalf? Other than when it signifies the buying of physical things (cf. Matt. 13:44; 21:12), *agorazo* is almost always used redemptively in the New Testament (e.g., 1 Cor. 1:1; 6:20; 7:23; Rev. 5:9) and *never* of socially redeeming a person from the pollution of idolatry (which is what Owen said Peter meant in verse 1). In the Revelation, John recorded:

> No one could learn the song [of redemption] except the 144,000 who had been *redeemed* from the earth. These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were *purchased* from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. (14:3–4)

Consequently, in view of this predominant usage, the burden of proof rests on the extreme Calvinist to demonstrate that Peter, in this case, is not using *agorazo* in a redemptive sense.

2 Peter 3:9

God is love and as such, "He is not willing that *any* should perish but that all should come to repentance" (NKJV). Indeed, He "wants *all* men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). Contrary to the interpretation of those who hold to limited atonement, this does not mean "all *classes* of men" (viz., "the elect from all nations"). What meaning can language truly have if *any*, *all men*, and the *whole world* (cf. 1 John 2:2) are taken to represent only "some" or "a few"?[26]

There are some who attempt to avoid the obvious impact of these verses by creating the artificial distinction that Christ died for all people *without distinction* but not all people *without exception* (Steele and Thomas, *FPC*, 46). This is merely a clever euphemism of their naked claim that *all* really means "some"—a distortion, again, that they would not tolerate in verses speaking of condemnation rather than salvation, such as Romans 3:23. Further, as we shall see, there is no basis in these texts to support such an interpretation.

Others, like R. C. Sproul (b. 1939), offer the even less plausible suggestion that "God does not will that any of us (the elect) perish."[27] God the Holy Spirit is unquestionably capable of saying *some* instead of *all*, if that is what He meant. He *did not:* "All people everywhere" are called upon to repent (Acts 17:30). Is it not absolutely absurd to suggest that "all people everywhere" actually means "some people everywhere" or "some people somewhere"?

l John 2:2

"He [Christ] is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, *and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world*." It is difficult to see how anyone, without already established theology to the contrary, could come to the conclusion that this verse does not support unlimited atonement.

John Calvin (1509–1564), whose untenable claim that *world* (Gk: *kosmos*) here refers to "the Christian world" (the elect), somehow came to this eisegetical understanding: "Under the word *all* [John the apostle] does not include the reprobate, but refers to all who would believe and those who were scattered through various regions of the earth" (*CC*, 244). As already observed, one need only consult the generic (general, unlimited) usage of *kosmos* in John's writings to confirm that he speaks here of the fallen, sinful world (cf. John 1:10–11; 3:19).[28] In fact, John himself defines his use of *kosmos* only a few verses later:

> Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For *everything in the world*—the *cravings of sinful man*, the *lust* of his eyes and the *boasting* of what he has and does—*comes* not from the Father but *from the world*. (1 John 2:15–16)

This transparent description of fallen, sinful humanity clearly includes the non-elect for whom Christ died (v. 2). Later, John adds: "We know that we are children of God, and that *the whole world* is under the control of the evil one" (5:19). It goes far beyond the strain of one's credulity to somehow conclude that *kosmos* in 1 John 2 refers only to the elect; if that interpretation is correct, only those whom God has chosen are under the power of the devil!

The doctrine of *limited* atonement claims that all for whom Christ died will be saved.[29] However, the above passages and many others reveal, in contrast to limited atonement, that Christ *did* die for all and *not* all will be saved (e.g., cf. Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:10). Therefore, it obviously follows that not all for whom Christ died will be saved, and the doctrine of limited atonement is apparently contradictory to the teaching of Scripture.

ANSWERING ALLEGED BIBLICAL OBJECTIONS TO UNLIMITED ATONEMENT

In spite of strong and repeated New Testament emphasis that Christ died for the sins of the entire world, proponents of limited atonement offer several passages that they believe support their view. A careful contextual examination reveals that evidence is lacking.

The Objection That Ephesians 1:4 Teaches Limited Atonement

"He *chose us* in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight." The Bible also asserts that Christ was "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8 NKJV). From this it is argued that the Lamb was sacrificed only for the elect; to have died for anyone else would be a waste of His precious blood, for only the elect will be saved.

Response

That only believers were chosen in Christ before time began does not mean Jesus did not die for everyone. As we have previously established, God knows all things beforehand (Isa. 46:10) and thus knew exactly who would believe. Peter explicitly says that we "have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father" (1 Peter 1:2), and Paul affirms that "those God foreknew he also predestined" (Rom. 8:29). The Atonement is limited in its *application*, but it is unlimited in its *extent*. There is nothing in Ephesians 1:4 that teaches otherwise.

The Objection That 1 Corinthians 15:3 Teaches Limited Atonement

"What I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for *our sins* according to the Scriptures" (cf. John 10:11; Rom. 4:25; 2 Cor. 5:21). The point made by extreme Calvinists is that when the Bible says Christ died for someone, it is pointedly limiting His work on the cross to only that group (believers): "lays down his life for the *sheep*" (John 10:11); "he chose *us*" (Eph. 1:4). Hence, it is said that the object of Christ's death is only those who do or

will believe in Him (cf. John 20:29; Gal. 1:3–4; Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 3:18).

Response

Once again, few New Testament truths are more evident than that God loves the world (John 3:16), that Christ died for the sins of all (cf. 1 John 2:2; 2 Peter 2:1), and that God desires everyone to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4–6; 2 Peter 3:9). The fact that only believers (the elect) are mentioned in some passages as the object of Christ's death does not prove the Atonement is limited.

First, when the Bible uses terms like *we*, *our*, or *us* when speaking of the Atonement, it speaks of those to whom it has been *applied*, not of all those for whom it was *provided*. And in so doing, Scripture does not thereby limit the potential application of the Atonement to all people.

Second, the fact that Jesus loves and died for the church (Eph. 5:25) does not mean that God therefore does not also love the whole world (John 3:16) and desire everyone to be part of His bride (1 Tim. 4:4–6).

Third, this reasoning overlooks the passages declaring that Jesus died for more than the elect (e.g., John 3:16; Rom. 5:6; 5:18–19; 2 Cor. 5:19).[30]

The Objection That John 5:21 Teaches Limited Atonement

"Just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so *the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it*." The inference of extreme Calvinists is that Christ gives spiritual life only to the elect, proving that the extent of the Atonement is limited (see Steele and Thomas, *FPC*, 51).

Response

First, John 5:21 makes no reference to the *elect*.

Second, the phrase "to whom he is pleased" does not mean Jesus wants to give life only to some; if it did, it would contradict the clear teaching of other Johannine statements (e.g., John 3:16; 1 John 2:2) as well as letters from other authors (e.g., Heb. 2:9; 2 Peter 2:1). All Calvinists believe that the Bible does not contradict itself.

Third, if John 5:21 referred only to the elect, it would be contrary to the context *here*, since Jesus said He would raise "*all* who are in their graves" (5:28), both saved and unsaved (v. 29).

Fourth, and finally, even if John 5:21 *does* refer only to the elect being regenerated (since only they believe), the Atonement is not shown to be limited in extent, for God loves all (John 3:16) and desires that all be saved (Matt. 23:37). The point of the passage is not to limit Jesus' love but *to show that His resurrection power is unlimited*.

The Objection That John 6:37 Teaches Limited Atonement

Jesus said, "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away." Particularists argue that this verse is mistranslated, that *whoever* means "the ones coming to Christ," namely, *only* the ones whom the Father has given Him.

Response

First, even granting this point grammatically does not establish the particularist view theologically; it would merely affirm that all of the elect will come to Christ. It says nothing about whether Christ died for more than the elect or how the elect will come to Him, i.e., whether unwillingly forced by irresistible grace or willingly (freely) by God's persuasive and effectual grace. Bernard of Clairvaux said, "If there is no free will, there is nothing to save; if there is no free grace, there is nothing with which to save" (as cited in Ellicott, *ECWB*, 6.429).

Second, it should be carefully noted that the text does not say Christ died only for those whom the Father gives to Him. Indeed, if it did, it would contradict John and the rest of Scripture in the affirmations that God loves the world (cf. John 3:16), that Christ died for the sins of the world (cf. John 1:29), that the Holy Spirit is convicting the world of sin (cf. John 16:7–8), and that God desires everyone in the world to be saved (cf. 1 Tim. 2:4).

Third, the context itself indicates that those who come to Christ will be those who believe. Verse 40 says, "My Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and *believes* in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." Therefore, those whom the Father gives will believe, and all who believe will be those whom the Father gives. Again, God's Word repeatedly calls upon *all* persons, not just the elect, to believe (cf. John 3:16, 36; Acts 16:31; 17:30; etc.).

The Objection That John 17:9 Teaches Limited Atonement

"I pray for them. *I am not praying for the world*, but for those you have given me, for they are yours." The "them" in this verse is plainly a reference to Christ's disciples (v. 6), and extreme Calvinists claim that this is an explicit *denial* by Jesus Himself that He prayed for the "world" of unbelievers. If true, this would support the argument that the Atonement is limited to the elect (the only ones for whom Christ prayed), for if He had prayed for *more* (or even *all*), then *more* (or all) would have been saved, since God would not reject the prayer of His own Son.

Response

First, that Christ prayed only for the elect in this passage doesn't prove that He never prayed for the non-elect. If, as even extreme Calvinists accept, Jesus could have received negative answers to His prayers (cf. Gill, *CGT*, 1.87–88, 2.77), why would John 17:9 demonstrate by necessity that He didn't also pray for those who would not believe? John himself later implies that the biblical authors recorded only a fraction of the things that Jesus did (21:25).

Second, there *is* recorded evidence that Christ prayed for non-elect persons; for instance, His request that His Father "forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34 KJV) could have included such people. Further, Luke includes Jesus' indirect prayer for the world, in which He directs us to "pray [that] the Lord of the harvest [will] send out laborers into His harvest" (10:2 NKJV), even though He knew that not all would be saved (Matt. 13:28–30).

Third, even if Jesus did *not* pray for the non-elect, other New Testament passages reveal that Paul did, and he exhorted us to do the same: "Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved" (Rom. 10:1).[31] "I urge … that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made *for everyone*" (1 Tim. 2:1).[32]

Fourth, and finally, Christ's praying or not praying for the non-elect does not nullify His love for them or His death for their sins. His specific prayer for those who *would* become believers (v. 20) no more demonstrates that He doesn't love the world than my saying "I pray daily for my children" proves that I don't love the world's children. My own have a special place in my prayers, just as Christ's disciples had a special place in His. *The important truth is that God wants everyone to become His child* (cf. Matt. 23:39; 1 Tim. 2:4–6; 2 Peter 3:9).

The Objection That Ephesians 5:25 Teaches Limited Atonement

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." The focus of Christ's love in this passage is the church, not the "unchurched"; Paul does not say that Christ loved "the world" and gave Himself up for her.

Response

Christ loves the church—no argument there. However, this fact does not conversely demonstrate that He *doesn't* love the world. For one logical instance, that I love my children does not mean I don't love children who are not mine; "I love my children and would die for them" puts specific focus on my love for them, but it doesn't mean I wouldn't help save the lives of other children.[33]

In addition, Christ's bride—the church—is a corpus of all persons who accept Him (John 1:12) and are baptized by the Holy Spirit into one body (1 Cor. 12:13). The door of the true church is open to all who will enter and join themselves to this special group that experiences His special love: "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' *Whoever* is thirsty, let him come; and *whoever* wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life" (Rev. 22:17).

The Objection That Romans 5:15 Teaches Limited Atonement

> If the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to *the many*! … Just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man *the many* will be made righteous, (vv. 15, 19)

Extreme Calvinists argue that in both cases the benefit of Christ's death is only for "the many" [the elect], not for "all" (cf. Heb. 9:28).

Response

As we have seen, it is noteworthy that the term *many* in Romans 5 is used in contrast with *one* (Adam or Christ) rather than in contrast to *all*. The fact that *many* is *interchangeable* with *all* is evident because:

(1) The term *all* is used *in this same passage* (vv. 12, 18) as interchangeable with *many*;
(2) On one occasion the two terms refer to the same thing—the "many died" in verse 15 refers to the same thing as the death came to "all men" in verse 12;
(3) The contrast is between "one" and "all" (v. 18), Just as it is between "one" and "many" (v. 19).
(4) If *many* means only "some" (as in *limited* atonement), then only some people, not all, are condemned because of Adam's sin (v. 19). Yet all true Calvinists believe in the universality of sin. By the same logic, with the same word, in the same verse, they should likewise believe in the universal extent of the Atonement.[34]

The Objection That Mark 10:45 Teaches Limited Atonement

"Even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as *a ransom for many.*"[35] Extreme Calvinists insist that, logically, if Christ died for all, then all should be saved, for if Christ's death substituted for the sins of all, then the debt is paid, and all are free. The Bible teaches that not all will be saved;[36] therefore, extreme Calvinists argue that Christ, in Mark 10:45, said "many" to signify that His death would not be a substitutionary ransom for the sins of *all* humankind.

Response

First, the conclusion that Christ did not offer Himself for everyone is not really an exposition of these passages (which say nothing about the Atonement being limited) but rather a speculative inference.

Second, the inference is not logically necessary. That a benefactor purchases a gift and offers it freely does not mean the intended receiver *must* receive it. Similarly, that Christ paid for our sins does not mean we must accept the forgiveness that was bought by His blood.

Third, as with Romans 5 (see above), the word *many* is inclusive: It is *many* as opposed to *few*, not *many* in contrast to *all*. Jesus said, "*Many* [all] are called but *few* chosen" (Matt. 20:16 NKJV).

Fourth, and finally, that Christ's death made everyone *savable* does not thereby mean everyone is *saved*. The sacrifice for all made salvation *possible* but

not *actual*—we receive justification by faith.[37] This is not difficult to understand: Even though the elect were chosen in Christ before creation (Rev. 13:8; Eph. 1:4), they were not positionally saved until they were regenerated and justified. Before the chronological moment of regeneration, the elect were not *saved* but *savable*. Once again, salvation can be *provided* for all without its being *applied* to all. Jesus placed the Bread of Life on the world's table, even though not everyone wills to be made full, and the Water of Life is flowing for "*whoever*" will drink (John 4:14), even though many refuse to quench their thirst.

The Objection That Romans 9:11–13 Teaches Limited Atonement

> Before the twins [Jacob and Esau] were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls—she [Rebekah] was told, "The older will serve the younger." Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

This passage appears to say that God not only loves the elect but that He hates the non-elect.

Response

We have already addressed this passage in regard to God's omnibenevolence,[38] and few verses are more misused by extreme Calvinists (especially those who hold to double-predestination).[39]

First, again, God is not speaking about the *individual* Jacob but the *nation* of Jacob (Israel). In Genesis, when the prophecy was given (25:23 NKJV), Rebekah was told, "Two *nations* are in your womb, two *peoples* shall be separated from your body … and the older shall serve the younger." The reference is not to individual election but to the corporate election of the chosen nation (Israel).

Second, despite the corporate election of the Israelite nation, each individual had to accept the Messiah, by faith, to receive God's salvation (cf. Rom. 11:20). Paul said, "I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of *my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel*" (Rom. 9:3–4; cf. 10:1).

Third, God's "love" for Jacob and "hate" for Esau is directed to the *nations* of Jacob (Israel) and Esau (Edom). What is more, Paul, in Romans 9:13, is speaking of them not before they were born (c. 2000 B.C.) but long after they lived—the citation is not from Genesis but from Malachi 1:2–3 (c. 400 B.C.).

The deeds of the evil Edomites, perpetrated upon the Israelites, are well documented (e.g., Numbers 20), and even though it was for these actions that God "hated" them as a nation, Scripture does not teach that no Edomites would be saved. In fact, the Bible says there were believers from both Edom (cf. Amos 9:12) and the neighboring country of Moab (cf. Ruth 1), as there will be people in heaven from *every* tribe, kindred, nation, and tongue (Rev. 7:9).

Fourth, the word translated into English as *hated* means "loved less."[40] To reillustrate, Scripture says that Jacob "*loved also Rachel more than Leah*.… And when the LORD saw that *Leah was hated*…" (Gen. 29:30–31 KJV).[41] Similarly, Jesus said, "If anyone comes to me and does not *hate* his father and mother … he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26).[42] A parallel idea is expressed in Matthew 10:37: "Anyone who *loves* his father or mother *more than* me is not worthy of me."

Fifth, and finally, the statement "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy" (Rom. 9:15; cf. Ex. 33:19) should be understood as intensive, not limiting. That is, the emphasis is on the intensity of the merciful action, not on the limits of its object. Clearly God loves all (cf. John 3:16; 1 John 2:2; 1 Tim. 2:4) and even "bore with great patience the objects of his wrath" (Rom. 9:22), waiting for them to repent (2 Peter 3:9).

Romans 9, then, does not teach that God hates the non-elect (or even that He does not love them) but instead that His love for those who do receive salvation is so amazing—so splendid, so magnificent—that His love for those who reject it looks like hatred by comparison.

The same loving stroke that makes a kitten purr seems like an expression of hatred if she turns the opposite direction and finds that her fur is being rubbed the wrong way. God's *expressed* love is the same for both believer and unbeliever: The believer is already experiencing God's love, while the Lord is patiently waiting for the unbeliever to repent (i.e., to turn his life in the right direction—toward Him) so that he can experience it as well.

"God is love" (1 John 4:16), and, as extensively demonstrated, while love can *morally* constrain (2 Cor. 5:14), it cannot *physically* compel. Love operates persuasively but never coercively. Once again, "forced love" is a contradiction in terms—forced love is not love, but assault. As I have said elsewhere, there are no shotgun weddings in heaven, and God is not a "Cosmic B. F. Skinner" who behaviorally modifies unwilling humans. If He *could* do so without violating both His integrity and the freedom He has given us, then everyone *would* be saved (2 Peter 3:9).[43]

The Objection That 1 Corinthians 15:22 Teaches Limited Atonement

"For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive." Some extreme Calvinists claim that *all* in this case must mean only the elect:

> Although it is clear that every person in the world died in Adam (Rom. 5:12), *it is equally clear that everybody in the world has not died in Christ*. There are many people who have not been crucified in Christ. They hate Him. (Palmer, *FPC*, 53, emphasis added)

Somehow, "*all* will be made alive" is supposed to support limited atonement.

Response

There are at least three reasons why 1 Corinthians 15:22 does not teach that the extent of the Atonement is limited.

First, all means "all." *All* does not mean "some."[44]

Second, there is a tight logical connection between the two *alls* in this verse, and it is generally acknowledged that the first *all* means "all fallen human beings."

Third, the text is not even speaking about salvation but about the resurrection of everyone ("*all* will be made alive"). Some are resurrected to salvation, and some are raised to condemnation. As Jesus said,

> I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live.… Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when *all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out*—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned. (John 5:25, 28–29)

Introduced by these words, it could not be more clear that 1 Corinthians 15:22 is speaking of resurrection:

> Christ has indeed been *raised from the dead*, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, *the resurrection of the dead* comes also through a man. (vv. 20–21).[45]

The Objection That 1 Peter 3:18 and 2:24 Teach Limited Atonement

> *Christ died for sins* once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.… He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.

This implies a substitutionary atonement, and, as stated above, many limited atonement advocates insist that if Christ was substituted for all, then all must be saved. Since *all* Calvinists believe that only some, not all, will be saved, it follows for *extreme* Calvinists that Christ must have died only for the elect (see McGregor, *NPS*, 149ff). They often point to *The Nature of the Atonement*, by John McLeod Campbell (1800–1872), as a demonstration of the incompatibility of universal and substitutionary atonement.[46]

Response

Because of its view of substitution, this objection is a form of special pleading.[47] *Of course* everyone for whom Christ is substituted will be saved *if* the application of substitution is automatic, but it need not be. A penalty can be paid without the payment taking effect, just as a prisoner can be offered a governor's pardon yet refuse to accept it, or a bankrupt man be offered money to pay his creditors and decline to receive it. Again, those (like me) who adhere to substitutionary atonement but reject limited atonement believe that Christ's sacrifice for the sins of all humankind did not automatically save anyone but rather made them savable. It did not release God's saving grace into anyone's life but satisfied (propitiated) God on their behalf (1 John 2:2), awaiting their faith to receive the unconditional gift of salvation made possible by Christ's atoning work.[48]

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR AN UNLIMITED ATONEMENT

In addition to the extensive biblical support, *unlimited* atonement is also based firmly in the attributes of God, especially His omnibenevolence. The Bible affirms that He is all-loving, and since whoever is all-loving must love all, God must love all. *Limited* atonement (in general) claims that God loves *only* the elect salvifically, and double-predestination[49] maintains that He not only doesn't love but actually hates the non-elect. Hence, *God's omnibenevolence excludes limited atonement*.

The Biblical Basis for God's Omnibenevolence

The biblical foundation for God's omnibenevolence is extensive.[50] The following is only a selection of texts.

"God so loved *the world* that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

"God demonstrates his own love for us in this: *While we were still sinners, Christ died for us*" (Rom. 5:8).

"*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ*?… I am convinced that neither death nor life … nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:35, 38–39).

"*Christ's love* compels us, because we are convinced that *one died for all*, and therefore all died" (2 Cor. 5:14).

"When the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, *he saved us*, not because of righteous things we had done, but *because of his mercy*" (Titus 3:4).

"Dear friends, let us love one another, for *love comes from God*. Whoever does not love does not know God, because *God is love*.… This is love: not that we loved God, but that *he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins*" (1 John 4:7–8, 10).

The Theological Basis for God's Omnibenevolence[51]

God's love is a moral attribute, but the fact that He is omnibenevolent follows from several of His metaphysical attributes. The above verses amply demonstrate that love is not only a characteristic of God but that He is *all*-loving.

God's Infinity Implies Omnibenevolence

God is infinite in His essence,[52] and as love is of the essence of God (1 John 4:16), He is *infinite* love. His love can no more be limited than can His nature, which is unlimited.

God's Simplicity Implies Omnibenevolence

God is simple (indivisible, without parts) in His essence;[53] therefore, God cannot be partly anything. Whatever a simple Being is, it is that wholly and completely. God, then, is wholly and completely loving, for love is of His simple essence.

God's Necessity Implies Omnibenevolence

God's necessity[54] implies His omnibenevolence as well. A necessary Being is what it is by necessity, and as God is love, God *necessarily* is love. It is impossible for God *not* to love, for love is of His very essence.

In summary, both biblical and theological evidence clearly show that God is all-loving; consequently, He must love all. Because anything else would be contrary to His very nature, God's omnibenevolence is contrary to the doctrine of limited atonement.

ANSWERING OBJECTIONS TO GOD'S OMNIBENEVOLENCE[55]

Objection One—Based on the Argument That Necessary Love Is Contradictory

Love is a free act flowing from free will. Since forced love is contradictory, it is said that love cannot flow from the essence of God to all human beings, because His essence is necessary. Consequently, the argument goes, it cannot be of the essence of God to love everyone, for then God would be forced to love, which is untenable. Stated another way, God loves because He wants (chooses, wills) to love when and whom He desires, not because He must. Isn't unlimited atonement, then, in opposition to the very nature of God as love?

Response to Objection One

Once again, love and *necessity* are not contradictory, but love and *compulsion* are. While it is necessary, then, that God loves all, it is also necessary that He loves *freely*. God's will is completely in accord with His nature; thus, His freely chosen love for all persons is in harmony with His necessary, unchanging nature. There is no conflict with God's love being both necessary and free.

Objection Two—Based on God's Unique Love for the Elect

Those who deny unlimited atonement claim that God does not salvifically love all people, pointing to His special love for the elect (e.g., Eph. 1:4; 5:25; 1 Cor. 15:3; John 10:11).

Response to Objection Two

In reply, we have already demonstrated that Christ's unique love for His bride does not negate His love for everyone else. Indeed, He desires all to be part of His bride, the church.

Further, as previously established, when the Bible speaks of those to whom the Atonement has been *applied*, it does not thereby limit the Atonement's possible application for all for whom it was *provided*.

What is more, again, that Jesus loves His bride and died for her does not mean He hates those who have not yet believed.

Objection Three—Based on the Idea That Unlimited Atonement Necessarily Leads to Universalism

If an all-powerful Being can do whatever He wants to do,[56] and if a sovereign God is in control of all things,[57] then His will cannot be thwarted: He accomplishes whatever He purposes to do (Isa. 55:11). If God can accomplish whatever He desires, and if God desires to save all, then doesn't it follow that all will be saved (universalism)?

Response to Objection Three

Even though God's *ultimate* will is always accomplished, His *immediate* will is not. God wills some things conditionally and some unconditionally: Our justification is willed on the condition of our acceptance of His gift (John 1:12; Rom. 3:25; Matt. 23:37).[58] God does not desire that anyone perish, wanting all to repent (2 Peter 3:9); nevertheless, not all *will* repent and, hence, not all will be saved (cf. Matt. 23:37).

In addition, God's omnipotence does *not* mean that He can do everything. As we have already noted, He cannot do what is contradictory, and He cannot go against His own nature (Heb. 6:18; 2 Tim. 2:13). God, in accordance with His own self, cannot force someone to love Him; while He is all-powerful, He exercises His power in accordance with His love. Unlimited atonement need not lead to universalism.[59]

Objection Four—Based on God Having Unused Power

Extreme Calvinists still insist that God does not have to exercise love toward everyone just because He is omnibenevolent any more than He must exercise His power toward everyone just because He is omnipotent. God, allegedly, can have more love than He displays, just as He has more power than He applies.

Response to Objection Four

Again, *love is a moral attribute of God; power is nonmoral*. Moral attributes, because they are moral, bind God to act in a certain way. Nonmoral attributes do not, and the confusion of the two is a category mistake.[60]

Furthermore, as stated previously, it is inconsistent to hold (as extreme Calvinists do) that even though God must always act justly because He is all just, He need not always act lovingly because He is all-loving. If this *were* the case, God's justice would not obligate Him to condemn all sin. But *it does*, just as His omnibenevolence compels Him to love all sinners. Love is as essential to God as justice, and whatever attribute He has, He must have completely, necessarily, and infinitely.

Objection Five—Based on What Sinners Deserve

We are saved by God's grace, but grace isn't deserved by any sinner—*justice* demands that sin be condemned. Therefore, the doctrine of unlimited atonement, which maintains that God must love all, seems to be contrary to the doctrine of total depravity, which affirms that all human beings deserve God's condemnation.[61]

Response to Objection Five

It is true that nothing *in any sinner* deserves or merits God's love. This is not the point; the point is that there is something *in God* that prompts His desire to save all sinners—His infinite love. God wants to save us because He is naturally (essentially, necessarily, unarbitrarily) all-loving, not because we have earned salvation or even His passion for our salvation (we haven't).

ESSENTIALISM VS. VOLUNTARISM

A second theological reason for rejecting limited atonement is its basis on the premise of theological voluntarism. There are two primary views of the relationship between God's nature and God's will: divine voluntarism and divine essentialism. *Voluntarism*, in which the doctrine of limited atonement is rooted, insists that *something is right because God wills it*; that is, God decides something is right, and *then* it is right. *Essentialism*, on the other hand, declares that *God wills something because it is right*; that is, it is *already* in accord with His unchanging nature. Divine voluntarism is without philosophical (rational), biblical, or practical foundation.

Philosophical Arguments for Divine Essentialism

Traditional theists maintain that God is unchangeable in His nature ("morally immutable").[62] Thomas Aquinas offered three basic arguments for God's immutability.

The Argument From God's Pure Actuality

The first argument for God's unchangeability is based on the fact that a Being of *pure actuality* ("I AM-ness") *has no potentiality*.,[63] Only that which has potentiality can change. Accordingly, God cannot change (Ex. 3:14), for He, as Pure Actuality, has no potential to actualize through change.

The Argument From God's Perfection

The second argument for God's unchangeability stems from His absolute perfection.[64] Whatever changes acquires something new; God cannot acquire anything new, since He is, by His very nature, absolutely perfect (there is no way in which He could be better or improved). If God lacked any perfection, He would not be God, for to gain a new perfection is to have lacked it.

The Argument From God's Simplicity

The third argument for God's unchangeability follows from His simplicity.[65] Everything that changes is composed of what does change and what does not change, but there can be no composition in an absolutely simple Being. Hence, God cannot change.

If everything about a being changed, it would no longer be the same being. In fact, that would not be change at all but the annihilation of one thing and the re-

creation of something entirely new. If in every change something remains the same and something does not, the something that changes must be composed of these two elements. Since God, an absolutely simple Being, cannot have two elements, He cannot change.

Biblical Arguments for Divine Essentialism

The scriptural passages that support theistic essentialism are those that declare God to be unchangeable in His nature.[66]

Old Testament Evidence of God's Moral Immutability

The psalmist declared:

> In the beginning you [Lord] laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them and they will be discarded. But you remain the same, and your years will never end. (102:25–27)

First Samuel 15:29 affirms, "He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man, that he should change his mind." God confirmed, through the prophet, "I the Lord do not change" (Mal. 3:6).

New Testament Evidence of God's Moral Immutability

The New Testament is equally strong about God's unchangeable nature. Hebrews 1:10–12 quotes Psalm 102 in confirmation. A few chapters later the author promises, "It is impossible for God to lie" (Heb. 6:18). Paul adds, in Titus 1:2, "God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time." James (1:17) assures, "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows."

If God's will is subject to His nature, and if God is unchangeable in His nature, then whatever God wills must be good and right in accordance with (and never contrary to) this nature. Consequently, divine essentialism must be correct.

Practical Arguments for Divine Essentialism

Two practical arguments in favor of divine essentialism are (1) the need for moral stability and (2) the moral repugnance of voluntarism. These are supported by what we experience of God's trustworthiness and the scriptural testimony that God can be relied upon not to change.

The Argument From the Need for Moral Stability

If all moral principles were based on God's changing will, there would be no moral security. How could one be committed to something if there was always the possibility that the rules might be altered? Indeed, how could we love and serve God if He could will, for instance, that our ultimate good was not to love Him but to hate Him?

The Argument From Moral Repugnance

Divine essentialists insist that it is morally repugnant to assume, as voluntarists do, that God could change His will on whether love is essentially good and decide instead that hate become a universal moral obligation. It is difficult to conceive how a morally perfect Being could arbitrarily determine that rape, injustice, or genocide are morally right. Since it is morally repugnant for us, made in God's image, to imagine such a change in His will, how much more must it be for the God in whose image we are made?

God's Trustworthiness

The Bible presents God as eminently trustworthy: When He makes an unconditional promise, He never fails to keep it (cf. Gen. 12:1–3; Heb. 6:16–18). Indeed, the gifts and callings of God are without the possibility of His changing His mind (Rom. 11:29); God is not a man (1 Sam. 15:29), and He can always be counted on to keep His word (Isa. 55:11). This absolute reliability would not be possible if God could change His will at any time about anything. What makes God morally bound to keep His word is His unchangeable nature; otherwise, He could decide at any moment, for example, to send all believers to hell, or to reward the wicked for murder and cruelty. Such a God would not be trustworthy; *the God of the Bible is unchangeably good*.

Objections to Divine Essentialism

Voluntaristic arguments against essentialism, such as those put forward by William of Ockham (c. 1285–c. 1349), chiefly center on the supremacy of God:

(1) Either God wills something because it is right (essentialism), or else something is right because God wills it (voluntarism).
(2) If He wills something because it is right (essentialism), then God is not

supreme, because there is something outside Him to which He is subject.
(3) Hence, something is right because God wills it (voluntarism).

There are at least two problems with this argument.

First of all, the first premise presents a false dilemma. It need not be "either/or"; it could be "both/and." That is, if moral principles flow from the will of God as rooted in the nature of God, then a voluntaristic conclusion does not follow.

Also, the second premise wrongly assumes that the supreme ethical standard to which God's will is subject is "outside" of God. If it is "inside" God—if the standard is His *own* supreme moral nature—the dilemma vanishes.

In conclusion, extreme Calvinism's view of limited atonement is clearly based on a form of voluntarism,[67] a belief without rational, biblical, or practical foundation. God cannot change in His nature, so whatever He wills must be in accord with His immutable nature. Since His nature is to love all whom He creates, He cannot limit His salvific desire to only some.

Irresistible Grace Plus Omnibenevolence Equals Universalism

Another serious theological problem for adherents to limited atonement is their view of irresistible grace, for they hold the following premises:

(1) God can do anything He wills, including saving all He wills to save;
(2) God wills only to save some people (the elect), not all people.

There is only one logical conclusion:

(1) God is not all-loving. That is, He does not love everyone.

The problem can be restated as follows:

(1) If God is all-powerful, He *could* save all persons.
(2) If God is all-loving, He *would* save all persons.
(3) All persons will not be saved.
(4) Therefore, God is either not all-powerful or He is not all-loving.
(5) God *is* all-powerful.
(6) Thus, God is not all-loving.

If, on the one hand, an all-powerful God *can* save all but *will not* save all, then He does not love all. In this case, irresistible grace—exercised only on some, when it could be used on all—is a denial of God's omnibenevolence. If, on the other hand, God is all-powerful, *including* the ability to irresistibly overrule people's will in order to save them, *and* He is all-loving in that He wants to save all people, then irresistible grace creates universal salvation. Therefore, *the paradigm of extreme Calvinism, when held to consistency, either leads to the denial of an all-loving God or to the affirmation of universalism*.[68]

Limited Atonement and Irresistible Grace Deny Free Will

Further, the doctrine of limited atonement is a rejection of God-given freedom. Because in this life free will for human beings entails the power of contrary choice,[69] even an all-powerful God cannot force someone to act contrary to free choice. Forced liberty is an absurd notion, and irresistible grace on the unwilling is precisely that—contrary to the freedom God bestowed upon His human creatures.

To put it another way, since even an omnipotent Being cannot do what is contradictory, God cannot exercise irresistible grace on the unwilling. The only solution that preserves *irresistible* or *persuasive* grace is to hold that God exerts it only upon the willing.[70] In this view, God can exercise *persuasive* grace on everyone, and only those willing to accept it will be saved. This would eliminate the possibility of universalism—since God can love all without everyone willingly receiving His unlimited love—*and* uphold the omnipotence and omnibenevolence of God, something unattainable for proponents of limited atonement.

Irresistible grace is contrary to human free will *and* to divine omnibenevolence. The heart of freedom is self-determination,[71] and it is contrary to self-determination to have its actions determined (caused) by another being. Hence, if humans are free, then God, who *gave* them freedom, cannot exercise irresistible grace on them contrary to their will. This is precisely the result of extreme Calvinism's "irresistible grace on the unwilling."

THEOLOGICAL QUERIES POSED BY

DEFENDERS OF LIMITED ATONEMENT

Spurgeon's Argument

Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892) defended limited atonement by his insistence that it is the *opponent* who limits the Atonement: *First*, adherents to unlimited atonement do not believe that Christ died so as to secure the salvation of all, and *second*, they do not believe that Christ died to secure the salvation of any person in particular. Spurgeon then went on to boast that those who believe in limited atonement believe that Christ died for "multitudes [the elect] that no man can number" (cited by Steele and Thomas, *FPC*, 40).

In response, this inverted rationalization is an unfortunate illustration of Spurgeon's eloquence gone to seed: Only an upside-down logic could force anyone to think twice about the idea that limited atonement is more unlimited than unlimited atonement! The first assertion—that unlimited atonement doesn't teach Christ's death as securing the salvation of all—diverts the issue. It isn't a question of *securing* the salvation of all (as in universalism) but of *providing* salvation for all and *securing* it for the elect (as in moderate Calvinism and Arminianism). It is extreme Calvinism that maintains Christ died to *provide* and to *secure* the salvation *only* of the elect. Spurgeon, then, gave the right answer to the wrong question.

As to the second point—that unlimited atonement doesn't teach that Christ died to secure the salvation of any specific person—Spurgeon gives the wrong answer to the right question. Both moderate Calvinist and classical Arminian opponents of limited atonement believe that Christ *did* die to secure the salvation of the elect and that God foreknew, from all eternity, exactly who they would be.

Sproul's Argument

R. C. Sproul, another defender of limited atonement, believes the opposition is trapped by asking: "For whom was the atonement *designed*?" (*CG*, 205). If it was intended for *all*, as in unlimited atonement, then why are not all saved? How can a sovereign God's intention be thwarted? If it was intended for only *some* (the elect), then limited atonement is correct. The dilemma can be stated as such:

(1) Either the Atonement was intended for all or only for some (the elect).
(2) If the Atonement was intended for all, then all will be saved (since God's

sovereign intentions will come to pass).

(3) If the Atonement was not intended for all, then it was intended only for some (the elect).

(4) Therefore, either universalism is true or limited atonement is true.

Therein lies the *trap:* Both moderate Calvinists and traditional Arminians deny universalism; therefore, they would seem by this logic to be driven to accept limited atonement.

In response, the first premise (*either* the Atonement was intended for all *or* only for some) is another false dilemma. As already stated, there is a third alternative: Christ's sacrifice was intended both to *provide* salvation for all and to *procure* salvation for all who believe. The false dilemma wrongly assumes that there could only have been one intention for the Atonement. The denial that God desires the salvation of all whom He has created is a grave error.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR AN UNLIMITED ATONEMENT

With one significant exception,[72] the orthodox fathers of the Christian church have given unanimous support for the saving love of God for all human beings.

Early Fathers

Justin Martyr (c. 100–c. 165)

"The whole human race will be found to be under a curse.… The Father of all wished His Christ, for the whole human family, to take upon Him the curses of all" (as cited in Bercot, *DECB*, 42).

Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)

"He endowed His own handiwork with salvation, by destroying sin. For He is a most holy and merciful Lord, and He loves the human race" (in ibid., 43). "In the last times, the Son was made a man among men, and He re-formed the human race" (in ibid.).

Origen (c. 185–c. 254)

"He takes away sin until every enemy will be destroyed and death last of all

—in order that the whole world may be free from sin" (in ibid., 45).

Medieval Fathers

Early Augustine (354–430)

> There is, then, no natural efficient cause or, if I may be allowed the expression, no essential cause, of the evil will, since itself is the origin of evil in mutable spirits, by which the good of their nature is diminished and corrupted; and the will is made evil by nothing else than defection from God—a defection of which the cause, too, is certainly deficient. (*CG*, 12.9)

"*God no doubt wishes all men to be saved* and to come into the knowledge of the truth" (*OSL*, 57, emphasis added). Again,

> If, indeed, it has happened that some are removed from the influence of this clearest light of truth, whose blindness requires its illumination, yet even to them, *we doubt not*, the same grace will find its steady way, however late, by *the merciful favour of that God "who will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth*" (*OPP*, 48, xxiv, emphasis added).

Later Augustine

Working from his belief that infants could be saved and that donatist schismatics could be forced to believe against their free will, Augustine drew out the logic of these positions in his later views, laid forth in the following quotations.[73]

" 'He wills all men to be saved,' is so said that all the predestined may be understood by it, because every kind of man is among them" (*ORG*, 44).

> Accordingly, when we hear and read in Scripture that He "will have all men to be saved," although we know well that all men are not saved, we are not on that account to restrict the omnipotence of God, but are rather to understand the Scripture, "Who will have all men to be saved," as meaning that *no man is saved unless God wills his salvation: not that there is no man whose salvation He does not will, but that no man is saved apart from His will*; and that, therefore, we should pray Him to will our salvation, because if He will it, it must necessarily be accomplished. (*E*, 103, emphasis added; cf. 97)
>
> Our Lord says plainly, however, in the Gospel, when upbraiding the impious city: "How often would I have gathered thy children together; even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" *as if the will of God had been overcome by the will of men*.… But even though she was unwilling, *He gathered together as many of her children as He wished: for He does not will some things and do them, and will others and do them not*; but "He hath done all that He pleased in heaven and in earth" (ibid., 97, emphasis added).

Contrasting the Early and Later Augustine[74]

There are many contrasts between the early Augustine and the later Augustine that bear on the origin of extreme Calvinism. The essential differences can be

summarized as follows:

Early Augustine	Later Augustine
God wills all to be saved	God wills only some to be saved
God never compels free will	God compels free will
God loves all	God loves only some
Saving faith is not a special gift to some	Saving faith is a special gift to only some
Fallen people can receive salvation	Fallen people cannot receive salvation

Problematically, the later position of Augustine involves a denial of human freedom. As he himself stated earlier, "*He that is willing is free from compulsion*" (*TSAM*, 10.14, emphasis added). Again, "*God does not work out salvation in us as if he were working in insensate stones, or in creatures in whom nature has placed neither reason nor will" (OFW*, 2.6, emphasis added). He added insightfully, "*We may not so defend grace as to seem to take away free will, or, on the other hand, so assert free will as to be judged ungrateful to the grace of God*, in our arrogant impiety" (ibid., 2.29, emphasis added).

Anselm (1033–1109)

> Moreover, you have clearly shown the life of this man [Jesus] to have been so excellent and so glorious as to make ample satisfaction for the sins of the whole world, and even infinitely more. It now, therefore, remains to be shown how that payment is made to God for the sins of men. (*CDH*, II.XVIII)

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)

> Christ, suffering in loving and obedient spirit, offered more to God than was demanded in recompense for all the sins of mankind.… Christ's passion, then, was not only sufficient but superabundant for the sins of mankind; as John says, "he is a propitiation for our sins, not for ours only but also for those of the whole world" (*ST*, 3a.48, 2).

Reformation Leaders

There is a break, beginning with the Reformers, from the almost unanimous view of unlimited atonement. Nevertheless, it is significant that the "Father of Calvinism" himself was not a Calvinist on the doctrine of limited atonement. As we shall see, John Calvin made unequivocal statements that Christ died for the

sins of the whole human race. Rarely do other statements conflict with these emphatic pronouncements, and when they do, they can usually be understood as references to the application of the Atonement to the elect rather than the extent of the Atonement for all people.

Calvin: Christ's Blood Expiated (Satisfied) God for All the Sins of the World

> This is our liberty, this our glorying against death, that our sins are not imputed to us. He says that this redemption was procured by the blood of Christ, for *by the sacrifice of His death all the sins of the world have been expiated*. (*CC*, on Col. 1:15)[75]

Calvin: Christ Provided Salvation for All Humanity

> We must now see in what ways we become possessed of the blessings which God has bestowed on his only begotten Son, not for private use, but to enrich the poor and needy. And the first thing to be attended to is, that so long as we are without Christ and separated from him, nothing which *he suffered and did for the salvation of the human race* is of the least benefit to us. (*ICR*, 3.1.1)

Calvin: The "Many" for Whom Christ Died Is Everyone

> We should note, however, that Paul does not here contrast the larger number with the many, for *he is not speaking of the great number of mankind*, but he argues that since the sin of Adam has destroyed many [all], *the righteousness of Christ will be no less effective for the salvation of many [all]*. (*CC*, on Rom. 5:15)

Calvin: The Guilt of the Whole World Was Laid on Christ

> I approve of the ordinary reading, that he alone bore the punishment of many, because *on him was laid the guilt of the whole world*. It is evident from other passages, and especially from the fifth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, that "many" sometimes denotes "all" (ibid., on Isa. 53:12).

Calvin: The "Many" Is the Whole Human Race

> Mark 14:24 [says,] "This is my blood." I have already warned, when the blood is said to be poured out (as in Matthew) for the remission of sins, how in these words we are directed to the sacrifice of Christ's death, and to neglect this thought makes any due celebration of the Supper impossible. In no other way can faithful souls be satisfied, if they cannot believe that God is pleased in their regard. *The word "many" does not mean a part of the world only, but the whole human race:* he contrasts "many" with "one," as if to say that he would not be the Redeemer of one man, but would meet death to deliver many of their cursed guilt. *It is incontestable that Christ came for the expiation of the sins of the whole world. (EPG*, IX.5)

Calvin: Salvation Is Limited in Its Effect, Not in Its Offer

If it is so (you will say), little faith can be put in the Gospel promises, which, in testifying concerning the will of God, declare that he wills what is contrary to his inviolable decree. Not at all; for *however universal the promises of salvation may be*, there is no discrepancy between them and the predestination of the reprobate, provided we attend to their effect. We know that *the promises are effectual only when we receive them in faith*, but, on the contrary, when faith is made void, the promise is of no effect. (*ICR*, 3.24.17)

Calvin: Christ's Death Is Applied Only to the Righteous (by Faith)

Accordingly, he is called our Head, and the first-born among many brethren, while, on the other hand, we are said to be ingrafted into him and clothed with him, all which he possesses being, as I have said, nothing to us until we become one with him. And although it is true that *we obtain this by faith*, yet since we see that *all do not indiscriminately embrace the offer of Christ which is made by the gospel*, the very nature of the case teaches us to ascend higher, and inquire into the secret efficacy of the Spirit, to which it is owing that we enjoy Christ and all his blessings, (ibid., 3.1.1)

Calvin: Salvation Is Applied Only to Those Who Believe

The apostle indicates that the fruits of it do not come to any but to those who are obedient. In saying this he commends faith to us, for neither He nor His benefits become ours unless, and in so far as, we accept them and Him by faith. At the same time he has inserted the universal term "to all" to show that no one is excluded from this salvation who proves to be attentive and obedient to the Gospel of Christ. (*CC*, on Heb. 5:9)

Calvin: Even the Lost Were Purchased by Christ's Blood

"It is no small matter to have the souls perish who were bought by the blood of Christ" (*MG*, 83).

Calvin: No One Is Barred From Salvation

[Paul] had commanded Timothy that prayers should be regularly offered up in the church for kings and princes; but as it seemed somewhat absurd that prayer should be offered up for a class of men who were almost hopeless (all of them being not only aliens from the body of Christ, but doing their utmost to overthrow his kingdom), he adds, that it was acceptable to God, who *will have all men to be saved*. By this he assuredly means nothing more than that the way of salvation was not shut against any order of men; that, on the contrary, *he had manifested his mercy in such a way, that he would have none debarred from it*. (*ICR*, 3.24.16)

Calvin: Christ Suffered for the Sins of the World

"I would they were even cut off." [Paul's] indignation increases and he prays for destruction on the imposters by whom the Galatians had been deceived. The word "cut off" seems to allude to the circumcision which they were pressing for. Chrysostom inclines to this view: "They tear the Church for the sake of circumcision; I wish they were cut off entirely." But such a curse does not seem to fit the mildness of an apostle, who ought to wish that all should be saved and therefore that not one should perish. I reply that this is true when we have men in mind; for *God commends to us the salvation of all*

men without exception, even as Christ suffered for the sins of the whole world. (*CC*, on Gal. 5:12)

When he says "the sin of the world," *he extends this kindness indiscriminately to the whole human race*, that the Jews might not think the Redeemer has been sent to them alone. From this we infer that the whole world is bound in the same condemnation; and that since all men without exception are guilty of unrighteousness before God, they have need of reconciliation, (ibid., on John 1:29)

Calvin: Unbelief Is the Reason That Some Do Not Receive the Benefits of Christ's Death

Paul makes [the revelation of God's] grace common to all men, not because it in fact extends to all, but because it is offered to all. Although *Christ suffered for the sins of the world*, and is offered by the goodness of God without distinction to all men, *yet not all receive Him*. (ibid., on Rom. 5:18)

To bear the sins means to free those who have sinned from their guilt by his satisfaction. *He says "many" meaning "all," as in Rom. 5:15*. It is of course certain that not all enjoy the fruits of Christ's death, but this happens because their unbelief hinders them, (ibid., on Heb. 9:28)

Calvin: Only Believers Enjoy the Benefit of Salvation

"I am come a light into the world." The universal particle seems to have been put in deliberately, partly that *all believers without exception might enjoy this benefit* in common and partly to show that unbelievers perish in darkness *because they flee from the light of their own accord*, (ibid., on John 12:46)

Calvin: Universalism Is Untenable (Salvation Is Not Applied to All)

[John] put this in for amplification, that believers might be convinced that *the expiation made by Christ extends to all who by faith embrace the Gospel*. But here the question may be asked as to how the sins of the whole world have been expiated. I pass over the dreams of the fanatics, who make this a reason to extend salvation to all the reprobate and even to Satan himself. Such a monstrous idea is not worth refuting. Those who want to avoid this absurdity have said that *Christ suffered sufficiently for the whole world but effectively only for the elect*. This solution has commonly prevailed in the schools. Although *I allow the truth of this*, I deny that it fits this passage.[76]

Calvin: Christ's "Blood" Received in Communion Is Not for Unbelievers

"How can the wicked drink Christ's blood 'which was not shed to expiate their sins' and Christ's flesh 'which was not crucified for them'?" (*TT*, 285).[77]

In short, for Calvin, the Atonement is unlimited in *extent* and limited in *application* (to those who believe). Christ died for all, but only the elect will receive salvation.

Post-Reformation Teachers

Philip Schaff (1819–1893)

This is in harmony with the whole spirit and aim of this Epistle [Romans]. It is easier to make it prove a system of conditional universalism than a system of dualistic particularism. The very theme, 1:16, declares that the gospel is a power of God for the salvation, not of a particular class, but of "every one" that believeth. In drawing a parallel between the first and the second Adam (5:12–21), [Paul] represents the effect of the latter as equal in extent, and greater in intensity than the effect of the former; while in the Calvinistic system it would be less. We have no right to limit "the many" (*hoi polloi*) and the "all" (*pantas*) in one clause, and to take it literally in the other.

If, by the trespass of the one [Adam], death reigned through the one, much more shall they that receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one, even Jesus Christ. So, then, as through one trespass the judgment came unto *all men* to condemnation; even so through one act of righteousness the free gift came unto *all men* to justification of life. For as through the one man's disobedience *the many* [i.e. *all*] were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the one shall *the many* [*all*] be made righteous. (5:17–19)

The same parallel, without any restriction, is more briefly expressed in the passage (1 Cor. 15:21): "As in Adam *all* die, so also in Christ shall *all* be made alive"; and in a different form in Rom. 11:32 and Gal. 3:22.…

These passages contain, as in a nutshell, the theodicy of Paul. They dispel the darkness of Romans 9. They exclude all limitations of God's plan and intention to a particular class; they teach not, indeed, that all men will be actually saved—for many reject the divine offer, and die in impenitence—but that God sincerely *desires* and actually *provides* salvation for all. Whosoever is saved, is saved by grace; whosoever is lost, is lost by his own guilt of unbelief. (*HCC*, VIII.XIV.114)

Earl Radmacher (b. 1933)

This universal offer is also a genuine offer. The cross of Christ is broad enough and deep enough to cover all the sins of everyone who will come to Him. This general call to salvation is a part of common grace. It may or may not lead to saving faith in the mighty work that Christ accomplished on the cross for the sinner's eternal salvation. Even though the offer of this great gift from God is genuine and available to all, many do not receive it by believing in Jesus Christ. (*S*, 92)

Millard Erickson (b. 1932)

"We conclude that the hypothesis of universal atonement is able to account for a larger segment of the biblical witness with less distortion than is the hypothesis of limited atonement" (*CT*, 835).

Advocates of limited atonement face the somewhat awkward situation of contending that while the atonement is sufficient to cover the sins of the non-elect, Christ did not die for them. It is as if God, in giving a dinner, prepared far more food than was needed, yet refused to consider the possibility of inviting additional guests. Advocates of unlimited atonement, on the other hand, have no difficulty with the fact that Christ's death is sufficient for everyone, for, in their view, Christ died for all persons, (ibid.)

The view that we are adopting here should not be construed as Arminianism. It is rather a moderate form of Calvinism. It is the view that God logically decides first to provide salvation, then elects some to receive it. This is essentially the sublapsarian position of theologians like Augustus Strong. Those who would construe this position as Arminianism need reminding that what distinguishes Calvinism from Arminianism is not the view of the relationship between the decree to provide salvation and the decree to confer salvation upon some and not upon others. Rather, the decisive point is whether the

> decree of election is based solely upon the free, sovereign choice of God himself (Calvinism) or based also in part upon his foreknowledge of merit and faith in the person elected [Arminianism]. (ibid.)

CONCLUSION

The biblical, theological, and historical bases for the universal (*unlimited*) extent of the Atonement are solid. With one notable and explainable exception (the later Augustine), there is no significant voice in the whole history of the church up to the Reformers that defended *limited* atonement. Indeed, the Bible is emphatic that God loved the whole fallen world and that Christ died for the same. The theological arguments springing from God's omnibenevolence are powerfully in favor of unlimited atonement—that Christ died for the sins of all human beings. Any denial of this truth arbitrarily limits God's love to only some and is based on an indefensible form of voluntarism.

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE EXTENT OF SALVATION (UNIVERSALISM)

We now move from one end of the spectrum to the other. The last chapter examined the view that God desires to save and actually does save only some persons (limited atonement). This chapter addresses the position that God desires to save and actually does save all persons (universalism). Another view affirms, contrary to both of these extremes, that God desires to save all but that He actually saves only some—those who believe.

Unlike the other two views, the provision of *unlimited* atonement is in accord both with God's omnibenevolence (which affirms His desire to save all) and with the human freedom of those who reject God's offer (which makes it impossible for Him to save all). That is, the Atonement is unlimited in its extent (Christ died for all), but it is limited in its *application*, since not all believe, and God has willed that only those who believe can be saved.

DEFINITION OF UNIVERSALISM

Universalism, derived from the word *apokatastasis* (i.e., "restoration," in Acts 3:21), is the belief that eventually everyone will be saved. It was first proposed by Origen (c. 185–c. 254), a partially unorthodox church father. One of the most famous theologians in modern times to embrace universalism was the

neo-orthodox thinker Karl Barth (1886–1968); noted philosopher John Hick (b. 1922) is also a proponent of the view (see his *EGL*). Many liberal theologians, a good number of cults, and several aberrant religions hold to some form of universalism or annihilationism.[1] Like universalists, annihilationists believe that no one will suffer eternal punishment, since everyone who does not believe will be annihilated.[2] Even some noted evangelicals, such as Clark Pinnock (b. 1920), John Wenham (b. 1913), and John Stott (b. 1925) have embraced forms of annihilationism. Nevertheless, universalism is heretical, having been condemned at the Fifth Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in A.D. 553.[3]

BIBLICAL ARGUMENTS OFFERED FOR UNIVERSALISM

To support their position, universalists generally appeal to widely held sentiment about God's love. While they cite several passages of Scripture, as we shall see, the verses offered for universalism are taken out of context. We will state and examine each.

The Contention That Psalm 110:1 Teaches Universalism

David said:[4] "The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.' " The inference drawn by some universalists is that if all Christ's enemies are eventually submissive to Him, then they must be saved: Salvation involves submission to the lordship of Christ.

Response

Despite the universalists' claim, this text does not support their position.

First, the lost are called "enemies," which is not a description of the saved, who are called "friends" (John 15:15) and "sons" of God (John 1:12).

Second, in addition to their being "enemies," they are spoken of as subjugated, not saved. They are called God's "footstool"—hardly an appropriate description of saints, who are co-heirs with Christ and have every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms in Him (Eph. 1:3; Rom. 8:17).

Third, in the context, David is not speaking of the salvation of the lost.

Rather, he refers explicitly to God's "wrath" on his "enemies" (Ps. 110:1, 110:5), not His blessings on His people.

The Contention That Acts 3:21 Teaches Universalism

Peter speaks of Jesus, who "must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets." This reference to the "restoration of all things" (NKJV) is taken by universalists to mean that all people will eventually be saved. Mormons say this passage points to a restoration of the church (through Joseph Smith), following a total apostasy.

Response

The context does not support any such conclusions.

For one thing, this verse does not uphold universalism. While the same author (Peter) affirms that God desires that all men be saved (2 Peter 3:9), as does the apostle Paul (cf. 1 Tim. 2:4), some people are simply not willing to accept God's grace (cf. Matt. 23:37). Once again, since God is love (1 John 4:16) and humans are free, God cannot force them to freely love Him. God will allow the unrepentant to have it their way. As noted by C. S. Lewis (1898–1963), those who do not say to God, "Your will be done," will eventually hear God declare to them, "*Your* will be done." Such is the nature of hell, a place where the will of those who reject the Lord is fulfilled in opposition to His.[5] The Bible nowhere holds out hope for those who refuse to accept God's love.[6]

In addition, Acts 3 does not even remotely hint that there will be a total apostasy of the entire church, and other passages of Scripture totally refute such an idea. Jesus said the gates of hell would not prevail against the church (Matt. 16:18). He also promised His followers, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20 NKJV). Jesus could not be with His followers to the end of the age if the church went into complete apostasy at some point after its founding. In Ephesians 3:21, Paul says, "To Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus *to all generations, forever and ever*" (NKJV). How could God be glorified in the church throughout all ages if the entire body abandoned and/or renounced Him? Ephesians 4:11–16 speaks of the church growing to spiritual maturity, not spiritual degeneracy.

What then does "the restoration of all things" mean? Peter, making reference

to the "restoration of all things, *which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began*" (Acts 3:21 NKJV), said it is speaking of the "covenant which God made with our [Jewish] fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed' " (v. 25). This Abrahamic covenant is unconditional, including the promises of possessing the Holy Land "forever" (Gen. 13:15). It is to the future fulfillment of this covenant that Peter refers. It is the restoration of all *things* to Israel, not to the salvation of all *people*.[7] This is the restoration expected by Jesus' disciples; the last thing they asked Him before He ascended to heaven was "Lord, are you at this time going to *restore* the kingdom to Israel?" His answer can be summarized as "Not yet, but meanwhile preach the gospel to the ends of the earth" (see Acts 1:6–7). Again, nothing is said here about the ultimate salvation of all human beings. To affirm otherwise is to totally deny the context. Jesus also spoke of this restoration when He said to the Twelve,

> I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (Matt. 19:28)

This will be fulfilled in His literal future reign on earth.[8]

The Contention That Romans 5:18–19 Teaches Universalism

> Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

From these verses many universalists infer that Christ's death for all guarantees the salvation of all.

Response

This conclusion, however, is contrary to the setting here and in Romans as a whole, as well as to the rest of God's Word.

First, even in this context Paul speaks of being "justified *by faith*" (v. 1), and not automatically by what Christ did for us. He also refers to salvation as "the gift" (v. 16), which is something that needs to be received.[9] And in the preceding verse he declares that salvation comes only to those "who receive … the gift of righteousness" (v. 17); not all receive the gift (cf. Matt. 23:37; 25:40–41).

Second, the rest of the epistle makes it unmistakably clear that not everyone will be saved. Romans 1–2 speaks of the heathen who are "without excuse" (1:20), upon whom the wrath of God falls (1:18). Paul declares that "as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law" (2:12 NKJV).

Third, the many [all] being "made righteous" does not refer to their actually being saved but rather their being made savable by the removal of judicial guilt inherited from Adam.[10] That is, what the first Adam did by bringing legal condemnation to all humanity is reversed by what Christ, the "last Adam," accomplished—the savability (*potential* justification) of everyone.[11] *Actual* salvation does not come automatically but by an act of "faith" (cf. 5:1).

Fourth, in the very heart of his argument, Paul concludes that apart from justification by faith the world is "guilty before God" (3:19 NKJV). Later, speaking of the destiny of both the saved and the lost, Paul affirms that "the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (6:23). Likewise, Paul recognized that in spite of his prayers, not all of his kinsmen would be saved (11:1ff)., but some would be "accursed" (9:3 NKJV). Indeed, the whole point of Romans is to show that only those who believe will be justified (1:17; cf. 3:21–26).

Fifth, Romans 9 declares that only the elect (not everyone) will be saved (cf. v. 14ff.) The rest God "endured with much longsuffering," waiting for them to repent (v. 9:22 NKJV; cf. 2 Peter 3:9) so they would not be "vessels of wrath prepared for destruction."

Sixth, and finally, there are numerous passages of Scripture that speak of the eternal destiny of lost people,[12] including John's vivid vision at the end of the Revelation:

> Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (20:11–15)

In short, the evidence for universalism is lacking in Romans 5, and it is contrary to the clear teaching of other Scriptures. Furthermore, since the Bible does not contradict itself,[13] the verses that can be interpreted in more than one way must be understood in the light of those that cannot.

The Contention That 1 Corinthians 15:24–25 Teaches Universalism

> Then the end will come, when he [Jesus Christ] hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.

Universalists claim this supports their thesis that eventually, in the end, everyone will be saved. On this text, Origen wrote:

> If even that unreserved declaration of the apostle does not sufficiently inform us what is meant by "enemies being placed under His feet," listen to what he says in the following words, "For all things must be put under Him." What, then, is this "putting under by which all things must be made subject to Christ?" … I am of the opinion that it is this very subjection by which we also wish to be subject to Him, by which the apostles also were subject, and all the saints who have been followers of Christ. (*OFP*, 1.6.1)

Response

It is clear from this text that Paul had no such idea in mind.

First, Paul is not speaking of the salvation of the lost but rather their condemnation. This is evident in words and phrases like *destroy, put under his feet, put an end to all rule* NKJV, and *enemies*. As we have seen, by contrast, the saved are called "friends" of God (cf. John 15:15).

Second, once again, these enemies are subjugated to God, not saved by Him. They are called God's "footstool," which doesn't befit saints who will reign with Christ (cf. 2 Tim. 2:12), some even on their own thrones (cf. Matt. 19:28; Luke 19:17–19).

Third, it is "death" that will be "destroyed," not the free choice of those who refuse to believe in God (cf. Matt. 23:37; 2 Peter 3:9). The only way to guarantee the ultimate salvation of all is for God to force the impenitent and reprobate, against their will, to submit to Him; He will not do this.[14]

Fourth, that God will be "all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28) does not mean that all will be in God. Paul means that the Lord will reign supreme in all the universe, whether for salvation (of those who accept Him) or for subjugation (of those who reject Him).

Fifth, the phrase "all things" must be understood in its context. It does *not* say that all things will be saved, rather it simply asserts that "all things are made subject to Him" (v. 28 NKJV). But, again, they are made subject as "enemies" (v. 25). In fact, "all things" is used in parallel with "enemies" (in successive verses, 26–27).

Sixth, in this very passage Paul declares that *only* those who "believed" are

"saved" (15:2). Indeed, he says in 1 Corinthians: "Do you not know that *the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God*?" (6:9).

Seventh, and finally, heaven is not a place for God's enemies, those He will have allegedly overpowered and forced against their will into the fold to love Him. This is precisely what a God of love cannot do; Jesus said so (cf. Matt. 23:37). First Corinthians 15 contains no hint of salvation for unbelievers.

The Contention That 2 Corinthians 5:19 Teaches Universalism

Paul told the Corinthians "that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation." (Romans 11:15 also speaks of the reconciliation of the world.) On this basis universalists argue that "the world" was reconciled to God by Christ's salvific work. Thus, all are saved on the basis of His sacrifice.

Response

In reply, one need only look at the context to see that universalism is not affirmed.

First, Paul indicates that actual reconciliation is for those who are "in Christ," not for all human beings (v. 17).

Second, reconciliation is regarded as a process according to God's purpose, not an accomplished fact for the whole world. It is God's desire to save all (cf. 2 Peter 3:9), but all will not be saved (cf. Matt. 7:13–14; Rev. 20:11–15). The sense in which the whole world is reconciled to God is potential, not actual. That is, Christ's death for all human beings made them *reconcilable* to God; otherwise, Paul would not be calling on them to "*be* reconciled to God" (v. 20).

Third, if all were already saved by what Christ did for them, what do we make of Paul's exhortation to be "ambassadors for Christ" and to be "pleading" with the world to "be reconciled to God" (all (NKJV)? It is senseless to beg them to be reconciled to Him if in fact they already are in right relationship.

Fourth, and finally, to interpret this passage in favor of universalism is to say that Scripture contradicts itself, since many other passages clearly teach that all will not be saved.[15]

The Contention That Ephesians 1:10 Teaches Universalism

Another verse misconstrued by universalists is Paul's statement to the Ephesian Christians that in "the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth; in Him" (NKJV).

Response

A careful examination of this text reveals that Paul is speaking here of believers, not unbelievers.

First, the context is about those "He chose … in Him before the foundation of the world" (1:4 NKJV).

Second, the phrase *in Christ* is never used by Paul, or anywhere else in Scripture, of anyone but believers.

Third, that unbelievers are excluded is clear in that Paul does not refer to those "under the earth" as he does elsewhere when speaking of the lost (e.g., cf. Phil. 2:10).

Fourth, and finally, as already shown above, there is abundant evidence elsewhere in Paul's writings (cf. 2 Thess. 1:7–9) and in the rest of Scripture that some will go to their eternal destiny without Christ.[16]

The Contention That Philippians 2:10–11 Teaches Universalism

Paul foretells that one day

> at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth, and those under the earth, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father, (NLT)

Universalists insist that unbelievers are clearly in view in the phrase "under the earth." And if so, then all persons, even the wicked, will eventually be saved.

Response

While it is admitted by all that unbelievers will eventually confess that Jesus is Lord, nonetheless, there is no evidence here or elsewhere that they will be saved.

First of all, they will confess the *fact* that He is Lord; there is no reference to their believing *in* Him, which is necessary for salvation.[17]

Also, even demons believe that God *is*, but they do not believe *in* God (cf. James 2:19). Likewise, believing that Jesus is Lord will not save anyone; only

belief *in* Christ (James 2:21–26) brings salvation.[18]

Furthermore, as for "those under the earth" in this text (i.e., the lost), their acknowledgment of Jesus will be a confession from their mouth. For *salvation*, Paul insists that one must both "confess with your mouth … and *believe in your heart*" (Rom. 10:9). Again, unbelievers will be *subjugated*; which indicates an unwilling act, whereas salvation is a free act.

The Contention That 1 Peter 3:18–20 Teaches Universalism

> Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water.

Response

Taken in its proper context, there is no support here for universalism.

First, there is no suggestion that Jesus offered the hope of salvation to these "spirits in prison." The text does not say that Christ *evangelized* them,[19] but simply that He *proclaimed*[20] the victory of His resurrection to them. This view fits the setting (the previous verse speaks of Christ's victorious death and resurrection) and is in accord with the teaching of other New Testament texts (cf. Eph. 4:8; Col. 2:15).

Second, Peter is not speaking of all persons but a limited group "who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built" (v. 20).

Third, the Bible is clear that there is no second chance after death (cf. Heb. 9:27). The Revelation records the Great White Throne Judgment, in which those who are not found in the Book of Life are sent to the lake of fire (20:11–15). Luke records Christ's teaching that once a person dies, he goes either to heaven or to hell (16:19–31), and that there is a great gulf fixed "so that those who want to pass" from one to the other cannot (v. 26 NKJV). The whole urgency of responding to God in this life, before we die, further supports the fact that there is no hope beyond the grave (cf. Prov. 29:1; John 3:36; 5:24).

Fourth, and finally, there is no good evidence that the phrase "spirits in prison" even refers to human beings. Nowhere else is such a phrase used of human beings in hell. Many scholars believe that the "spirits" who invaded humanity in "the days of Noah" were the "Sons of God" (used of angels in Job

1:6; 2:1; 38:7). This fits with 2 Peter 2:4, where, immediately before he refers to the Flood, he mentions the angels sinning (v. 5; cf. Gen. 6:1–4). Whatever these "spirits" are, whether human or angelic, there is no foundation for the ideas that Peter is referring to all humankind or that all humans will be saved.

The Contention That 1 Peter 4:6 Teaches Universalism

"For this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit" (KJV). It is argued by universalists that this passage is both (1) clearly referring to preaching the gospel and (2) preaching it to the dead. If so, then it implies a chance to be saved after death, which many universalists see as necessary to accomplish the salvation of all human beings.

Response

However, even granting these two points, it does not follow, for several reasons, that all will be saved.

First, Peter does not say that the gospel was preached to them *after their death*. This is an assumption not supported by the context or by other biblical texts. Indeed, the passage is better rendered,[21] "For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to *those who are now dead*, so that they might be judged according to men in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit." In favor of this is the fact that the gospel "was preached" (in the past) to those who "are dead" (now, in the present).

Second, nowhere does Peter say that this alleged gospel preaching resulted in the salvation of all to whom it was given. This is another assumption not justified by this or any other scriptural statement. Indeed, there are numerous texts to the contrary.[22]

Third, the implication of the passage is that not all will be saved. The preceding pronouncement (v. 5) speaks of the dead being judged and giving an "account" to God, not of their being unilaterally saved.

Fourth, and finally, the phrase "live according to God in the spirit" (NKJV) or "live according to God in regard to the spirit" does not necessarily denote salvation. When such phrases in the New Testament are used in connection with resurrection, they are teaching that, like Christ and because of His resurrection, everyone will be *resurrected*—not that everyone will be saved (cf. 1 Cor. 15:20–

22). Indeed, Jesus said:

> Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, *and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned*. (John 5:28–29)

In summary, all the texts offered in favor of universalism are found to be wanting. When each passage is carefully and contextually examined, there is no ground for concluding the ultimate and universal salvation for all humankind. In truth, when *other* passages of Scripture are also put forward, there is complete support of the view that *not* all persons will eventually be saved. Tragic as it is, the Bible clearly teaches that some persons will be lost forever.[23]

THEOLOGICAL ARGUMENTS OFFERED FOR UNIVERSALISM

Faring no better are universalism's theological arguments, which are likewise inaccurate and insufficient. Each is based on a misconception of the nature of God and/or the nature of human beings.

The Argument From God's Omnibenevolence

Universalism is usually based on the notion that a God of love would never allow any of His creatures to perish. Love never fails, and it never gives up. The Hound of Heaven never stops pursuing until He captures us by His love. An omnibenevolent God not only loves all but does so for all time, both in this life and in the life to come. However long it takes His love to reach all His rebellious creatures, an all-loving God will take. So the universalist argues.

Response

However, as C. S. Lewis demonstrated,[24] just the opposite is the case. While God *does* love the world (John 3:16) and *doesn't* desire that any should perish (cf. 2 Peter 3:9), nonetheless, His very nature *as love* demands that He not force His love on anyone (cf. Matt. 23:37).

> When one says, "All will be saved," my reason retorts, "Without their will, or with it?" If I say,

> "Without their will," I at once perceive a contradiction; how can the supreme voluntary act of self-surrender be involuntary? If I say, "With their will," my reason replies, "How, if they will not give in?" (Lewis, *PP*, 106–07).

Once again, Lewis observed:

> There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God says, "*Thy* will be done" (*GD*, 69).

Further, since God is omniscient and knows all future free acts,[25] He knows that some people will never freely repent. Knowing they are irredeemable and reprobate, He knows His love will never win them over, no matter how long He pursues them. Hence, His "Spirit shall not strive with man forever" (Gen. 6:3 NKJV). There is a point of no return, and God knows it. Hence, "It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27 NKJV).

What is more, the Bible makes it very clear that there will be an eternal hell[26] and that there will be people in it (Matt. 25:41; 2 Thess. 1:7–9; Rev. 20:11–15). In fact, Jesus had more to say about hell than He did about heaven. He warned, "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28). He added of those who reject Him, "As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age" (Matt. 13:40). In His great Mount Olivet Discourse, our Lord declared, "Then he [God] will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels' " (Matt. 25:41). Elsewhere He affirmed: "If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out" (Mark 9:43). In a vivid, self-telling story that, unlike the parables, uses an actual person's name (Lazarus), Jesus said:

> In hell, where [the rich man] was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, "Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire."
>
> But Abraham replied, "Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us."
>
> He answered, "Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment."
>
> Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them" (Luke 16:23–29).

The Argument From God's Omnipotence

Some have also argued for universalism from God's omnipotence. Origen declared: "Nothing is impossible to the Omnipotent, nor is anything incapable of restoration to its Creator" (*OFP*, 3.6.5). This, of course, implies that God desires by His goodness to do so, a position supported by many Scriptures (e.g., 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9). If God wants to save all, and if He can save all (i.e., He is all-powerful), it would seem to follow that He will save all.

Response

Two points should be made in reply.

First, God's attributes[27] do not operate in contradiction to one another. As we have repeatedly observed, He is internally consistent in His nature. This is why the Bible insists that "it is impossible for God to lie" (Heb. 6:18). This is also the reason that His power must be exercised in accord with His love; that is, God cannot do what is unloving.

Second, as already demonstrated above, it would be unloving and contradictory for God to force people to love Him. Love by its very nature can work persuasively but not coercively. If some refuse to be persuaded (as the Bible says some will), then God will not coerce them into His kingdom. Satan, in *Paradise Lost* by John Milton (1608–1674), declares: "Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven." To add a final word, God will respond, "Have it your way."

The Argument From the Reformatory View of Justice

Origen also argued that God's justice has in view reformation, not punishment. He claimed that "the fury of God's vengeance is profitable for the purgation of souls.… The punishment, also, which is said to be applied by fire, is understood to be applied with the object of healing" (*OFP*, 2.10.6). He added,

> Those who have been removed from their primal state of blessedness have not been removed irrecoverably, but have been placed under the rule of those holy and blessed orders which we have described; and by availing themselves of the aid of these, and being remolded by salutary principles and discipline, they may recover themselves, and be restored to their condition of happiness. (ibid., 1.6.2)

Response

There are several problems with using God's obvious desire that persons reform their lives to prove that all will be saved in the end.

First, contrary to both Scripture and fact, the reformatory view of justice assumes that all persons freely choose to be reformed (cf. Matt. 23:37; Rev. 20:10–15).

Second, again contrary to Scripture and fact, the reformatory view of justice predicates that no decisions are final. This is incorrect; as we have seen, suicide, for example, is both one-way and final. As previously cited, the Bible declares, regarding the afterlife, that "man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment" (Heb. 9:27).

Third, the reformatory view of justice is contrary to the reality of justice, which is penal, not reformatory. God's absolute justice demands that a penalty be paid for sin (see Lev. 17:11; Ezek. 18:20).

Fourth, the reformatory view of justice is contrary to the substitutionary death of Christ.[28] "Christ died for our sins" (1 Cor. 15:3). "Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God" (1 Peter 3:18). "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21). To claim God is only interested in reforming sinners, and not punishing unrepentant sin, is contrary to the very concept of Christ's vicarious atonement. If sin need not be punished, why did Jesus have to pay the awful price for sin?

Fifth, and finally, God is indeed interested in reformation: Reformation is what *this* life is all about. But if people refuse to be reformed during this life, then punishment is what the *afterlife* is about. This is why God is so longsuffering, not willing that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9).

The Argument From God's Wisdom

Origen offered an argument for universalism from God's wisdom:

> God, by the ineffable skill of His wisdom, transforming and restoring all things, in whatever manner they are made, to some useful aim, and to the common advantage of all, recalls those very creatures which differed so much from each other in mental conformation to one agreement of labour and purpose; so that, although they are under the influence of different motives, they nevertheless complete the fullness and perfection of one world, and the very variety of minds tends to one end of perfection. [For] it is one power which grasps and holds together all the diversity of the world, and leads the different movements towards one work, lest so immense an undertaking as that of the world should be dissolved by the dissensions of souls. (Origen, *OFP*, IV.II.I)

Response

Here again the universalist overlooks several important truths.

For one thing, God's wisdom[29] does not act contrary to His love, which cannot force anyone to do something they do not choose to do.

For another, the fact that God is infinitely wise allows Him to know that not everyone will freely choose to serve Him. This being the case, it would be contrary to God's wisdom to attempt to save people He knows will never freely accept His gracious offer of salvation.

In addition, there is a contradiction within the universalist view at this point. Many, like Origen, argue,

> God, the Father of all things, in order to *ensure the salvation of all* His creatures through the ineffable plan of His word and wisdom, so arranged each of these, that every spirit, whether soul or rational existence, however called, should *not be compelled by force*, against the liberty of his own will, to any other course than that to which the motives of his own mind lead him (lest by so doing the power of exercising free-will should seem to be taken away, which certainly would produce a change in the nature of the being itself). (*OFP*, 2.1.2, emphasis added)

But this is precisely what God cannot do, namely (1) "ensure the salvation of all" and (2) "compel by force." As long as someone refuses to freely accept His love, a loving God cannot ensure he will be saved. In this case, as C. S. Lewis aptly put it, there must be a "great divorce."

AN EVALUATION OF UNIVERSALISM

In addition to the lack of biblical and theological support for universalism, there are many additional biblical and rational arguments against it.

Universalism Is Contrary to the Image of God

God made humankind in His image,[30] which includes the freedom to choose. In order to guarantee that everyone will be saved, those who refuse to love God would have to be forced to love Him against their will, and "forced freedom" isn't freedom at all.

Universalism Is Contrary to God's Love

Forced love is not only contrary to freedom, it isn't love at all, but hate. Forced love is a kind of assault. No one who is truly loving forces him-or herself on another.[31]

Universalism Is Contrary to God's Justice

God is absolutely holy,[32] and as such He must punish sin. Therefore, as long as people are living in sin and rebellion against God, He must punish them.[33]

Universalism Is Contrary to Biblical Teaching on Hell

Once again, Jesus taught that not only is there a hell that was created for Satan and his angels, but, tragically, there will also be persons in it.[34]

Universalism Is Without Scriptural Foundation

As shown above, universalism (1) is based on verses wrenched out of context, and (2) it ignores other clear passages that teach the opposite.

Universalism Is Based on a Kind of Freudian Illusion

Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) taught that any belief based on a mere wish that something be true is an illusion (see *FI*, chapter 6). No loving person would *want* anyone else to suffer in hell forever; however, strong desire to the contrary seems to be a primary impulse in universalist thinking, setting up an implausible and unbiblical system of belief.

THE HISTORIC FOUNDATION AGAINST UNIVERSALISM

As stated earlier, with rare exceptions (like Origen), it is difficult to find significant fathers in the long centuries of the church, up to and through the Reformation, who embraced this unorthodox teaching. Not until the rise of modern liberalism[35] do we encounter substantial denial of eternal suffering for the unrepentant.

Early Fathers

Down through the centuries, the stalwarts of the church have almost universally supported the biblical position that some human beings (viz., the lost) will undergo conscious, eternal punishment. This is in contradiction to universalism, which insists that eventually all persons will be saved. As we have seen, those few who held contrary views (like Origen) fortunately were condemned by orthodox theologians and councils of the church.

Justin Martyr (c. 100–c. 165)

> For among us the prince of the wicked spirits is called the serpent, and Satan, and the devil, as you can learn by looking into our writings. And that he would be sent into the fire with his host, and the men who follow him, and would be punished for an endless duration, Christ foretold. (*FA*, I. XXVIII in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*)

Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)

> "Moreover," he says, "the book of life was opened, and the dead were judged out of those things that were written in the books, according to their works; and death and hell were sent into the lake of fire, the second death." Now this is what is called Gehenna, which the Lord styled eternal fire. "And if any one," it is said, "was not found written in the book of life, he was sent into the lake of fire" (*AH*, I.V.XXXV in ibid.).

Cyprian (200–258)

> For God, as He is merciful, so He exacts obedience to His precepts, and indeed carefully exacts it; and as He invites to the banquet, so the man that hath not a wedding garment He binds hands and feet, and casts him out beyond the assembly of the saints. He has prepared heaven, but He has also prepared hell. He has prepared places of refreshment, but He has also prepared eternal punishment. He has prepared the light that none can approach unto, but He has also prepared the vast and eternal gloom of perpetual night. (*EC*, V.XXX.VII in Schaff, *NPNF*)

Lactantius (c. 240–c. 320)

> Both therefore spoke with truth, but yet both incorrectly; for the ways themselves ought to have been referred to life, their ends to death. We therefore speak better and more truly, who say that the two ways belong to heaven and hell, because immortality is promised to the righteous, and everlasting punishment is threatened to the unrighteous. (*OTW*, VII.III)

Medieval Fathers

Augustine (354–430)

> For then he perceives that the whole human race was condemned in its rebellious head by a divine judgment so just, that if not a single member of the race had been redeemed, no one could justly have questioned the justice of God; and that it was right that those who are redeemed should be redeemed in such a way as to show, by the greater number who are unredeemed and left in their just condemnation, what the whole race deserved, and whither the deserved judgment of God would lead even the redeemed, did not His undeserved mercy interpose, so that every mouth might be stopped of those who wish to glory in their own merits, and that he that glorieth might glory in the Lord. (*E*, 99)
>
> It is in vain, then, that some, indeed very many, make moan over the eternal punishment, and perpetual, unintermitted torments of the lost, and say they do not believe it shall be so; not, indeed, that they directly oppose themselves to Holy Scripture, but, at the suggestion of their own feelings, they soften down everything that seems hard, and give a milder turn to statements which they think are rather designed to terrify than to be received as literally true. (ibid.)

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)

> The will, of its own accord, may tend to an evil, through the removal of some obstacle: for instance, if a man be prevented from sinning, not through sin being in itself displeasing to him, but through hope of eternal life, or fear of hell, if hope give place to despair, or fear to presumption, he will end in sinning through certain malice, being freed from the bridle, as it were. (*ST*, II.78.2)
>
> Further, a sin does not deserve greater punishment through being united to another sin; for Divine justice has allotted its punishment to each sin. Now a venial sin deserves eternal punishment if it be united to a mortal sin in a lost soul, because in hell there is no remission of sins. Therefore venial sin by itself deserves eternal punishment. (ibid., II.87.5)

Reformation Fathers

John Calvin (1509–1564)

> God once established by his eternal and unchangeable plan those whom he long before determined once for all to receive into salvation, and those whom, on the other hand, he would devote to destruction.… He has barred the door of life to those whom he has given over to damnation. (*ICR*, III.21.7)
>
> Indeed many … accept election in such terms as to deny that anyone is condemned. But they do this very ignorantly and childishly, since election itself could not stand except as set over against reprobation. (ibid., III.23.1)

"Man falls according as God's providence ordains, but he falls by his own fault" (ibid., III.23.8).

Post-Reformation Teachers

Jacob Arminius (1560–1609)

> For if sin is a worse evil than damnation … since the former is opposed to divine good, and the latter to human good, then truly it is greater to ordain one to sin than to ordain to hell, to create a man that he might sin, than that he might perish. If, however, accuracy of statement is to be sought, it should be affirmed that, if a man is ordained to commit sin, then he cannot sin. For sin is a voluntary act, and the decree of God in reference to sin introduces a necessity of sinning.
>
> Further, if a man is created that he may be condemned, then he cannot be condemned by God. For condemnation is the act of a just judge. But a just judge does not condemn one unless he is wicked by his own fault, apart from necessity; and he is not wicked, apart from necessity, and of his own fault, who is created that he may sin, and thus perish. (*WJA*, III.377)

Charles Hodge (1797–1878)

When addressing the issue, "It is urged that it cannot be consistent with the justice of God to inflict a really infinite penalty on such a creature of man," Hodge wrote:

> We are incompetent judges of the penalty which sin deserves. We have no adequate apprehension of its inherent guilt, of the dignity of the person against whom it is committed, or of the extent of the evil which it is suited to produce. The proper end of punishment is retribution and prevention. What is necessary for that end, God only knows; and, therefore, the penalty which He imposes on sin is the only just measure of its ill deserts.

He continued:

> It is often said that sin is an infinite evil because committed against a person of infinite dignity, and therefore deserves an infinite penalty.… If the evil of a single sin, and that the smallest, lasts forever, it is in one sense an infinite evil, although in comparison with other sins, or with the whole mass of sin ever committed, it may appear a mere trifle. The guilt of sin is infinite in the sense that we can set no limits to its turpitude or to the evil which it is adapted to produce.…
>
> Relief on this subject is sought from the consideration that as the lost continue to sin forever they may justly be punished forever. To this, however, it is answered that the retributions of eternity are threatened for the sins done in the body. This is true; nevertheless, it is also true, first, that sin in its nature is alienation and separation from God, and as God is the source of all holiness and happiness, separation from Him is of necessity the forfeiture of all good; secondly, that this separation is from its nature final and consequently involves endless sinfulness and misery. (*ST*, III.878)

William G. T. Shedd (1820–1894)

> The punishment inflicted upon the lost was regarded by the Fathers of the Ancient Church, with very few exceptions, as endless.… The [Medieval] Church received the traditional doctrine respecting endless retribution. Heaven and hell were separated by an absolute and impassable gulf, but the intermediate space between them was subdivided into purgatory, which lies nearest to hell.… The Modern Church has accepted the traditional faith upon this subject. In proportion as the inspiration and infallibility of Revelation have been conceded, the doctrine of an absolute and therefore endless punishment of sin has maintained itself, it being impossible to eliminate the tenet from the Christian Scriptures, except by a mutilation of the canon, or a violently capricious exegesis. The denial of the eternity of future punishments, in modern times, has consequently been a characteristic of those parties and individuals who have rejected, either partially or entirely, the dogma of infible inspiration. (*HCC*,

II.414–19)

Millard Erickson (b. 1932)

> Just as in the past, the question of the future state of the wicked has created a considerable amount of controversy in our day. The doctrine of an everlasting punishment appears to some to be an outmoded or sub-Christian view. It, together with angels and demons, is often one of the first topics of Christian belief to be demythologized. Part of the problem stems from what appears to be a tension between the love of God, a cardinal characteristic of God's nature, and His judgment. Yet, however we regard the doctrine of everlasting punishment, it is clearly taught in Scripture.…
>
> If there is one basic characteristic of hell, it is, in contrast to heaven, the absence of God or banishment from his presence. It is an experience of intense anguish, whether it involve physical suffering or mental distress or both. There are other aspects of the situation of the lost individual which contribute to its misery. One is a sense of loneliness, of having seen the glory and greatness of God, of having realized that he is the Lord of all, and then of being cut off. There is the realization that this separation is permanent.
>
> Similarly, the condition of one's moral and spiritual self is permanent. Whatever one is at the end of life will continue for all eternity. There is no basis for expecting change for the better. Thus, hopelessness comes over the individual. (*CT*, 1234–35)

Earl Radmacher (b. 1933)

> Ultimately, everyone, unregenerate and regenerate, will be judged by their works. At the Great White Throne Judgment the unregenerate dead, "small and great," will be resurrected to stand before God and to be "judged according to their works" (Rev. 20:12–13). Their works will demonstrate that they deserve eternal condemnation (20:15). Somehow in the infinite mind of God every work ever performed by every unsaved person is a matter of record. People who have taken their chances on their works as a means of gaining entrance to heaven will find that their works fall short of God's righteous demands for eternal fellowship with Him. When the "books" in heaven reveal that unbelievers fall short of what is required, another book, the Book of Life, will be opened to show that their names are not written there. (*S*, 173)

CONCLUSION

In summary, there is no support in Scripture for the illusory hope that everyone will be saved. The basic reason is rather simple: God created human beings with free will, and those who choose not to believe cannot be forced to believe. God is love, and love works persuasively, but never coercively. There is a hell; in the words of C. S. Lewis,

> I willingly believe that the damned are, in one sense, successful rebels to the end; that the doors of hell are locked on the *inside*. I do not mean that the ghosts may not *wish* to come out of hell … but they certainly do not will even the first preliminary stages of that self-abandonment through which alone the soul can reach any good. They enjoy forever the horrible freedom they have demanded, and are therefore self-enslaved. (*PP*, 115–16)

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE EXCLUSIVITY OF SALVATION (PLURALISM)

Christianity claims to be the true faith. Jesus says there is only one God (Mark 12:29) and that He is the only way to salvation (John 14:6; cf. 3:18; 10:1, 9–10). This is at odds with the dominant trend in modern comparative religion. Alister McGrath (b. 1953) succinctly summarizes the protest of pluralism:

> How can Christianity's claims to truth be taken seriously when there are so many rival alternatives and when "truth" itself has become a devalued notion? … [Allegedly,] no one can lay claim to possession of the truth. It is all a question of perspective. All claims to truth are equally valid. There is no universal or privileged vantage point that allows anyone to decide what is right and what is wrong. ("CPCCC" in *JETS*, 365)

For the exploration of this issue, several terms need to be distinguished.[1]

Pluralism is the belief that every religion is true: Each provides a genuine encounter with the Ultimate, and while one may be better than others, all are adequate.

Relativism, similar to pluralism, claims that every religion is true for the one adhering to it. If there is no objective religious truth,[2] then there are no criteria by which we can discern that one religion is true or better than another.

Inclusivism maintains that one religion is explicitly true, and all others are implicitly true.[3]

Exclusivism holds that only one religion is true and that what is opposed to it in other religions is false.[4]

That the unparalleled saving work of Christ is the only means of salvation is one of the great principles of Protestantism. Along with "Scripture alone" (Lat: *sola scriptura*) and "faith alone" (Lat: *sola fidei*), "salvation by grace alone through Christ alone" stands at the heart of evangelical theology.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR THE EXCLUSIVITY OF CHRIST'S SALVIFIC WORK

The fully bloomed New Testament doctrine that our salvation is possible only through the work of Christ is rooted in the Old Testament. From the very first Old Testament prediction about Jesus (Gen. 3:15) to the final prophecy (Mal. 4:3, 5), there is one and only one way by which human beings can be restored to relationship with God—through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The Exclusive Soteriological Claims of Christ

Jesus unequivocally states that He is the only means of salvation: "Whoever believes in [me] is not condemned, but *whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son*" (John 3:18). "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but *whoever rejects the Son will not see life*, for God's wrath remains on him" (3:36).

> I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber.… *I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved*. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. (10:1, 9)

Again: "*If you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins*" (8:24). The declaration of Jesus couldn't be more clear: "I am the way and the truth and the life. *No one comes to the Father except through me*" (14:6).

The Exclusive Soteriological Claims of Scripture

Not only does Jesus claim to be the only way to God, but His immediate followers also confirm His message: "Salvation is found in no one else, for *there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved*" (Peter,

in Acts 4:12). Paul adds, “There is one God and *one mediator* between God and men, *the man Christ Jesus*” (1 Tim. 2:5). The writer of Hebrews declares that “when [Christ] had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God … because *by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy*” (10:12, 14). John concludes:

> Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. *He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life*. (1 John 5:10–12)

The Soteriological Necessity of Believing in Christ

It is noteworthy that not only is the work of Christ needed for our salvation, but so is believing in the Christ who performed that work.[5] Peter says there is no salvation apart from His *name* (Acts 4:12). John emphasizes that believing in “the Son” [Christ] is salvifically mandated (John 3:18, 36; 1 John 5:10–12). As we have seen, Jesus Himself explicitly confirms this (John 8:24), and Paul also speaks about the need for *knowledge of and belief in Christ*:

> “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”[6] How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? (Rom. 10:13–14)

ANSWERING OBJECTIONS TO THE EXCLUSIVE CLAIMS OF CHRIST

Many protests have been raised against Christological exclusivism. From a biblical point of view, three are noteworthy.

Objection One—Based on Old Testament Saints Not Having Explicit Belief in Christ

It seems evident that not all of the Old Testament believers had explicit knowledge of the death and resurrection of Christ for their sins, yet the New Testament teaches that this is essential to salvation (cf. Rom. 10:9). Indeed, Paul claims this is the heart of the gospel (1 Cor. 15:1–6), which alone is the power of God to save (Rom. 1:16). In spite of some early predictions about Christ’s death

(Dan. 9; Isa. 53; Zech. 12) and resurrection (Ps. 2, 16) and of somehow foreseeing His day (John 8:56), there is no indication that every pre-Christian believer understood and overtly believed that Jesus would die for his or her sins and then be raised from the dead. Certainly the Ninevites who repented in response to Jonah's preaching did not have this knowledge (Jonah 3), but they were saved.[7]

In addition, it is beyond unlikely that every Israelite who brought a lamb to the temple understood that the sacrifice foreshadowed the Messiah, the coming Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world (cf. John 1:29). Hebrews 11:6 seems to indicate what is salvifically sufficient: "Anyone who comes to [God] must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." That is, soteriological necessity appears to be fulfilled if we believe (1) that God exists, and (2) that He will graciously save those who believe in Him. If this is correct, faith in Christ seems not to be needed for salvation.[8]

Response to Objection One

First, there is a difference between what is *absolutely* necessary and what is *normatively* necessary. It does not appear from Scripture to be absolutely necessary for God to require all people in all times to have explicit belief in the death and resurrection of Christ for salvation. Nonetheless, there is no reason God cannot have decreed that such faith is normatively necessary after Christ came and was proclaimed to the world. Paul implies exactly this: "[God] has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:31).

What was implicit in the Old Testament became explicit in the New Testament: Jesus of Nazareth, born of the Virgin Mary, was the long anticipated Passover Lamb (cf. John 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7). When Old Testament typology (implicit) became New Testament reality (explicit)—when the One prophesied became present—God apparently required[9] that everyone must now "believe in the Lord Jesus" in order to "be saved" (Acts 16:31). Paul confirmed, "I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus" (Acts 20:21).

Second, there is a biblical progress of revelation.[10] As time passed, God, the Creator of time, revealed more and more about His plan of redemption. For example, at first it was revealed that the coming Savior would be the seed of the

woman (Gen. 3:15), then the descendent of Shem (9:26), the offspring of Abraham (12:3), from the tribe of Judah (49:10), the son of David (2 Sam. 7:12), and so forth. With each new revelation comes a new obligation for believers to embrace it, just as when a new law is officially promulgated, citizens are obligated to incorporate it and live by it. "Ignorance" of the law (or truth) is not a valid excuse; "*now* [God] commands all people everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30).

Specifically, then, Christ's fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and typology makes it incumbent upon us to accept this revealed divine truth. For example, when the disciples of John the Baptist (who knew only of John's baptism and hadn't yet heard that the ascended Christ had sent the Holy Spirit) heard the message of Paul about this subsequent revelation, they were obligated to believe it. They did, and hence, received the Spirit (Acts 19:1–6).

Indeed, that progressive revelation brings progressive responsibility to believe seems to be the overall emphasis of the book of Hebrews. After showing the Jewish believers that Christ was "better than" the angels, Moses, Joshua, and the Old Testament priests, the author strongly exhorted them to believe this or they would receive the judgment of God. In no uncertain words, after instructing them that Christ offered "one sacrifice for sins forever" (10:12 NKJV), he warned them that "if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins" (10:26 NKJV). Thus, in view of progressive revelation, while it may not be *absolutely* necessary for a person to have explicit faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in order to be saved, God has willed such belief to be *normatively* necessary.

Objection Two—Based on the Difference Between *Fact* and *Knowledge of the Fact*

Inclusivists argue that exclusivism overlooks the difference between the *fact* of Christ's salvific work and the *knowledge of the fact*: They insist that a person *cannot* be saved without the former but *can* without the latter. For example, I can receive shoes as a gift, mailed to me from an unknown donor, without knowing who sent them (or, for that matter, which cow died to provide the leather). Why, then, can't a person receive the gift of salvation, provided by the death of Christ, without knowing about His sacrifice or why it was made?

Response to Objection Two

Exclusivists do not deny the logical possibility of being saved without the knowledge of how salvation was made possible. In fact, as already mentioned, it appears that many Old Testament believers were not fully aware of Christ's someday sacrifice and resurrection. However, the question is not *what is logically possible but what is actually true*. What we're really asking is this: How much knowledge of His plan of salvation does God require of us *in this present age* as a condition for our receiving His gift of salvation? The answer, as the above verses indicate, appears to include explicit knowledge of the gospel.[11]

Objection Three—Based on the Accusation That Exclusivism Is Unfair to the Unreached

If explicit knowledge of Christ's salvific work is a necessary condition for salvation, then isn't it unjust of God to condemn the unevangelized to eternal separation from Him? It seems blatantly unfair to punish people for irresponsibility in an area they didn't know they were responsible.

Response to Objection Three

A more complete response to this objection is provided later.[12] It is sufficient here to note that the premise of the objection is wrong, for it assumes that the unevangelized are without awareness as to what God requires of them. To the contrary, He declares that they know, and know "clearly," and thus are "without excuse" (Rom. 1:19–20). Further, they have truth "written on their hearts" and will *justly* perish if they refuse to respond (2:12–15). The light of creation and conscience is sufficient for their condemnation, yet the Bible promises that should they respond to the light they have, God can provide the knowledge sufficient for salvation.[13] As Peter said, "In every nation whoever fears Him [God] and works righteousness is accepted by Him" (Acts 10:35 NKJV). Hebrews adds that "he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (11:6 NKJV). Abraham reminds, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:25 KJV).

AN EXAMINATION OF THE CLAIMS OF

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM[14]

Against exclusivism, religious pluralism[15] claims that every religion is true, since each one provides a genuine encounter with what its adherents consider to be the Ultimate [God]. One religion may be more or less better than the others, but all are adequate. As such, pluralism is diametrically opposed to biblical exclusivism, which claims that Christianity is true and that anything opposed to it is false. Again, herein is the problem that McGrath accurately captures:

> How can Christianity's claims to truth be taken seriously when there are so many rival alternatives and when "truth" itself has become a devalued notion? … [It is alleged that] no one can lay claim to possession of the truth. It is all a question of perspective. All claims to truth are equally valid. There is no universal or privileged vantage point that allows anyone to decide what is right and what is wrong. ("CPCCC" in *JETS*, 365)

Pluralists set forth their arguments on several fronts. Each will be stated and treated in order. First, we will examine the claim of the alleged moral and spiritual equality of all religions.

The Argument That All Religions Teach Similar Truth

Pluralist John Hick (b. 1922) argues,

> I have not found that the people of the other world religions are, in general, on a different moral and spiritual level from Christians.… The basic ideal of love and concern for others and of treating them as you would wish them to treat you is, in fact, taught by all the great religious traditions. ("PV" in Okholm and Phillips, *FVSPW*, 39)

Hick contends that this is proven by statements found in other religions that are similar to the Golden Rule (ibid., 39–40).

Response

First, it is questionable that "the fruit of the Spirit" (Gal. 5:22) can actually be found in non-Christian doctrines. While no one denies there are "good people" who adhere to other faiths, their "goodness" does not demonstrate that they are manifesting the highest moral standard of love (*agape*). A man's generosity, kindness, and even death for his beliefs does *not* show that he lives out of true love (e.g., 1 Cor. 13:3). God's common grace *does* enable even evil people to do

good (e.g., Matt. 7:11); nevertheless, it is apparent that only God's supernatural love (*agape*) can compel a person to express it (cf. John 15:13; Rom. 5:6–8; 1 John 4:7).

Likewise, while many believe that William James (1842–1910) proved the equality of all forms of goodness in *Varieties of Religious Experience*, Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), in *Religious Affections*, convincingly showed that Christian godliness provides unique manifestations. My own decades of observation seem to confirm that there is a difference in the highest level of Christian and non-Christian piety in favor of Christianity. For example, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Islam have produced neither a Mother Teresa (1910–1997) nor the self-sacrificing *agape* love Jesus singles out as being unparalleled (John 15:13).[16]

Second, even a demonstration of some sort of practiced moral equality among most adherents of the world's prominent religions would not establish either the equality or inferiority of the Christian faith's moral teachings.

For one thing, a person flawlessly practicing a lesser moral code may appear to be "better" than a person imperfectly living in accordance with a higher one. In order to make a fair comparison, one must do two things: (1) Consider the highest moral teachings of each religion, and (2) compare the lives of the adherents who best exemplify the standards of each. For instance, doing so with Christianity and Hinduism and then evaluating the lives of Mother Teresa and Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948) demonstrates the matchlessness of Christian compassion for the needy.

What is more, we must differentiate between what was *inherent* in another religious paradigm before Christian influence and what was *incorporated* into it as the result of Christian example. Hinduism as a system does not generate social compassion; the societal beneficence found in some current forms of Hinduism are not indigenous. Such humanitarianism is an import from Christian faith and practice; in fact, the degree to which Gandhi himself displayed such compassion can be traced to his Christian training and to his self-confessed admiration for the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.

Also, finding a moral principle akin to Judeo-Christianity's Golden Rule (cf. Matt. 7:12) does not demonstrate the moral equality of all religions. *This is a manifestation of general revelation*, that is, the law of God written upon the hearts of all (Rom. 2:12–15). But general revelation neither contradicts *nor* equals special revelation.[17] While applied Christian morality has produced dynamic social compassion, Eastern religions have produced stagnant societies,

and Islam has created abusive and unloving ones.[18]

Third, Hick's analysis begs the question:[19] Only by assuming that the moral common denominator of all religions is the standard by which they should all be judged does he arrive at the obvious conclusion that they are all equal. He had to negate the unequaled aspects of Christian morality in order to show that Christianity is not superlative, which he seems to acknowledge in this confession:

> [The] acceptance of some form of the pluralistic view prompts each to de-emphasize and eventually winnow out that aspect of its self-understanding that entails a claim to unique superiority among the religions of the world. ("PV" in Okholm and Phillips, *FVSPW*, 51)

Fourth, the *moral* manifestation of a belief does not settle the *truth* question. For example, the fact that there are "good" Mormons does not prove Joseph Smith (1805–1844) was a true prophet.[20] Indeed, it is likely that he wasn't, since, for instance, he gave demonstrably false prophecies.[21] How adherents live is, *at best*, a. manifestation of their moral code, which may or may not have anything to do with whether their religion's central teachings about God and salvation are true. *Truth is what corresponds to reality*;[22] consequently, a worldview is true only if its fundamental tenets correspond to the real world, not if its followers live "good" lives.[23]

Fifth, and finally, the moral preeminence of Christianity does not rest on the imperfection of Christ's followers but on the perfection of Jesus Christ Himself. The ultimate test is not based on our fallible morality but on His unblemished character.[24] Accordingly, Christianity has a moral peerlessness that is recognized by even strongly non-evangelical theologians, such as Paul Tillich (1886–1965):

> Is Jesus unique only because history or historical factors converge in a certain way—in a uniquely significant way—at the time of his life? … No, no, no! I have now given already at least three answers to this. My chief answer was the lack of any "scar" which would show [in Jesus] an estrangement from God.… Another was the total self-sacrifice of him who is the Christ … The third answer was that he shows the presence, in his suffering on the cross, of an utter humility. (*UC*, 156)

One could also add a life full of incomparable miracles that climaxes in Jesus' resurrection from the dead.[25]

The Argument for the Alleged Redemptive Equality of All Religions

Another argument set forth by pluralists insists that there is no significant

salvific difference among the world's renowned religions. Regarding the Christian belief in an exceptional mode of salvation, Hick suggests this either begs the question or is not practically evident:

> If we define salvation as being forgiven and accepted by God because of Jesus' death on the cross, then it becomes a tautology[26] that Christianity alone knows and is able to preach the source of salvation. [And] if we define salvation as an actual human change, a gradual transformation from natural self-centeredness (with all the human evils that flow from this) to a radically new orientation centered in God and manifest in the "fruit of the Spirit," then it seems clear that salvation is taking place within all of the world religions—and taking place, so far as we can tell, to more or less the same extent. ("PV" in Okholm and Phillips, *FVSPW*, 43)

Furthermore, what is allegedly common to all religions is an adequate response to the Ultimate:

> [All religions] seem to constitute more or less equally authentic human awareness of and response to the Ultimate, the Real, the final ground and source of everything.… [There are] a plurality of religious traditions constituting different, but apparently more or less equally salvific, human responses to the Ultimate. These are the great world faiths, (ibid., 45, 47).

Response

Examination reveals several errors in his analysis.

First, Hick again begs the question—his whole argument is based on the a priori assumption that all religions have a proper (correct, acceptable) relation to what is truly Ultimate. In truth, perhaps they are *not* properly related or even connected at all to what is actually Ultimate. Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) pointed out in *Future of an Illusion* that deception is possible, and Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872) observed that "religion" can potentially be a simple projection of one's own imagination (*EC*, chapter 1). Also, Paul Tillich noted that a person can have an ultimate commitment to what is less than Ultimate, which he calls "demonization" (*UC*, 5).

Second, Hick incorrectly posits that all religions are nothing but human response to the Ultimate. This too begs the question, this time in favor of an antisupernatural perspective.[27] In fact, it assumes a pantheistic view of the Ultimate as that which, in the various world religions, transcends all particular (cultural) manifestations of It.[28]

Third, denial of the truth of any specific religion is itself a form of exclusivism; in this case, the argument favors the *particular* view known as pantheism in order to deny the *particularity* of a view known as Christian

theism. Even the pantheist makes a *particular* (specific, nongeneral, exclusivist) truth claim when his assertion opposes nonpantheistic views. Assuming this kind of pantheistic position as a basis for one's analysis of all religions, including nonpantheistic worldviews, once again simply begs the question. *When the pluralist* denies *that one particular religion is true as opposed to any others—in an effort to refute exclusivism—he himself thereby makes an exclusivist truth claim*; the objection, therefore, is self-defeating.

Fourth, pluralism frequently degenerates to the position that whatever is sincerely believed is true. However, this would mean, for example, that it matters not if one is a passionate Satanist or white-supremacist—in any event, his view is truth. In refutation, *sincerity is not a test of reality*. As has been said countless times, many sincere people, on many issues, have been sincerely wrong. All truth is true, no matter how we choose to respond to it.

Fifth, and finally, Hick's contention implies that all truth claims are a matter of both/and, not either/or. The fact is that opposites cannot both be true, for the opposite of true is false.[29] For instance, Hindu pantheism and Christian theism cannot both be true, since they affirm mutually exclusive worldviews.[30] Likewise, Christianity, which affirms Christ's literal death and resurrection, and Islam, which denies them, cannot both be correct.

The Argument That Christ Is Not Unique

Another pluralist objection to exclusivism is the allegation that Christ's excellence does not surpass that of other religious leaders. This attempt to destroy the uniqueness of Christianity is based on a denial of the historicity of the New Testament.[31] As for the Christian teaching about Christ as God incarnate in human flesh, Hick states that there are two primary problems.

The First Allegation

> The first problem is that the historical Jesus did not teach this doctrine… Among mainline New Testament scholars there is today a general consensus that these are not pronouncements of the historical Jesus but words put in his mouth some sixty or seventy years later by a Christian writer expressing the theology that had developed in his part of the expanding church. ("PV" in Okholm and Phillips, *FVSPW*, 52–53)

Hick then presents a number of biblical writers who supposedly agreed that "Jesus did not claim deity for himself" (ibid., 53).

Response

Hick is dreadfully misinformed on the matter. The historicity and reliability of the New Testament documents have been abundantly confirmed.[32] The related New Testament books were not written after the eyewitnesses were dead but while they were still alive. The gospel of John was written by John the apostle (21:24). The gospel of Luke was written by Doctor Luke, a contemporary disciple who knew the eyewitnesses (1:1–4). First Corinthians (which even biblical critics admit was written in A.D. 55–56) speaks of five hundred eyewitnesses (15:5–7), most of whom were living when Paul wrote it less than twenty-five years after Jesus' death. Even the late John A. T. Robinson (1919–1981), a liberal New Testament scholar, dated some of the Gospels as early as A.D. 40–60,[33] much too early to support Hick's view of documents written by a later generation that had already formulated a view contrary to that of the historical Jesus. Therefore, since the Gospels are reporting, not creating, the words and deeds of Christ, there is firm support for His unique and specific claims to be God incarnate, and, thus, indescribably superior to other religious leaders.[34]

The Second Allegation

> The second problem is that it has not proved possible, after some fifteen centuries of intermittent effort, to give any clear meaning to the idea that Jesus had two complete natures, one human and the other divine.… Is it really possible for infinite knowledge to be housed in a finite human brain? … Do we really want to claim that Jesus was literally omnipotent but pretended not to be, as in Mark 6:5? …[35] While he was good, loving, wise, just, and merciful, there is an obvious problem about how a finite human being could have these qualities in an *infinite* degree. A finite being cannot have *infinite* attributes. ("PV" in Okholm and Phillips, *FVSPW*, 55–56)

Response

Hick falls short of claiming that the Incarnation involves an outright logical contradiction, though his language could be taken to imply the same. Even so, if the Incarnation is *not* a logical contradiction, then there is no demonstrated incoherence in the exclusivist view. Hick himself admits that "it is logically permissible to believe anything that is not self-contradictory" (*MGI*, 104).

As for the claim that it is difficult to show just how the Incarnation is a reality, on the same grounds one would have to reject much of our common experience *and* some of modern science, which has difficulty explaining how

light can be both waves and particles. No scientist has been known to give up his belief in light in response to this challenge.

Also, Hick appears to be misinformed about the orthodox theistic view of the two natures of Jesus Christ, embracing an unorthodox view known as monophysitism,[36] which confuses the divine and human natures. His question "Is it really possible for infinite knowledge to be housed in a finite human brain?" reveals this untenable entanglement, for classical theism does *not* claim there was infinite knowledge in the finite brain of Christ. Rather, it affirms that Christ possessed two distinct natures, one infinite and the other finite. The person of Jesus, then, had infinite knowledge only in His infinite nature. As God, He knew all things; as man, Jesus grew in knowledge (Luke 2:52). The same applies to His other attributes; for example, He was omnipotent as God but limited as man.[37]

The Argument for the Supposed Intolerance of Exclusivism

A more severe tone is struck by pluralists when they engage in name-calling by charging that nonpluralists are *intolerant*. (Exclusivism, by nature, maintains that one view is true and that what is opposed to it in other views is false.) Why should one paradigm possess the truth while the others are disenfranchised?

Response

First, if holding an exclusivist view makes one intolerant, then pluralists are also intolerant, for they claim that their view is true to the exclusion of opposing views (like exclusivism). They certainly wouldn't tolerate the position that their pluralistic view *and* opposing (nonpluralistic) views were both true.[38]

Second, if the charge of intolerance is leveled not because of the *content* of the view but rather the *manner* in which one holds it, then the argument is irrelevant—there is no single view that dominates intolerance, and a pluralist can be as intolerant as anyone else. For that matter, there could be both tolerant exclusivists and intolerant pluralists. All of this notwithstanding, *the attitude with which one holds a view has no bearing on its truth value*. Being intolerant about truth does not make it false any more than being tolerant about error makes it true. Studying under a dogmatic mathematician does not mean 7×3 isn't 21, and studying under a broadminded mathematician does not mean $8 + 6$ is 15.

Third, the very concept of tolerance implies an actual disagreement. We don't tolerate that with which we agree—we already affirm it. Tolerance suggests that there are opposing views in the first place; the very concept presupposes a *nonpluralistic* (i.e., exclusivist) view of truth.

The Argument for Exclusivism's Alleged Narrow-Mindedness

Pluralists constantly allege that nonpluralists are *narrow-minded:* They claim that their view is true, and everything that opposes it is in error. Again, this seems utterly presumptuous: Why should only exclusivists be in possession of the truth?

Response

Pluralists (P) and exclusivists (E) make an equal claim to truth and error—both claim that their view is true and whatever opposes it is false. For instance, if E is true, then all non-E is false. Likewise, if P is true, then all non-P is false. *Exclusivism and pluralism are equally "narrow"; all truth is narrow*. After all, 2 + 3 is not 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 or any other number to infinity except 5. There is only one true answer: This *is* narrow, and whether or not we like it, that's the way truth is.[39]

The Argument for Exclusivism's Supposed Intellectual Imperialism

Another charge against exclusivism is that of intellectual imperialism: Exclusivists, allegedly, are totalitarian with regard to truth, and they should be more open to input from other sources. Some pluralists go so far as to claim that not only *truth* but the very idea of *meaning* smacks of fascism (cited by McGrath, "CPCCC" in *JETS*).

Response

While this allegation has appeal, it is without merit with regard to determining what is true and what is false.

First, this accusation is often fallaciously presented ad hominem, attacking the person rather than the position.

Second, the objection has an unjustified presumption, namely, that truth should be more *democratic*. Reality check: Truth is not decided by majority

vote! Again, truth is what corresponds to reality, whether most of us believe it or not.[40]

Third, do pluralists really believe that all views are equally true and good? Are fascism and/or marxism as desirable as the preservation of human freedom? Should we have accepted the burning of Hindu widows during the funeral rites of their husbands? No, no, and no.

THE UNEVEN GROUND OF PLURALISM

Pluralism maintains several dubious premises, among which are the following.

That There Are Universally Agreed-Upon Trans-Religious Moral Criteria

In order to validate the argument for trans-religious moral equality, one must assume a set of moral criteria, not unique to any particular religion, by which all of them can be measured. However, pantheistic pluralists generally refuse to accept *any* universally binding moral law. If there were such an absolute morality, then there would also be an absolute Moral Lawgiver. As mentioned in Volume 1, only theistic-type religions accept these criteria, and even then some deny the absolutely perfect nature of God.[41]

That All Religious Phenomena Can Be Naturalistically Explained

Beneath the pluralisms disdain for exclusivism is the preconceived premise that all religious phenomena can be accounted for through naturalistic explanation: Anything supernatural is simply and completely unacceptable. This before-the-fact naturalism, though, is without basis—miracles cannot be discounted a priori.[42] Neither are miracles incredible, as was maintained by David Hume (1711–1776—see *ECHU* and *THN*). As we noted in Volume 1, not only is there evidence for miracles, but there is *substantial* evidence for both the astounding supernatural act of the world's *ex nihilo* ("out of nothing") creation[43] and the earthshaking miracle of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.[44]

That the World Is "Religiously Ambiguous"

Again, John Hick maintains that "the universe, as presently accessible to us, is capable of being interpreted intellectually and experientially in both religious and naturalistic ways" (*IR*, 129). "The Real is perfectly undifferentiated; that is, it has no properties to which our concepts veridically [truly or truthfully] apply" (Geivett, "RJH" in Okholm and Phillips, *FVSPW*, 77).

In response,[45] *first*, it is self-defeating to claim that *we know that we cannot know* the Real.[46]

Second, that we do not know reality *exhaustively* doesn't mean we cannot know it *actually*. Douglas Geivett (b. 1959) confirms: "To the extent that God is known at all, he is known truly" (ibid.).

Third, the very notion of an undifferentiated Real[47] is at least implausible if not self-defeating. Hick's suggestion that the Real can be illustrated by the concept of Buddhist sunyata[48] is a case in point: If the Real (Ultimate) is undifferentiated—if it has no correlation with our interpretation and understanding—how, then, can any symbol represent it?

Fourth, neither can the Real be manifested in various traditions (which Hick contends). In order for something to be *manifested* (displayed, presented, demonstrated), at least some of its characteristics must be *revealed*; the Real, as totally undifferentiated, has no discernible characteristics and, hence, could not be experientially expressed in any meaningful way (ibid.).

Fifth, and finally, there is a kind of mystical epistemology presumed in this "God is unknowable" approach, an imperialistic decree on how God can and cannot reveal Himself. One wonders what pipeline to metaphysical truth supplied this absolute information (ibid.).

That Pluralistic Dialogue Is the Only Way to Truth

Another erroneous presupposition is that pluralistic interreligious dialogue is the best (if not the only) valid way to discover truth. A concomitant fallacy is the assumption that no genuine religious discussion is possible if one assumes his belief is true in advance of the dialogue—this is taken as sure proof that he is not "open to truth." True dialogue assumes that one is tolerant, open, humble, willing to listen and learn, engaging in a shared search for truth in a self-sacrificing, other-oriented love (Hick, *IR*, 239); exclusivism, allegedly, allows for none of these.

In response to this charge, it is necessary to point out, for one thing, that true dialogue is *not* dependent upon the adoption of a pluralistic position on truth.

One can (and, according to Christian belief, must) have the attitude of love, humility, and openness without sacrificing his convictions. For example, one can have a philosophical discussion about the law of noncontradiction[49] without giving up his belief that this precept is absolutely necessary for all cogent thought on either side of the dialogue. Furthermore, the pluralist violates his own imperative in that he is not willing to give up his commitment to pluralism as a condition for such dialogue. Again, the very concept of "tolerance" implies that some views are wrong—it is evil and error that are tolerated. It makes no more sense to say that we "tolerate truth" than it does to say that we "tolerate goodness."

That Hick's View Is Religiously Neutral

Pluralists like John Hick are frequently disguised in religious neutrality, yet *no such thing exists*. Pluralism is not religiously neutral but is patterned after Hinduism's conception of the Transcendent and is antagonistic to the core principles of Christianity. Furthermore, pluralism does not actually encourage genuine dialogue between the traditions—it renders vacuous the *notion* of being part of a given "religious tradition." According to pluralists, every tradition is essentially the same; to accept pluralism is not to "embrace openness" but to reject one's own tradition for another—that is, the pluralist's.

That a Relativistic View of Truth Is Correct

Beneath the pluralistic assertion that all major religions have equal claim to the truth is a relativistic view of truth itself. As we have seen, the denial of absolute truth is self-defeating. It claims that relativism is true for everyone, everywhere, and always. What is true for everyone, everywhere, and always is an absolute truth. Therefore, relativism suicidally claims that *relativism* is absolutely true.[50]

CONCLUSION

Pluralism's claim that all religions are true is self-refuting, for the undeniable law of noncontradiction affirms that opposites cannot both be correct.[51] Consequently, for instance, since Islam claims there is only one person in God,

and Christianity says there are three, both religions cannot be right on this point. Likewise, since Islam teaches that Jesus did not die on the cross and rise from the dead on the third day, and Christianity teaches that He did, one of them is wrong.[52] The same is true of all core beliefs of all religions—some affirm there is a theistic God (e.g., Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), while others hold to a pantheistic God (e.g., Hinduism, Zen Buddhism, and Taoism). God cannot be both transcendent over the world (as in theism) and not transcendent over it (as in pantheism). If theism is true, then pantheism is false.[53]

Further, pluralism's claim that all religions are equal is unsubstantiated, for in the process of making this charge pluralists maintain unproven presuppositions (such as naturalism and pantheism). They further argue contrary to fact by denying the historicity of the New Testament.[54] What is more, they reduce all religions to their basic common denominator and then claim that none is unique. This begs the question because we cannot determine whether one religion is unique by neglecting uniqueness in favor of comparing it with other religions on the basis of what it has in common with them. In brief, pluralism fails both in fact and in philosophy.

Finally, and fatally, pluralism is hanged on its own gallows, for while it denies exclusivism on the grounds that no view can make an exclusive claim to truth, nonetheless, it claims that pluralism is exclusively true—that is, true to the exclusion of all forms of nonpluralism (such as exclusivism). If pluralism is exclusively true, then it is not actually pluralism but a form of exclusivism.

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE RESULTS OF SALVATION (Infants and Heathen)

Salvation is all-encompassing, including the past, present, and future. It also affects all of creation, saved and unsaved, animate and inanimate, human and angelic. Part of this chapter is a summary outline designed to provide a more comprehensive and unified soteriological perspective. Most of it, however, directly and more thoroughly deals with two important topics: the redemptive status of the unborn and the state of the unevangelized (the heathen).

THE RESULTS OF SALVATION ON HUMAN BEINGS AND CREATION

Human beings are the definitive focus of God's magnificent plan of salvation. Nevertheless, the physical world, which stages the salvific saga, and the angelic world, which surrounds it, are likewise significant participants in the overall drama.

The Results of Salvation on the Saved

Of course, as demonstrated in part 1, salvation presupposes the Fall—there is

no need to restore perfection unless we no longer have it. Therefore, salvation begins where the Fall ends; salvation is not a single event but an overarching process beginning in Genesis 3 (paradise lost) and continuing through Revelation 22 (paradise regained). Historically, salvation includes its Old Testament *anticipation* and its New Testament *realization*.

Salvation includes three spectacular events:

(1) The *official victory* over sin by the Cross;[1]
(2) The *practical victory* over sin within believers;[2]
(3) The *final victory* over sin at the Second Coming.[3]

As we observed in chapter 6, the first step provides *justification* (by which we are saved from the *penalty* of sin), the second is the process of *sanctification* (by which we are rescued from the *power* of sin), and the last will achieve *glorification* (by which we are delivered from the very *presence* of sin).

The Results of Salvation on the Lost

While those who reject Christ cannot be saved after death,[4] nonetheless, they will be affected by the process of salvation. All humans, saved and unsaved, will be resurrected (cf. Dan. 12:1–3; John 5:28–29; Rev. 20:1–3); as we have seen, all people are made justifiable by virtue of Christ's death and resurrection (cf. Rom. 5:15–19; 2 Cor. 5:19; 1 Tim. 4:10). Even angels are affected by the marvel of God's plan of salvation for the world (cf. Eph. 3:10; 1 Peter 1:12).[5]

Lost angels will be judged by human beings (1 Cor. 6:3), and lost human beings will be condemned by their refusal to accept the testimony of the saved (2 Thess. 1:1–9): "This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ" (Rom. 2:16). The very word of God is a savor of life unto life to those who believe, but it is a savor of death unto death to those who reject it. Jesus said, "There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day" (John 12:48). In brief, Christ's work of salvation has an extensive influence on both the saved and the lost, positively and negatively.

The Condemnation of the Lost Is Just

God's condemnation of the lost will serve justice because His message was

sent to all the world (Matt. 28:18–20; Acts 1:8). Paul said, “This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant” (Col. 1:23). Jesus also told His disciples: “This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matt. 24:14). Those who did not hear the gospel *could* have,[6] for God rewards those who seek Him (Heb. 11:6) and, as Peter said, “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right” (Acts 10:34–35). When people respond to the light of creation (Rom. 1:19–20) and/or conscience (Rom. 2:12–15), God provides the light of redemption—He knows exactly who will be where when the gospel is preached (Acts 17:26), and He knows that no one who would have received salvation did not have the opportunity.

The Condemnation of the Lost Is Final

As we have seen, Hebrews 9:27 teaches that every person “is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.” In a story regarding the separation of heaven and hell, one of Jesus’ characters said, “Between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us” (Luke 16:26). Reflecting on the eternal state, John declares: “Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy” (Rev. 22:11). Both destinies are final—in the end the wheat will be separated from the chaff, the good from the evil, and the sheep from the goats.

The Condemnation of the Lost Is Eternal

The eventual state of the wicked is not only final, but it is also eternal (everlasting):[7]

> All the nations will be gathered before him [Christ], and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.…” Then he will say to those on his left, “Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt. 25:32–34, 41).

Paul adds,

> This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power. (2 Thess. 1:7–9)

Two additional categories emerge for discussion: infants and the heathen. Both deserve special attention because of the unique difficulties they present.

The Question of Salvation for Infants

The eternal status of infants has always been a thorny issue in orthodox Christian theology. On the one hand, to many it seems eminently unjust to condemn babies to eternal flames. On the other hand, they are conceived in sin (Ps. 51:5) and, like the rest of Adam's race, they are "by nature the children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3 KJV). Likewise, the Bible proclaims that faith is a condition[8] for receiving God's gift of salvation (John 3:16–18; Acts 16:31), and infants are not able to believe. What is more, Scripture seems to teach that all persons must make their decision in this life for the next one; infants who die as infants in this life are not old enough to have faith. The pros and cons of various views are discussed below in some detail.

The Question of Salvation for the Heathen

The matter of salvation for the unevangelized (heathen) poses a potential problem for God's omnibenevolence.[9] If God is all-loving, how can He send to an eternal hell people who have never heard the Good News of salvation? This dilemma is made more acute by some estimates that a large portion of the world's more than six billion people have never heard a clear gospel presentation, at least not in their own language.

Christian apologists have offered two basic answers. Some believe the heathen can be saved apart from the gospel by responding to the light of general revelation (creation and conscience). Others believe that God provides the truth of the gospel (special revelation) to those who earnestly seek Him. This issue is also discussed more fully below.

The Results of Salvation on Angelic Beings

Angels, like human beings, have free will.[10] Some used it to serve God, and

others exercised it to rebel against Him. Those who chose to serve their Creator received the beatific vision; Jesus said that they "always see the face of my Father" (Matt. 18:10). Those who chose to follow Satan in his rebellion against God, leaving their "first estate" (Jude 6 KJV), received the wrath of the Father and are condemned to eternal damnation (Matt. 25:41). Both groups—faithful and unfaithful are affected by the Cross.

The Results of Salvation on Good Angels: The Beatific Vision

The reward of good angels is to see God face-to-face. In this beatified state, having beheld an absolute Good, they cannot now choose evil.[11] Even though the angels who never sinned do not personally need the work of the Cross for their salvation, nonetheless, they rejoice when humans are saved (Luke 15:10) and join in when the song of redemption is sung in heaven (Rev. 5:9–11). God's salvation of the church, the bride of Christ, is the object of their heavenly inquiry (1 Peter 1:12; Eph. 3:10).

The Results of Salvation on Evil Angels: Eternal Suffering

Even though the wicked angels are irredeemable (Heb. 2:16), it is by the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus that His victory over them is pronounced:

> Having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. (Col. 2:14–15)

By virtue of our redeemed status, even we will be used in God's judgment on the angels of evil (1 Cor. 6:3).

The Results of Salvation on Creation

Although human beings (and only human beings) are the object and focus of biblical salvation (cf. Heb. 2:14–16), their physical surroundings were involved in the Fall (cf. Rom. 8:18ff.), and we will be the beneficiaries of their redemption. There will be both a restoration of paradise on earth and a renovation of the whole created heaven and earth (cf. Rev. 21).

The Restoration of Paradise

According to the Revelation, paradise lost will become paradise regained. What was lost by the first Adam will be regained by the Last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45). Death will be reversed, sin will be defeated and banished, and pain will be eliminated. As we have seen, John described it in these words:

> Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Rev. 21:1–4).

Again, Paul saw it in terms of the liberation of all creation that had been subject to the Fall:

> I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.
>
> We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. (Rom. 8:18–23)

The Renovation of the Universe

Following Isaiah's prediction (Isa. 65:17), Peter recorded the broadening of the scope of salvation to include the entire created universe that has been infected by sin (cf. Job 15:15; Eph. 2:2; Dan. 8–9):

> The day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.
>
> Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. (2 Peter 3:10–13)

This will be the ultimate ecological redemption to which our most noble and commendable contemporary efforts will pale in significance.

THE RESULTS OF SALVATION ON INFANTS

We now return to soteriological questions regarding infants and the heathen. As to the former, several views have been proposed; we will examine the merits and difficulties of each.

The Baptized-Infant View (God Saves Only Baptized Infants)

This view is held only by sacramentalists who believe both (1) that infant baptism is efficacious and (2) that baptism is necessary for salvation. Some Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and Anglicans espouse this position, and Ambrose (339–397) set it forth:

> No one ascends into the kingdom of heaven, except by means of the sacrament of baptism.… Moreover to this there is no exception, not the infant, nor he who is unavoidably prevented [from being baptized].… They have, however, immunity from pains, (cited by Sanders, *NON*, 291)

Herein are the seeds of the limbo doctrine.[12]

Augustine (354–430) has been given the dubious honor of being the first to teach the damnation of all *unbaptized* infants—essentially, the wrath of God abides on them (*E*, 46; 1.28, 33–35). He did allow, however, that unbaptized infants who die do not suffer as severely as those who live to adulthood and commit actual sins (ibid., 1.21).

The argument for the baptized-infant view is stark and straightforward: Baptism is essential for salvation; therefore, no unbaptized person—including infants—can be saved. Consequent to the position's harshness, modifications were forthcoming. Pelagius (c. 354–c. 420), Augustine's nemesis, reacted against the teaching of unbaptized infant damnation: "Where they are not, I know; where they are, I know not" (cited by Sanders, *NON*, 292).[13] Eventually a "middle place" between heaven and hell was developed that was later called *limbo*. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) upheld Augustine's view but softened it by claiming that unbaptized infants who die do not experience the pain of hell. This, in practice, is virtually indistinguishable from limbo.

Other theologians have put forth the Catholic idea of "baptism of desire" to solve the problem—that is, people can be saved by their desire for baptism if they are prevented from obtaining it. Since the concept of infants desiring baptism is untenable, these apologists posit that the desire of their parents or the church is sufficient. "This idea goes back at least to Hincmar of Rheims (A.D. 860)" (Sanders, *NON*, 293). How, though, can the desire of someone else be effective, when an individual's salvation is a personal matter? To many, vicariously desired baptism seems as meaningless as vicarious marriage.

Critique of the Baptized-Infant View

First, the entire scenario is dependent on a sacramental theology that demands infant baptism as a condition for salvation. Anabaptists[14] reject this in favor of the premise that personal faith is the only condition for salvation.[15] After all, baptism is a work of "righteousness" (Matt. 3:15), and the Bible makes it clear that we are not saved by righteous works (cf. Rom. 4:5; Eph. 2:8–9; Titus 3:5–7). If baptism does not save,[16] then neither does infant baptism.

Second, the baptized-infant view (that the only infants saved are those who are baptized) seems harsh and cruel because it portrays a merciless God. By contrast, the Bible reveals a God of infinite mercy, grace, and love.[17]

Third, some have asked how a child who is innocent of any personal (actual) fault can be banned from heaven and cast into hell. Are not people held responsible only for their own sins? Ezekiel wrote: "The soul who sins is the one who will die.… The righteousness of the righteous man will be credited to him, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against him" (Ezek. 18:20; cf. Rom. 2:6; 14:12).

Fourth, and finally, the baptized-infant view does not adequately account for the body of scriptural teaching used to support the view that all infants, irrespective of baptism, go to heaven.[18]

The Elect-Infant View (God Saves Only Elect Infants)

Another position asserts that the only deceased babies who go to heaven are the ones who are elect. Since Protestants believe in only two possible destinies,[19] the elect-infant view implies that all non-elect infants go to hell. John Calvin (1509–1564), who rejected the baptized-infant view in favor of the elect-infant position (*ICR*, 4.16.17), contended that while salvation is *ordinarily* obtained through hearing the Word of God,[20] nonetheless, God is not limited to that means. Infants who are saved are not granted salvation because they are innocent —no one is. The entire human race sinned in Adam (Rom. 5:12); some of the elect die in infancy, while others grow to become adults.

As for the argument that faith is *absolutely* necessary for salvation, Calvin replied that Paul (in Rom. 10:14ff.) is "only describing the *usual economy* and dispensation which the Lord is wont to employ in calling His people, and *not* laying down *an invariable rule*, for which no other method can be substituted" (*ICR*, 4.16.19, emphasis added). Infants, like adults, are saved by the divine regeneration of their souls, and Calvin taught that God can do this with or

without their knowledge of His salvific plan or their placing of conscious faith in Christ (ibid., 4.16.17, 20–21).

In addition, Calvin believed that Jesus personally assured the salvation of elect infants: “Christ bids them be brought to him. Why so? Because he is life. Therefore, that he may quicken them, he makes them partners with himself” (ibid., 4.16.17). Further,

> Christ was sanctified from earliest infancy, that he might sanctify his elect in himself at any age, without distinction.… If in Christ we have a perfect pattern of all the graces which God bestowed on all his children, in this instance we have proof that the age of infancy is not incapable of receiving sanctification. (ibid., 4.16.18)

Commenting on Matthew 19:14,[21] Calvin said:

> From this we gather that His grace reaches to this age of life also.… It would be too cruel to exclude that age from the grace of redemption.… From this it follows that they were regenerate by the Spirit in the hope of salvation. And finally, that he embraced them was a testimony that Christ reckoned them in His flock. (*CC*, 2.252)

Calvin nowhere affirmed that this regeneration extends to *all* children. We are left with the logical interpretation that as with adults, salvation is possible only for the elect: Non-elect children, like non-elect adults, will be lost.

Concurrently, the Calvinistic Canons of Dort[22] offered the reassurance that “godly parents ought not to doubt the election and salvation of their children whom it pleased God to call out of this life in their infancy” (article 17). *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (1646–1648) likewise affirmed that “elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ” (10.3). This does not *necessarily* limit elect infants to elect parents, but it can be and *has been* taken to imply the same. Even so, the straightforward implication is that non-elect infants are eternally doomed.

The rationale for only elect infants being saved is that since God chose the elect before they were born, even before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4; cf. Rom. 8:29), it is reasonable to infer that He chose certain infants to be saved and not others. Ultimately, salvation does not come from human will (Rom. 9:16). Indeed, most Calvinists believe that God has to give faith itself to the elect, often citing Ephesians 2:8–9 and Philippians 1:29 in support. This being the case, it matters not that infants are too young to believe.

As for the justice of God, according to the elect-infant view, God justly condemns the whole human race because of Adam’s sin (Rom. 5:12ff.). We are

all, from the moment of conception (Ps. 51:5), sinners by nature (Eph. 2:3), who are deserving of eternal isolation from God. He has no obligation to save anyone, and it is only by His grace that He saves some. Among these, God chose to elect some who would die in infancy and some who would live to adulthood. These elect—and these elect alone—will be accepted into heaven.

Critique of the Elect-Infant View

The elect-infant view has not been met with wide acceptance outside extreme Calvinist circles; in fact, even some strong Calvinists oppose it.[23]

First, the elect-infant view denies universally accessible salvation. Christ did not die only for the elect but for all,[24] and salvation is not offered only to the elect but to all. As we have seen, John says that Christ "is the propitiation for our sins, and *not for ours only, but also for [the sins of] the whole world*" (1 John 2:2 NKJV). In the same context, he adds that *world* (from Gk: *kosmos*) means the entire unbelieving, fallen world (vv. 15–17). Peter spoke of the apostate as being "bought" by Christ's blood (2 Peter 2:1). If salvation is for all, then why posit its availability only for elect infants, excluding potential soteriological application for the rest? Indeed, as cited previously, John Calvin himself, the oft-called "father of Calvinism," insisted:

> We must now see in what ways we become possessed of the blessings which God has bestowed on his only begotten Son, not for private use, but to enrich the poor and needy. And the first thing to be attended to is, that so long as we are without Christ and separated from him, nothing which *he suffered and did for the salvation of the human race* is of the least benefit to us. (*ICR*, 3.1.1, emphasis added)

Furthermore,

> We should note, however, that Paul does not here contrast the larger number with the many, for *he is not speaking of the great number of mankind*, but he argues that since the sin of Adam has destroyed many [all],[25] *the righteousness of Christ will be no less effective for the salvation of many [all]. (CC*, on Rom. 5:15, emphasis added)

Thus,

> I approve of the ordinary reading, that [Christ] alone bore the punishment of many, because *on him was laid the guilt of the whole world*. It is evident from other passages, and especially from the fifth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, that "*many" sometimes denotes "all*" (ibid., on Isa. 53:12, emphasis added).

He added,

> *The word "many" does not mean a part of the world only, but the whole human race:* [Paul] contrasts "many" with "one," as if to say that [Jesus] would not be the Redeemer of one man, but would meet death to deliver many of their cursed guilt. *It is incontestable that Christ came for the expiation of the sins of the whole world. (EPG*, IX.5, emphasis added)

Second, Peter states that God desires to save everyone (2 Peter 3:9), and Paul confirms that God "wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). If God desires all to receive salvation, and if it is possible to save *some* infants (i.e., the elect) apart from personal faith (as taught by the elect-infant view), then why would He not elect *all* of them to salvation?

Third, it is of little comfort for anyone other than elect parents to be assured that elect infants are saved. For example, teaching that infant salvation is limited to only those of believing parents offers no hope for the unevangelized.[26] The heathen have not yet heard the gospel and, as such, are not part of *the* covenant family in general or covenant families in particular. It's possible that God is calling out a people for His sake—from "every nation, tribe, people and language" (Rev. 7:9)—from among infants in heathen lands as well.

Fourth, the elect-infant view presents an indescribably severe conceptualization of God's justice and mercy. While all orthodox theologians accept that humans are born in sin, not all of them see this as sufficient grounds for excluding God's love from *anyone*. Once again, while there is nothing in fallen humans that merits salvation, there is something in God—omnibenevolence—that prompts Him to seek the salvation of everyone He has created (cf. John 3:16; Rom. 5:6–8).

Fifth, the elect-infant view fails to distinguish between an inherited sin nature (on which all orthodox Christians agree) and a personal rebellion against God, which only those old enough to consciously sin can choose (cf. John 9:41). That is, the natural bent toward evil is one thing; living in rejection and defiance of God is another. Since infants have not exercised the latter, they are not in the same category as willfully rebellious adults.

Sixth, while our definition of "total depravity"[27] entails all infants being born in sin, nevertheless, the Bible teaches that Christ reversed this curse (which we inherited from Adam—Rom. 5:12–19) and that God will judge human beings only on the sins they have actually and personally committed in this life.[28] Infants have not committed such sins; hence, it seems to follow that God does not condemn those who die before adulthood.

Seventh, and finally, it is problematic to reconcile the elect-infant view with the seemingly universal demand that one must believe in order to be saved (e.g., John 3:36; Acts 16:31; Rom. 10:17). There appears to be no way a baby can express conscious, explicit faith in God.[29] Relatedly, on two grounds, the verses that allegedly support the position that saving faith is a gift of God are rejected as evidence for the elect-infant view.

For one thing, none of them clearly teaches that saving faith is a gift God gives only to some. For example, in Ephesians 2:8–9 it is not *faith* that is God's gift but *salvation*.[30]

Furthermore, it would contradict the rest of God's Word to say that saving faith is a gift given only to some: Scripture calls on all people to believe (e.g., Acts 16:31; 17:30; Rom. 10:13–14) and condemns them if they do not (John 3:18–19). This biblical mandate presumes that they have the ability to believe.[31]

The Foreknown-Infant View (God Saves Only Those Infants He Foreknew Would Have Believed)

According to the foreknown-infant position, God, the omniscient Being, foreknows which infants would have believed if they had lived long enough to choose to do so. Accordingly, He will save *only* those infants; the rest are lost, since they would not have believed even if they had lived to adulthood.

The foreknown-infant argument has commonalities with both the electinfant view (see above) and the evangelized-after-death-infant view (see below). For instance, it affirms that God is omniscient (Ps. 139:1–6), and, as such, He knows "the end from the beginning" (Isa. 46:10); indeed, He "foreknew" the elect (Rom. 8:29). Adherents point out that there seems to be no logical reason why these foreknown ones could not have included those elect who would die in infancy.

One advantage the foreknown-infant position has over the elect-infant view is that it avoids the suggestion that God is unmerciful and/or unjust.[32] Another strong point is that it takes faith into account as a condition for receiving salvation (cf. John 3:16–19) and thus avoids the declaration (or implication) that God saves some apart from their willingness to receive everlasting life. Another value of the foreknown-infant view is that it preserves God's omnibenevolence, His universally manifest love.

Critique of the Foreknown-infant View

While the drawbacks with this position are perhaps not insurmountable, nonetheless, there are some difficulties that should be noted.

First, from a strong Calvinist perspective, it is objected that in the foreknown-infant view God's foreknowledge is *based on* human freedom rather than on His absolute sovereignty (see Nash, *WBD*, 79). That is, the foreknown-infant view holds that God saves these babies *because of* their foreseen faith. This appears to negate the *unmerited* grace of God, who acts solely "according to the good pleasure of His will" (Eph. 1:5 NKJV) and not due to anything we determine or accomplish (Eph. 2:8–9).

Even for a strong Calvinist, though, this objection is not telling. One need not hold that God's foreknowledge is *based on* anyone's free will but simply, as the Scriptures say, *in accord with* it (cf. 1 Peter 1:2). In other words, foreknowledge and election are coordinate, co-eternal properties of God; for instance, He may have simply (and graciously) ordained that for the elect, potential free choice would be the means through which He would elect them.

Second, if the act of believing is a necessary condition for anyone to receive salvation, it is difficult to understand how it is sufficient for their salvation that God simply foreknew these infants *would have* believed had they lived longer lives (i.e., that He saves them in view of their *potential* faith). Of course, on the assumption that babies "grow up" in heaven (it's difficult to picture eternal infants), they will have a chance to *actually* believe, which would resolve the question of how potential faith can be accepted (in advance) for actual faith. However, if this *is* the case, then technically the matter is no longer within the realm of *infant* salvation (salvation *as* infants), since they would not actually be saved until after infancy, namely, when they were old enough to believe for themselves.

Third, like the baptized-infant view, the foreknown-infant position lacks explicit biblical support. There are no passages declaring this is in fact what God will do with infants; hence, it seems to be more suited to the category of theological possibility.

Fourth, how can someone be saved by *potential* faith? Again, if faith is a necessary condition for salvation,[33] either in this life or in the next, then God's foreknowledge alone—His knowing that they *would have* believed—is insufficient. To respond by arguing that not only *would* they believe, given time in this life, but also that they *do* believe after death (when they "grow up") is to reduce the foreknown-infant view to the evangelized-after-death-infant

position.[34]

Fifth, some modern Catholic theologians (and others) speak of infants as exercising "implicit faith," but how can sense be made of this concept? How can someone whose cognitive and conscientious faculties are undeveloped possibly express *any* kind of faith? For example, while infants are dependent on their parents for meeting their many needs, they make no deliberate choice to trust or believe for this: it is instinctive. Faith, at least saving faith as scripturally described, is *not* automatic; it is a conscious, voluntary act.

Sixth, to many opponents this view involves the seemingly horrible injustice of condemning—to eternal damnation—those non-foreknown infants who have never actually sinned. In this sense it is comparable to the extreme Calvinist elect-infant view; to critics, such teaching seems eminently unloving.

In response, a proponent of the foreknown-infant view could argue for the undeniable possibility that *all* who die in infancy would have believed had they lived long enough. This modified position would blend into the all-infant salvation views.

THE ALL-INFANT SALVATION VIEWS

Since the seventeenth century more people (of variable theological persuasions) have held to universal infant salvation than to any other position, so much so that, strangely, even some Calvinists who maintain limited atonement embrace a form of it (e.g., see Nash, *WBD*, chapter 5). The all-infant salvation view has three basic types of adherents:

(1) Those who base it on the premise that all infants either *would have* believed in this life or eventually *will* believe after death;
(2) Those who base it on the premise that God has elected all infants (just as He has elected some adults) and, by the irresistible grace of regeneration (apart from faith), He will save everyone who doesn't reach the age of accountability;[35]
(3) Those who base it on the premise that God, because infants cannot believe, will save all of them (apart from the condition that they would have believed in this life).

Since the first view (that all infants either would have or will believe) has already been discussed above,[36] the other two will be examined here.

The View That God Elects All Infants and Saves Them by Irresistible Grace Apart From Faith

This position, as presented by five-point Calvinist Ronald Nash (b. 1941), goes something like the following:

(1) All who die before the age of accountability are incapable of moral good or evil;
(2) God will only punish people (in the next life) on the basis of evils they have committed in this life;
(3) All who die before the age of accountability, then, will not be punished in the next life (that is, they will be saved);
(4) Arminians, however, hold that faith is a necessary condition for salvation;
(5) Those who die before the age of accountability cannot believe (that is, have faith);
(6) Hence, according to *Arminian* doctrine, no one dying before the age of accountability can be saved;
(7) *Calvinism* teaches that God can regenerate people without their consent (faith);
(8) Consequently, only a Calvinist can consistently maintain that all who die before the age of accountability will be saved. (ibid.)

To support Nash's *first* premise (that all who die before the age of accountability are incapable of moral good or evil), both Scripture and reason can be mobilized. The Bible speaks of an age before which an individual is not morally accountable. For instance, Nash cites Deuteronomy 1:39: "The little ones that you said would be taken captive, your children who do not yet know good from bad—they will enter the land. I will give it to them and they will take possession of it."

The *second* premise (that the only punishment in the next life will be on the basis of evils committed in this life) is also scripturally based. Second Corinthians 5:10 declares that "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for *the things done while in the body*, whether good or bad." Since many believe that this passage specifically refers to believers, Revelation 20:12–13 is more to the point:

> I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book

> was opened, which is the book of life. *The dead were judged according to what they had done* as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and *each person was judged according to what he had done*.

The *third* premise (that all persons dying before the age of accountability will be saved) follows logically[37] and is likewise biblically grounded. Nash cites Matthew 19:13–14—"The kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (little children, v. 14)—and Mark 10:13–16 and Luke 18:15–17, where "babies" (infants) were brought to Jesus and He said: "I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."

Following John Calvin, Nash also offers more disputable examples such as Jeremiah 1:5[38] and Luke 1:15.[39] While these texts do indicate that God, from the womb, had set these children apart, they neither say that *these* infants were regenerated at this time nor that *all* babies in die womb are saved. Given that, according to strong Calvinism, God only loves, elects, and irresistibly saves *some* adults (the elect), Nash offers no solid evidence for his belief that *all* infants are elect. Nonetheless, his conclusion to this point (as stated by the third premise—that all who die before the age of accountability will be saved) appears to be sound.

The remaining premises and conclusion, though, are seriously problematic and should be rejected on several grounds.

First, the *fourth* premise (that "Arminians" believe faith is a necessary condition for salvation)—is not exclusively "Arminian." Many moderate Calvinists, for example, also maintain this view.[40]

Second, and more to the heart of the issue, Nash's presentation of the fourth premise is based on an unjustified presupposition, namely, that belief *in this life* is an absolute condition for salvation. Even John Calvin denied this (as cited above), pointing out that faith may be the *customary* salvific condition but not an *absolute* one. In addition, Nash and most other strong Calvinists insist that regeneration logically occurs *prior to* belief.

To put the rebuttal in different terms, there is no heaven for those who *will not* believe—that is, rebellious persons who are morally accountable in this life. However, there is heaven for those who *cannot* believe—that is, persons who are not morally accountable and hence are not yet able to believe in this life.

Third, there is reason to believe that those who were morally unaccountable in this life will "grow up" in the next; hence, they will be able to believe after they are in heaven. Even Nash agrees that infants will mature:

> The Bible describes the redeemed in heaven as possessing glorified bodies.… [These] bodies will represent that dimension of our humanity *at its best*. I believe this means that children who die in infancy will greet us in heaven as mature adults. (ibid., 105)

Nevertheless, how could they be "mature" without being rationally and morally accountable? Consequently, Nash has no sufficient basis on which to *deny* that those elect who cannot believe in this life *will* believe in the next. In short, faith —as a condition for receiving salvation—is only absolute in *this* life for those who are old enough to believe.[41] It can be stated, then, that for the elect who don't live long enough to believe, faith is an ultimate condition in the *next* life.

Fourth, Nash's *sixth* premise (the conclusion that, *according to Arminian teaching*, no one who dies before the age of accountability can receive salvation) fails, because it assumes the truth of the *fifth* premise (that those who die before they reach moral responsibility cannot believe), which, on Nash's conditions,[42] is not justified. On the grounds that babies who die will one day have the ability to believe, Arminians and moderate Calvinists *can* hold to infant salvation (even universal infant salvation) without contradiction.

Fifth, the *seventh* premise (the extreme Calvinist dogma that God can regenerate people apart from their will) is untenable, contradicting the clear biblical teaching that faith is prior to regeneration rather than the reverse. We are "justified by faith" (Rom. 5:1 NKJV); meaning faith leads to justification, not vice versa. This is the uniform New Testament pattern: A person must believe in order to be saved (e.g., John 3:16, 18; 3:36; 5:24; Acts 16:31; et al.). Again, *no one has ever scripturally demonstrated that we must be saved in order to believe*.[43]

Sixth, in connection with the previous point, Nash's overall paradigm is based on the incoherent premise that God's grace can be irresistible without being coercive (*WBD*, 96). This is in opposition to a biblical and rationally justifiable view of human freedom as self-determining.[44] Extreme Calvinism argues that infants can be saved without their consent in the same way God allegedly saves adults (by regenerating them before they believe). However, if someone does not will to believe, irresistibly forcing him to "believe" is to force his choice. Again, a "forced choice," not being a free choice, is an absurd proposition.[45]

Seventh, and finally, even if all of his premises were correct, Nash cannot legitimize the salvation of *all infants* and still maintain the consistency of his own position, since he adheres to a limited atonement (ibid., 93).[46] Accordingly, because of this stance, he has no reliable reason to believe that God's election is

any broader among infants than it is among adults. If Christ only died for *some* adults, as extreme Calvinism posits,[47] then why should we assume that He died for *all* infants?

The View That God Will Save All Infants Because They Cannot Believe

Proponents of this teaching affirm that there is no heaven for those who *will not* believe; those who willingly reject God's offer of salvation will perish (cf. 2 Peter 3:9; John 3:18). The Bible nowhere teaches, however, that those who don't live long enough to *be able* to believe will be excluded from heaven. Defenders of this view, such as Robert Lightner (b. 1931),[48] appeal to a number of passages for support.

Little Children Are Part of the Kingdom of God

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (Mark 10:14). Jesus also made it clear that "no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (John 3:3). Thus, it would follow that "little children" will be in heaven, and since the text places no limits on the children who will be there, it is suggested that Jesus includes *every* little child in His kingdom.

Those who object to this position argue there is no proof that the term *children*[49] refers to infants or to those prior to an "age of belief." Further, opponents contend that Christ's words ("the kingdom of God belongs to such as these") could be a form of similitude rather than literalism; that is, in order to enter the kingdom, we all must become *like* little children (in humbling ourselves—cf. Matt. 18:4). However, Luke, *by name* (explicitly), mentions "infants" or "babies"[50] as being included among those who will be in the kingdom.

David's Infant Son Went to Heaven

King David prayed fervently for his dying infant son; when the baby died, David immediately ceased praying: "Now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? *I will go to him, but he will not return to me*" (2 Sam. 12:23). David went to heaven (cf. Ps. 16:10–11; Heb. 11:32), and surely his knowledge of being reunited with his child encompassed more than their deceased bodies being placed in the same grave. If this inference is correct, then David's baby went to heaven.

Critics of this interpretation point out that “I will go to him, but he will not return to me” might mean nothing more than “The dead do not return to us; rather, we go to be with the dead.” They also note that the Old Testament conception of the afterlife was not highly developed. Even so, neither of these is a telling point, since David clearly anticipated a blissful afterlife (Ps. 16:10–11), as did other Old Testament writers (cf. Job 19:25–26).

Babies Are Known of God and Are Written in His Book

David, in Psalm 139:13–16, speaks of God having created him in his mother’s womb and being written in “your [God’s] book” (v. 16). David refers to himself as a person, an “I” in the womb. This is taken by some to mean that God personally knows embryos and infants and eternally covers them with His love.

Critics argue that “your book” may simply be a figure of speech regarding God’s omniscience or the “book” of His remembrance. True, there is no clear textual indication that David is pointing to the Book of Life, in which are written all the names of the saved (Rev. 20:12). Nonetheless, this caveat does not negate that the child who dies is a person known and loved *from conception* by a God who wants everyone to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4).

The Bible Speaks of Children Too Young to Know Good or Evil

As to the age of accountability, Isaiah refers to a little child before “he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right” (Isa. 7:15). As mentioned previously, Moses does the same: “The little ones that you said would be taken captive, your children who do not yet know good from bad—they will enter the land. I will give it to them and they will take possession of it” (Deut. 1:39). These texts seem to imply that there is an age of moral accountability. Even of adults, Jesus said, “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains” (John 9:41). How much more would this apply to infants who cannot yet know right from wrong.[51]

In response, opponents observe that even if Isaiah *is* highlighting an age of accountability, it does not thereby show that all infants are saved. There are still at least two other all-infants-are-saved premises that must be proven: (1) that inherited depravity *in and of itself* is not sufficient for eternal condemnation, and (2) that faith *in this life* is not absolutely essential for eternal salvation. Stated briefly, then, Isaiah’s reference to a young child without moral awareness may refer only to personal or social guilt rather than to either inherited sin or ultimate salvation.

Romans 5 Says "All" Were "Made Righteous"[52]

As previously observed,[53] Paul declares:

> Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of *one* act of righteousness was justification that brings life for *all* men. For just as through the disobedience of the *one* man the *many* [i.e., *all*] were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the *many* [i.e., *all*] will be made righteous. (vv. 18–19)

Since Paul's unmistakable teaching is that we *all* are somehow "made righteous" by Christ's obedient death, it remains then for us to ask *in what sense* this is true.

Since universalism is clearly excluded by both the immediate context and other passages,[54] Paul cannot mean that all were *actually* (rather than potentially) made righteous. Further, it does not appear that Paul is referring to the declaration of our righteousness *in the sense of justification*, which comes only by faith (cf. Rom. 1:17; 3:21–26), and which infants, being infants, cannot exercise. It *can* mean, however, that the original sin brought about by Adam's choice is canceled by the work of Christ. If this is the case, humans are no longer hell-bound solely due to inherited depravity; they must commit their own personal sins to eventuate in condemnation.[55] Consequently, since infants have not committed actual sins, they could all be saved even though not yet able to believe.

According to this argument, the judicial condemnation brought by Adam upon all humanity (Rom. 5:12) was reversed by Christ, and thus God, no longer bound to condemn, need not condemn any infant. Be this as it may, as was contended earlier, God's condemnation is *not* based on inherited depravity[56] but on the evil that one actually chooses in this life (cf. Rev. 20:12–13). Infants have committed no morally accountable sinful deeds; therefore, God can save all infants because they have been made savable through Christ's finished work.

Critics of this view emphasize its novelty and deny its necessity, noting that it tends toward universalism[57] and eliminates faith as an absolutely necessary salvific condition in this life.[58] They also contend that it is both possible and traditional to interpret Romans 5:18–19 in other ways.

Summary Evaluation of Universal Infant Salvation Apart From Belief

One merit of this view is that it both satisfies God's justice and magnifies His omnibenevolence. In addition, it presents a conceivable biblical basis. Nonetheless, opponents raise several criticisms.

First, critics object that, according to this view, infants are saved without faith, while the Bible seems to teach that faith is a necessary condition for receiving the gift of eternal life (e.g., John 3:36; Acts 16:31; Heb. 11:6).[59]

In response, as already observed, some have argued that faith is a *normative* but not *absolute* requirement for salvation. Or, it may be absolutely necessary in this life for those who *can* believe but not for those (like infants) who *cannot*. For those who die prior to accountability, the choice could be left to the next life; this takes nothing away from the emphatic scriptural exhortations to those who can believe that they must believe before death (cf. John 3:18, 36; 5:24; Heb. 9:27).

Second, it is argued that, by its very nature, the salvation of free creatures involves a free consent. Saving infants against their will is no more possible than saving adults against their will (cf. Matt. 23:37; John 5:40).

In response, defenders make two observations. For one thing, according to this position, infants are not saved *against* their will but *apart from* their will—they are too young to believe. For another, it is always possible that all infants are in the class of those who would have believed had they been old enough to do so; that they will be given the opportunity to do so when they "mature" in heaven, it is contended, resolves the problem of faith and freedom.[60]

Third, critics insist that nowhere does God's Word spell out any age of accountability and, thus, it is purely speculative.

In response, there *is* some biblical evidence that there is some point in one's life at which he or she becomes morally responsible (cited above). Furthermore, both experience and common consent inform us that tiny children are not morally responsible, which is why they do not stand trial for their wrongs. Psychologically, infants and small children do not have sufficiently developed rational faculties to discern good from evil.

Also, that we may not be able to point to a *precise* age at which moral accountability begins is not an overwhelming difficulty. Consider, for example, self-consciousness: Even if we do not know precisely *when* it occurs, we nevertheless know *that* it occurs. The exact age of accountability may differ for individuals, depending on their moral development. Perhaps it is earlier for those who are more quickly exposed to explicit truth. At any rate, while it theoretically occurs for most people between the ages of four and twelve, it doesn't arrive at

all for those who never reach that stage of intellectual and moral maturity. *The age of accountability arrives when an individual is able to understand the difference between right and wrong and the consequences of making moral choices.*[61]

The criticisms of this view are by no means definitive. That God will save all those who never (in this life) reach the point of moral accountability is both theologically possible and biblically plausible. The most problematic issues are (1) the need for these infants (or small children) to eventually exercise their own conscious faith and (2) the apparent exception to the necessity for making a decision, before death, to believe in Jesus Christ. These questions, however, are not unanswerable, especially in view of the possibility that God foreknew that those who die too young to have faith would all be among those who would eventually mature and believe.[62]

The Limbo-Infant View (Infants Are Neither Saved Nor Lost)

The positions presented above all assume that there are only two possible destinations for infants. Perhaps there is a third place (or condition)—*limbo*. Some Roman Catholic theologians have posited limbo for babies who die unbaptized (and, accordingly, unsaved). It is possible to detach the doctrine of limbo from a sacramental paradigm[63] and instead simply argue that all non-elect babies who die go there, or at least all those who would not have believed had they reached the developmental point of being able to exercise faith.

However, even proponents find it difficult to locate scriptural support of any kind of limbo, which is more than anything a result of theological speculation. The hypothesis seems to be that regarding infants who die, God can neither justly allow them into heaven nor mercifully send them into hell, so He sends them to a sort of neutral state.[64]

Critique of the Limbo-Infant View

First, even some contemporary Catholic theologians reject limbo, admitting to both its lack of support and its speculative status.

Second, the Bible is void of references to any such view; any statements that can be adduced to support limbo speak merely of the baby not yet having reached a state of world-consciousness (e.g., Job 3).

Third, why should God not do the same for those who have not heard the

gospel? After all, like infants, they have not rejected Christ, since they haven't even heard of Him. Neither is there evidence, however, that God has a *limbo* for the unevangelized.[65]

Fourth, and finally, the very nature of limbo is hazy, raising both serious questions and objections.[66] For instance, would it be a place of annihilation? Are its inhabitants alive but not conscious, as though comatose?

The Evangelized-After-Death-Infant View

The remaining position contends that infants will mature after death (perhaps immediately) and will then be given an opportunity to believe. Those who believe will be saved, and those who do not (if there are any) will be lost. The possibility that all infants who die before the age of accountability are those whom God knew would have believed involves so-called *implicit* or *potential* faith, which will mature into actual faith at the moment of their decision.

According to the evangelized-after-death-infant view, those who die before moral responsibility will be allowed, after death, to "grow up," hear the Gospel, and decide for themselves where they will spend eternity. This belief, going back at least to Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335-c. 395) and now held by some Roman Catholic theologians,[67] has four primary bases:

(1) People are condemned to hell for their own willful sin; (2) Jesus died for all people, including young children who die; (3) all people receive sufficient grace for salvation; and (4) the act of faith is necessary for salvation. (Sanders, *NON*, 298)

Proponents of the evangelized-after-death-infant view contend that it is one of few positions upholding justice to all four premises.

Critique of the Evangelized-After-Death-Infant View

First, there is a conspicuous absence of biblical texts asserting that infants will mature after death, although, in response, this is not an uncommon belief as applied to the resurrection body. It is reasonable to assume that small children (who have believed) will "grow up" and have adult bodies in heaven; why, then, cannot those who die in infancy be given an opportunity to believe at that time? Furthermore, proponents of the view note that neither are there biblical texts explicitly stating, for instance, the doctrine of the Trinity, and this does not mean it has no scriptural foundation.[68] Doctrines can be properly deduced or inferred

from other, more overt biblical teachings.

Second, even if infants do mature after death, there is no evidence that they will then be evangelized: The only biblically cited evangelistic forum is earth (cf. Matt. 28:18–20, etc.). In response, however, it is possible that these texts refer only to the evangelization of those who do not die in infancy and the like.[69] Thus, the necessity that the decision for salvation must take place before death could be normative but not absolute.[70]

Third, Scripture plainly teaches that there is no hope for salvation beyond the grave (e.g., Heb. 9:27; cf. Luke 16:26–31; John 8:24). In response, perhaps these texts apply only to those who have lived to reach an age of moral accountability and have rejected the light God has given them.

Fourth, and most to the point, the evangelized-after-death-infant view, in not positing that all infants will be saved, overlooks the array of passages (presented above) that point to the universal salvation of everyone who dies without realizing accountability.

Summary and Conclusion

None of the views is without difficulties. The baptized-infant and elect-infant positions have serious problems. The limbo-infant doctrine lacks any real basis. The foreknown-infant, all-infant, and evangelized-after-death-infant views seem to be the most viable in terms of theological merit and biblical support. There are at least three crucial factors in determining which of these positions is correct.

Is Faith an Absolute Condition for Salvation?

There is a distinction between the personal innocence of infants and the conscious rejection of salvation by adults, *if* faith is not *absolutely essential* but is instead *normatively necessary* for salvation. If the latter (normative necessity) is correct, it makes sense to speak of all infants being saved without believing simply because of the work of Christ on their behalf.

On the other hand, if faith is an absolute essential for salvation before death—and many biblical passages (cited above) have been understood this way—then there is no heaven for those who *cannot* believe any more than for those who *do not* believe. Infants cannot believe, and we know that some, if not all, will be saved. In this case, it makes more sense to believe that infants will mature after death and be given a chance to make their decision.

Does God Always Offer Everyone the Opportunity to Believe?

If God does *not* give everyone the chance to believe, then the baptized-infant and elect-infant views make sense. However, the Bible is filled with affirmations that God offers salvation to all;[71] therefore, it appears to logically follow (as well as be inferred by God's love) that those who would believe if they could but die before they can will be given a chance to do so after they leave this life.

Is Inherited Depravity Alone Sufficient for Condemnation?

If original sin is enough to send anyone to hell, then the baptized-infant and elect-infant views are more plausible. If, however, one's own personal decision in rejecting God's message is necessary, then those two positions lose their credibility. The feasibility of the all-infant salvation views depends on this fact, for without it universal infant salvation cannot be easily justified. As demonstrated above, (1) the arguments for the savability of all infants (Rom. 5:18–19), (2) the fact that people are only condemned on the basis of acts done in this life (Rev. 20:12–13), and (3) God's omnibenevolence and perfect justice all argue against inherited depravity as solely sufficient for sending people (including infants) to hell.

It is worth noting that the views allowing for the possible salvation of all infants are not only compatible with God's justice and love, but they also help solve the question of heathen salvation. Since God is just, and since no one can be saved without Jesus Christ,[72] and since many heathen lands have not heard the Gospel, it is reasonable to infer that God's elect—who will come from *every* tribe, kindred, and tongue—could include those who die in infancy. Because it is estimated that among some heathen peoples up to half of all babies die before becoming morally accountable, it potentially follows that there will be innumerable heathen in heaven who never heard the Gospel while on earth.

THE RESULTS OF SALVATION ON THE HEATHEN

As to the salvation of the unevangelized, we will examine two main perspectives. The traditional orthodox view is that salvation is only possible by special soteriological revelation from God; general revelation is sufficient only for condemnation.[73]

Other theologians, however, hold that if one does *not* receive God's special

revelation regarding the plan of salvation, then what he understands and accepts through general revelation is sufficient for eternal life. Of course, the basis for his salvation is still the work of Christ, even though he may not be aware of what Christ has done for him.

The General-Revelation View (That the Heathen Can Be Saved Through God's Creation)

Those who believe today's unevangelized can be saved apart from hearing the gospel (that Jesus died for their sins and rose from the dead—cf. 1 Cor. 15:1–5) reason in the following manner.

The Love and Justice of God

Arguing from God's attributes of love and justice, some Christian apologists insist that He would not condemn those who have never heard the gospel of Christ. They emphasize biblical affirmations of God's justice (e.g., Gen. 18:25; Ps. 33:5), that He is "no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34 KJV) and "does not show favoritism" (Rom. 2:11). Further, God is omnibenevolent (2 Peter 3:9); He loves the whole world and sent His only Son to die for it (John 3:16).

Acts 10:35

Peter told Cornelius, a Gentile who had never heard the gospel, that God "accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right." The text indicates that Cornelius had "feared God" (v. 2 KJV) and was accepted by Him even though he had not yet explicitly heard the Good News.

Hebrews 11:6

"Anyone who comes to [God] must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." This would seem to include those who have never heard the gospel.

Acts 19:2–5

This passage tells of believers, years after the time of Christ, who were saved even though they had not yet received the Holy Spirit. When Paul asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" they replied, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit" (v. 2). So Paul declared the truth to them and, "on hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus" (v. 5). They were called "disciples" (i.e., believers) even before Paul

preached to them (v. 1).

Galatians 3:8

According to Paul, “The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: ‘All nations will be blessed through you.’ ” There is no evidence that the “gospel” Abraham heard contained the explicit message that Christ would die and be raised from the dead. When Abraham believed, the text simply says, “[The LORD] took him outside and said, ‘Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.…. So shall your offspring be’ ” (Gen. 15:5). Abraham was not required to believe on the death and resurrection of Jesus before he could be saved.

Revelation 14:6

John recorded: “Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the *eternal gospel* to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people.” If the gospel by which these people were saved is eternal, then it was the same ultimate *proclamation* as in the Old Testament (which, as the next text indicates, did not have the same developed *content* as the more-fully-revealed New Testament gospel (1 Cor. 15:1–5).[74] Nevertheless, people were saved by believing the good news that God is gracious.

Jonah 3:1–10

The Old Testament contains an explicit account of heathen salvation. Jonah, the Israelite prophet, was told to go to Nineveh (in Assyria) and announce their coming doom:

> [Jonah] proclaimed: “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned.” The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.… When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened, (vv. 4–5, 10)

Jonah later said of their conversion, “I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity” (4:2). There is no indication whatsoever that the content of the message they believed was more than trust in a gracious God who forgives those who turn to Him in faith from their sins.

Psalm 19:1–4

David indicates that the very heavens proclaim the gospel to all people:

> The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

This passage appears to teach that everyone, everywhere, has heard the "gospel of creation" (general revelation) by which they can be saved. Interestingly, however, this is the very passage Paul references in saying that no one can hear without a preacher (i.e., special revelation—Rom. 10:18).

The Gospel in the Stars

Some, following E. W. Bullinger (1837–1913) in *The Witness of the Stars*,[75] have even contended that the gospel is spelled out in the constellations, later distorted into what we know as the signs of the zodiac.[76] There are several serious problems with this view.

First, the so-called "gospel in the stars" obviously is not clear to everyone, as the Bible says general revelation is to all (Rom. 1:19). Many people, including this author, confess to not being able to see the plan of salvation in the sky, even when it is explained by proponents of the view.

Second, there are no lines between the stars or numbers on them for guidance in drawing them. Lines can be drawn in ways that do not spell out the gospel.

Third, even when the lines are drawn in a way favorable to the view, it still falls short of a clear gospel presentation.

Fourth, it is a form of astrology, a practice that is often biblically condemned (cf. Ex. 22:18; Lev. 19:26; Deut. 18:10; Jer. 50:36; Ezek. 13:7; Dan. 2:2ff.) whether it is "Christianized" or not.

Fifth, the stars were given for signs and seasons (Gen. 1:14), not for days and years. They were given neither to foretell human events nor to proclaim the gospel.

Sixth, the so-called "gospel in the stars" is a false gospel, since Centaur, who is supposedly a picture of Christ, is part horse and part man, not wholly God and wholly man. (In reality, this is a Greek myth about illicit sex between humans, animals, and the gods.)

Seventh, and finally, the view is contrary to the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura*, which says that God's Word alone is our source of information about salvation. Again, general revelation brings condemnation but not salvation

(Rom. 1:20; 2:15).

Romans 2:6–7

Paul affirms that "God 'will give to each person according to what he has done.'[77] To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality he will give eternal life." This is in the context of "Gentiles, who do not have the law" (2:14), that is, the heathen, which appears to mean that the unevangelized can receive "eternal life" apart from special revelation through God's law.

An Important Distinction

All evangelicals believe that Christ's death and resurrection (the fact of His finished work) are necessary for anyone's salvation. However, those who maintain that salvation can be obtained through general revelation insist that it is not necessary to *know* about what Christ has done. Accordingly, all verses (see below) indicating that Christ's death and resurrection are soteriologically necessary are taken to refer to the *fact* of Christ's sacrifice rather than to explicit *knowledge of* that truth.[78]

The Special-Revelation View (That Salvation Comes *Only* Through the Gospel of Jesus Christ)

The standard orthodox position down through the centuries—held by Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, and their followers—is that, in this age, salvation is not possible apart from *knowledge of and belief in* the death and resurrection of Christ.

Evidence That Salvation Is Only Through Knowledge of Jesus Christ

This position regarding the eternal destiny of the heathen seems to call into question God's justice and omnibenevolence. Nonetheless, there are several biblical passages pointing in this direction.

John 3:36

As we have seen, Jesus made it clear that "whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but *whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him*." This, too, appears to emphasize knowledge of (and belief in) Christ as necessary for salvation.

John 3:18

"Whoever believes in [me] is not condemned, but *whoever does not believe [in me] stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son*." Explicitly, belief "in the name of God's one and only Son" is laid down as the salvific condition.[79]

John 8:24

"*If you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be*, you will indeed die in your sins." Once more, the condition for avoiding eternal death is faith in Jesus.

John 10:1, 9, 11, 14

Jesus said,

> I tell you the truth, *the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber.… I am* the *gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.…* I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.… *I know my sheep and my sheep know me*.

The fact that the sheep (believers) must "know" Christ and "enter" the gate indicates salvation requires specific knowledge of Him.

Acts 4:12

The apostles of Jesus boldly declared, "*Salvation is found in no one else*, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." Since there is overt reference to the *name* of Christ, it is difficult to believe that explicit knowledge of Christ is not demanded here as a condition for eternal life. Meaning, it is not simply the *fact* of Christ but the very *name* of Christ that is soteriologically necessary.

Romans 10:9

Paul teaches that you will be saved "*if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead*." This seems to mandate confession of the very name of Jesus for salvation.

Romans 10:13–14

The apostle follows up by adding:

> Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. *How, then, can they call on the one they*

> *have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them*?

The emphasis on the truths that the heathen must "call" on Jesus and that they must "hear" the gospel being preached appears to eliminate the possibility that anyone in this age can be saved apart from hearing the gospel.

1 John 5:10–13

John repeats the same truth in his epistles:

> *Anyone who does not believe God* has made him out to be a liar, because he *has not believed the* testimony *God has given about his Son*. And this is the *testimony:* God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. *I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life*.

The emphasized words clearly demonstrate that John is teaching explicit knowledge of Christ as necessary for salvation.

Response to Verses Used to Support the General-Revelation View

Proponents of salvation-only-through-special-revelation are aware of the verses put forward by those who believe salvation of the heathen is possible through general revelation alone. They respond by pointing to other verses and observations, summarized as follows.

Acts 10:35

Two things are often mentioned about the case of Cornelius.

First, Cornelius is proof that those who seek God in view of the light they have will then be given special revelation by which they can come to know Jesus Christ. After all, the whole point of the story is that God sent Peter by special revelation and Cornelius did not become a Christian until after he heard and believed that special revelation.

Second, the book of Acts is a transitional period between the two Testaments during which those who were saved on Old Testament grounds were provided with the New Testament light of Christ by which they could become Christians. This is brought out clearly in the response to the next text.

Acts 19:2–6

This passage has nothing to do with the heathen; it is about disciples of John

the Baptist who had not yet heard about the coming of the Holy Spirit to baptize believers in Christ into His body (the church). It was earlier demonstrated that these disciples were already *believers*; Paul's declaration of further truth was necessary for them to become *Christian believers*. Before hearing (and believing) the rest, those who had not yet heard the full Christian message were saved on the grounds of the *special revelation* they had received up to that point.

Hebrews 11:6

According to this verse, "Anyone who comes to him [God] must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."

First, while the reference is to knowledge of God, not of Christ, it does not exclude the latter.

Second, since the context involves Old Testament saints rather than New Testament believers, it is understandable that the broader statement about explicit knowledge of Christ was not included. Hebrews 11:6 is a proclamation of the minimal salvific requirement in *any* age; it does not exclude the possibility of God making belief in Christ an explicit requirement of New Testament salvation.[80]

Third, in the same vein, using this verse to deny that explicit belief in Christ is soteriologically necessary ignores progressive revelation, wherein God, for example, requires more of New Testament believers than of Old because of the additional revelation He has given (cf. Heb. 1:1; 2:3–4).

Galatians 3:8

Again, this text says the gospel was preached to Abraham, but when the contents of what Abraham believed are examined, they turn out to fall short of believing upon Christ's finished work, which the New Testament declares is essential to the gospel (cf. 1 Cor. 15:1–3).

Proponents of special revelation respond in two ways.

First, some hold that even in the Old Testament era, believers did have explicit knowledge of Christ. They point to Paul's statement that the "seed" of Abraham was Christ (Gal. 3:16). Further, some believe that when Jesus said to the Jews, "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad" (John 8:56), He meant that Abraham knew about what Christ would do for him.[81]

Second, other apologists take Galatians 3:8 as a simple description of the minimal content (not including explicit knowledge of Christ's death and

resurrection) necessary for Old Testament salvation. In any event, it was more than general revelation, since God gave a special revelation to Abraham; even if this "gospel" did not include *everything* that is salvifically spelled out in the New Testament, it was still an earlier stage in the progress of revelation wherein God did not yet demand belief in the fuller revelation about Christ.

Revelation 14:6

John's reference to the *eternal gospel*, whatever else it may mean, does not support the view that salvation of the heathen is based only on general revelation.

First, this message came to them by special revelation—God sent an angel to preach it.

Second, the content of this gospel was about those who believed in the Christ (the "Lamb") who "redeemed" them by His blood (14:1, 4 KJV).

Third, that the gospel is everlasting may mean no more than that Christ was "the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world" (Rev. 13:8). There is no indication that John is speaking about an eternal gospel known only by general revelation.

Jonah 3:1–10

As already mentioned, Old Testament saints did not necessarily have the same content of knowledge required by God for New Testament salvation. The doctrine of *progressive* revelation indicates that God progressively unfolded His plan by giving more and more revelation until the full and final revelation in Christ (Heb. 1:1–2). Special revelationalists need not (and most *do* not) deny that God requires more knowledge of Christ's work as a condition for New Testament salvation than He did in the Old Testament.

Psalm 19:1–2

David is not speaking of God's special revelation but of general revelations through the "heavens," which are the "work of his [creative] hands." He is not speaking of the Cross, which is the work of God's redemptive love (Rom. 10:14, 18). Psalm 19:1 is illustrative of both messages (general and special revelation) being *universal*, not *identical*. Indeed, according to Romans, general revelation informs us about God's "eternal power" (1:20), not about the plan of everlasting life. General revelation is sufficient for condemnation, since it finds everyone "without excuse," and insufficient for salvation.

Romans 2:6–7

This passage does not affirm that the unevangelized can be saved by general revelation but rather that those who seek immortality will find it. Later Paul says it is only Christ "who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Tim. 1:10). General revelation and other means are part of the goodness of God that leads to repentance (Rom. 2:4). In short, the heathen who respond to the light of general revelation are subsequently given special revelation by which they can be saved (cf. Acts 10:34–48; Jonah 3).

A VINDICATION OF THE JUSTICE AND LOVE OF GOD

Is it right for God to send people to hell who have never heard the only gospel by which they can be saved? This question actually entails several others, which we will analyze individually.

Are the Heathen Lost?

All human beings are born in sin (Ps. 51:5) and are "by nature the children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3 KJV), for "just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned [in Adam]—" (Rom. 5:12). Explicitly referring to the heathen (who have only general revelation), Paul clarifies, "Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, *so that men are without excuse*" (Rom. 1:20). Likewise, "*All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law,* and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law" (Rom. 2:12). Then, summing up his conclusion from the whole section, Paul pronounces that "there is no difference, for *all have sinned* and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:22–23). Yes, the heathen are lost apart from Christ.

Can the Heathen Be Saved Apart From the Work of Christ?

On this question all orthodox Christians agree: There is no salvation apart from Christ's redemptive work.[82] Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the

life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Paul adds, "There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5). The writer of Hebrews agrees:

> Christ … has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.… When this priest [Christ] had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God … because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. (9:26; 10:12, 14)

"Salvation is found in *no one* else, for there is *no other name* under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Can the Heathen Be Saved Apart From Accepting Christ?

According to the special-revelation view, with which we concur, in our age there is no way to be saved without believing in Christ (cf. Acts 4:12; Rom. 10:9ff.; John 3:16, 18, 36; 5:24). This leads to the next crucial question.

Is It Just to Condemn Those Who Have Never Heard the Gospel?

Yes, for at least three reasons.

First, they have received God's general revelation. They know about His "eternal power and Godhead" (Rom. 1:20 KJV). They are informed that He "made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them" (Acts 14:15). They are aware that God "has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons" (Acts 14:17). Again, although they do not have the law, nevertheless,

> All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law.… Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law [of Moses], since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts. (Rom. 2:12, 14–15)

Second, God has revealed Himself to the unevangelized both in creation and in conscience; if they reject that light, God is not obligated to give them more, since they have turned against the light they already have (cf. Rom. 1:18). If man were lost in the darkness of a dense jungle and had just one glimpse of light, he should go for it; if he turns his back on it and then is forever lost in the blackness, he has no one but himself to blame: "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19).

Third, as we have seen, God will provide the heathen with special revelation sufficient for salvation if they seek Him through the general revelation. Broadly, this can be done in at least two ways: (1) sending a believer to share the gospel with them or (2) using dreams, visions, and specific special revelation.

Sending a Missionary/Evangelist

In favor of this view are the following:

(1) It harmonizes with scriptural examples of God sending a preacher to those whom He knows will respond to the gospel; for example, Peter being led to Cornelius (cf. Acts 10). The writer of Hebrews (11:6) tells us that those who seek will find.
(2) It is in accordance with the command of God in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20) and also with the standard laid down in 2 Timothy 2:2 to "entrust [the truth] to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others."
(3) It fits Paul's statement in Acts 17:26 that God has "determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live" so that those who desire can hear the gospel and be saved.
(4) It affirms the prayer of our Lord that believers will be produced through the community of other believers: "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me *through their message*" (John 17:20).

It is implied by Paul's words in Romans 10:14: "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?"

Using Visions, Dreams, or Specific Special Revelation

While it is normative (and perhaps even more fruitful) for God to use believers to bring the gospel to the unevangelized, it is possible that He may use other means at His disposal to deliver the message of the gospel to those who would believe if they heard it.

(1) God has employed many such means—for instance, radio, TV, recordings, and literature.
(2) One day God will use an angel to preach the gospel "to every nation,

tribe, language and people" (Rev. 14:6).

(3) Historically, God has miraculously conveyed special revelation through visions and dreams. *God is more willing that all be saved than we are* (cf. 2 Peter 3:9). His justice demands that He condemns all sinners, but His love compels Him to provide salvation for all who, by His grace, will believe: "*Everyone* who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Rom. 10:13).

Will There Be People in Heaven From Every Nation?

Those who reject special revelation as being necessary for salvation generally point to heathen and non-Christian people groups as examples of the implausibility of this view. What about China, India, and many formerly communist countries? Surely it is not right to suppose that there will be so many in heaven from Western countries and so few from Eastern lands.

In response, Christian apologists make notable observations.

First, it is possible that since God, in His foreknowledge, knew exactly who would and who would not believe, only those who would not believe live in places where they will not hear the gospel. Acts 17:26–27 has been used to make this point:

> From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.

Further indication that this may be the case is taken from Christ's prayer (in John 17:20) that those who believe in Him hear from other believers ("those who will believe in me *through their message*").

Second, there is no reason why the percentage of people saved must be the same from all nations any more than it has to be the same within any given country. Who is saved depends on who believes, and that will vary from place to place. Just as in farming and fishing, some areas prove to be more fruitful than others.

Third, again, God's Word assures us that there will be "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb" (Rev. 7:9). While the percentages may vary, it is just as unrealistic for there to be *no one* from a given country desiring to be saved as it would for *everyone* from another country wanting to be saved. God has given us freedom, and free will is exercised freely. Some will believe, and some will not.

Fourth, as argued above, most Christian theologians believe that some and possibly all children who die in infancy are saved. Due to high infant mortality rates alone, there could be as many or more in heaven from unevangelized peoples as from evangelized ones.

Fifth, many who are not personally reached by missionaries, nevertheless do come into contact with the gospel through various media. Again, God has often revealed Himself through dreams, visions, and in other miraculous ways on much lesser matters than an individual's salvation (cf. Ex. 3; Jude 13). There seems to be no good reason why He could not or even would not, if necessary, do the same for someone's eternal life.

Sixth, and finally, there could yet be revival in these unevangelized areas. Since a large percentage of all the people who have ever lived are alive today (the current population is well over six billion), a massive move of the Spirit could significantly increase the total percentage of all people who will be in heaven. Indeed, all of today's largely Christian nations were once pagan. Even the great orthodox theologian B. B. Warfield (1851–1921) argued that there may be more in heaven than in hell, contending that passages (e.g., Matt. 7:13–14) that speak of "few" finding the "narrow gate" refer to the immediate and local response to Jesus, not to the ultimate number of people who will be in heaven.[83]

Is There a Second Chance After Death?

A few apologists and many cults believe that God will give a second chance after death for adults[84] who have never heard the gospel. However, most orthodox Christians reject this.

First, once again, the Bible declares that every person "is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment" (Heb. 9:27).

Second, the urgency with which Scripture speaks of making one's decision now—in this life, before it is too late—is strong evidence that there is no second chance.[85]

Third, the fact that upon death people immediately go to a final destiny (cf. Luke 16:19ff.; 2 Cor. 5:8; Rev. 19:20) indicates that a decision must be made in this life.

Fourth, since God has so many means at His disposal to reveal Himself to unbelievers *before* death, it is unnecessary that He do so in the *afterlife*.

Fifth, belief in a second chance undermines the missionary mandate. Why order the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20) if people can be saved apart from

receiving Christ in this life?

Sixth, and finally, the verses used to support second-chance salvation are, at best, hermeneutically dubious and are contradicted by other clear scriptural teachings.

For example, in his first epistle, Peter writes:

> Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water. (3:18–20)

There are several reasons why this text should not be put forward to prove a second chance after death.

First, again, Peter does not say Christ *evangelized* (from Gk: *euaggelizo*) them, but simply that He *proclaimed* (from Gk: *kerusso*) the victory of His resurrection to them (cf. Col. 2:15).

Second, there is no reference to anyone being saved as a result of this proclamation.

Third, those who received the announcement were not unevangelized human beings but "spirits in prison" who may have been fallen angels (cf. Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7).

Fourth, at any rate, the group to whom He preached were not *all* people but only those who "were disobedient … in the days of Noah" (1 Peter 3:20 KJV; cf. Gen. 6:1–4). In this connection it is noteworthy that in 2 Peter 2:4, he mentions the *angels* sinning immediately before he refers to the Flood (v. 5).

Thus it seems best to take this passage as a reference to Christ's announcement of His triumph to the departed spirits after the Resurrection. This fits the context and is in accord with the teaching of other verses (cf. Eph. 4:8; Col. 2:15); as stated, Peter uses the term for *proclaim* or *announce*, not *evangelize*.

As for the declaration in 1 Peter 4:6 that "the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead," it seems best to take this as a reference to the fact that the gospel "was preached" (in the past) to those who "are now dead" (in the present).

First, there is no hope held out anywhere in Scripture for salvation after death. Death is final, and there are only two destinies—heaven and hell—between which there is an impassible gulf (see above).

Second, this is an unclear passage, subject to many interpretations, and no

doctrine should be based on ambiguity. As already established, difficult texts must be interpreted in light of clear ones rather than vice versa.

Third, there are plausible interpretations of this passage that do not conflict with other scriptural teaching. For example, some believe this might not be a reference to human beings but to the "spirits in prison" (angels) of 1 Peter 3:19 (cf. 2 Peter 2:4; Gen. 6:2). Or again, possibly it refers to those, now dead, who heard the gospel while they were alive. Although they suffered the destruction of their flesh (1 Peter 4:6), yet they still live with God by virtue of what Christ did through the gospel (namely, His death and resurrection). This victorious message was announced by Christ Himself to the spirit world after His resurrection (cf. 1 Peter 3:18–20).

In view of all this, there is no real evidence that God will give a post-death second chance (cf. John 8:24) to those who already rejected His general (or special) revelation.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The results of Christ's work of salvation are all-encompassing: They include the past, present, and future. His saving work affects all of creation, saved and unsaved, animate and inanimate, human and angelic. The physical world (which stages the salvific events) and the angelic world (which surrounds them) are significant players in the overall drama. Salvation affects not only the saved in a positive way, since they accept its benefits, but also the lost in a negative way, since they reject it. Salvation involves both infants, who cannot believe it, and the unevangelized, who haven't heard about it. Even the fallen natural creation reaps the soteriological benefits by its ultimate renovation as "the new heaven and the new earth."

As for infants and the heathen, evangelicals hold differing views. However, common to most (except to those holding a limited atonement) is the belief that God is just and merciful and has provided a way for all to be saved.

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE CONDITION FOR SALVATION

The condition (or conditions) for salvation has long been hotly debated on several fronts. The Reformation was centered on whether the condition of salvation is faith alone or faith plus works. There is also the contemporary "lordship salvation vs. free grace" dispute over whether one must accept Christ *only* as Savior (free grace) or *also* as Lord (lordship salvation) in order to be saved.[1] In addition, on the borders of evangelicalism,[2] is the question of whether, besides faith and repentance, confession (verbal witness) and baptism are necessary to be saved.

IMPORTANT DISTINCTIONS REGARDING THE QUESTION AT HAND

Focusing the question will be of considerable help in answering it. To do so, some important distinctions must be made.

Between Conditions for Giving and Conditions for Receiving

The first and most basic differentiation is that between the condition(s) for *God giving* the gift of salvation vs. the condition(s) for *humans receiving* it. According to all forms of Calvinism and most forms of Arminianism, *there are*

no conditions for God's provision of salvation. It is a free gift—no strings attached. Eternal life is not conditioned on *anything* but God's grace (cf. Eph. 2:8–9; Titus 3:5–7; Rom. 4:5; 11:29). Our gracious Creator does not offer salvation on the basis of any foreseen merit in us or in our deeds: "Salvation is of the LORD" (Jonah 2:9 NKJV).

Therefore, the question we're asking does not affect *God's* unconditional provision; the question is "Are there any conditions for *our* reception of everlasting life, and, if so, how many?" To this question there are several answers, even within evangelicalism.

Between Condition for Getting Salvation and Condition for Keeping It

Further, the question here is not whether we can (in any manner) lose salvation after having received it. That is the matter of eternal security,[3] and it has already been discussed.[4] *This* inquiry is for the purpose of discovering what conditions must be met in order for a person to receive eternal life in the first place.

Between Freedom to Choose Salvation and the Need for Divine Aid

Nor is the question whether anyone can accept salvation on his own, apart from the prompting and grace of God. It has already been agreed that this is impossible.[5] Again, Jesus says, "Without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5 NKJV), and Paul confirms, "It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Phil. 2:13). What we now seek to know, *granting the necessity of God's grace*, is whether an act of free will (i.e., faith) is necessary to receive eternal life.

Five main perspectives will be presented: Roman Catholic, strong Reformed, Church of Christ, lordship salvation, and free grace. After the statement of and arguments for each, an evaluation will be given. Afterward, a biblical and critical overview will be set forth.

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC VIEW ON THE CONDITION(S) FOR SALVATION

Since Roman Catholic soteriology has already been treated at length,[6] only a brief summation will be given here. It should be noted that this presentation is of the *official* Roman Catholic view, not necessarily what individual Catholics may offer or discuss in dialogue.

The "infallible" pronouncements of the Council of Trent (1545–1563) regarding salvation have never been (and for that matter never can be) revoked. Trent insisted that the condition for receiving the gift of salvation is faith plus good works. As we have seen, Catholics made it dogma that "*by his good works the justified man really acquires a claim to supernatural reward from God*" (Ott, *FCD*, 264, emphasis added). Roman Catholic authority Ludwig Ott argued,

> According to Holy Writ, *eternal blessedness in heaven is the reward for good works performed on this earth, and rewards and merit are correlative concepts* … (Matt. 5:12; 25:34, et seq.).… St. Paul, who stresses grace so much, also emphasized, on the other hand, the meritorious nature of good works performed with grace, by teaching that the reward is in proportion to the works: "He [God] will render to every man according to his own labour" [Rom. 2:6] (ibid., 264–65, emphasis added).
>
> As already mentioned, Ott then cites other similar passages (e.g., 1 Cor. 3:8; Col. 3:24; Heb. 10:35; 11:6) and concludes, "[Paul] thereby shows that the good works of the just establish a legal claim (*meritum de condigno*) to reward on God" [cf. Heb. 6:10] (*FCD*, 265).

Of course, by Catholic teaching, this demand upon (or requirement of) God is not intrinsic;[7] rather, God has placed *Himself* in this situation through His promise to reward good works. Nevertheless, eternal life is allegedly given to us on merit. As already cited, Trent declared,

> Those who work well "unto the end" [Matt. 10:22], and who trust in God, life eternal is to be proposed, both as a grace mercifully promised to the sons of God through Christ Jesus, "and as a recompense" which is … to be faithfully given to their good works and merit.… *If anyone shall say that the good works of the man justified are in such a way the gift of God that they are not also the good merits of him who is justified, or that the one justified by the good works … does not truly merit increase of grace, eternal life, and the attainment of eternal life (if he should die in grace), and also an increase of glory; let him be anathema*. (in Denzinger, *SCD*, 809.257, 842.261, emphasis added)

The Council of Trent additionally affirmed that "nothing that precedes justification, whether faith or works, merits the grace of justification" (in ibid.).[8] Again, when Catholic scholars cite James 2:24 (that we are justified by works), they do not refer to initial justification (at the sacrament of baptism), which comes only by grace. Rather, they are referring to progressive justification (growth in righteousness), which Protestants call *sanctification*. On the other

hand, Trent did maintain that works *are* necessary for salvation in the progressive (sanctificational) and ultimate (glorificational) senses—and with this Protestants disagree strongly.

Protestant Response to the Roman Catholic View

The Protestant response to the Roman Catholic position may be divided into two parts: *First*, a response to verses misused by Catholics attempting to prove that the performance of works is necessary for salvation; *second*, verses that show we are saved by faith alone.

Verses on "Works" Used by Catholics

The main verses employed by Roman Catholics to show that the doing of good works is necessary for salvation are: Matthew 5:12; 25:34; Romans 2:6–7; 1 Corinthians 3:8; Philippians 2:13; 3:21; Hebrews 6:10; 10:35; 11:6; and James 2:24. In response, several comments are in order.

First, as already clarified, none of these refers to an initial justification by works, so on this point there is no real salvific debate.[9]

Second, verses used by Catholics to support the necessity of works for justification do not concern what they call *initial justification* but what Protestants call *sanctification*.[10]

Third, even here Catholics commit a serious error: Galatianism. We are not only *justified* by faith alone, but we are also *sanctified* by faith alone, as Paul teaches:

> I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by *believing* what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by *human effort*? … Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard? (Gal. 3:2–3, 5).

As we've clearly established, the kind of faith (saving belief) by which we are alone justified and sanctified is the kind that *naturally* produces good works.[11] Hence, it is no surprise that there are verses that make such statements as "by works a man is justified, and not by faith only" (James 2:24 KJV), for "faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (2:17 NKJV). What James means is that *only the kind of faith that manifests itself in good works can save us*. Nonetheless, it is faith alone that does the sanctifying, even as the faith that sanctifies is accompanied by good works.[12] Paul likewise writes that God " 'will render to each one according to his deeds': eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for … immortality" (Rom. 2:6–7 NKJV).

Paul and James emphasize that we are not saved by works but by the kind of faith that naturally results in good works. In this sense, none of the passages that speak of works as the ground for God's evaluation of them is in conflict with the Protestant principle of faith alone (Lat: *sola fidei*).[13]

Fourth, as for verses speaking about reward, there is a serious misunderstanding by Roman Catholics, an equivocation between merited reward (*payment*) and unmerited reward (*gift*). Salvation is only a reward in the latter sense (i.e., as a gift); in this sense, for example, an earthly inheritance is a reward. Hebrews 11:6 fits into this category: "Without *faith* it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must *believe* that he exists and that he *rewards* those who earnestly seek him." *Faith* obtains this reward, not works. An inheritance is a gift, not something for which we work. Working *out* our salvation is not the same as working *for* it. It is "God who works it in" us by faith, and we by that faith work it out (cf. Phil. 2:12–13). That is to say, saving faith manifests good works.

Other verses about rewards, such as 1 Corinthians 3:8, are referring to rewards *in* heaven, not the reward *of* heaven. Even in this same text, those who suffer loss of reward will not lose their salvation: "If [a man's work] is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames" (3:15).

Verses on Faith Alone

Not only is Scripture lacking in any support for any kind of a works-contingent salvation (whether it be justification or sanctification), but the Bible is also *explicit* that we are saved by faith alone. As we have observed repeatedly, "It is *by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works*, so that no one can boast" (Eph. 2:8–9). Salvation is granted "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy" (Titus 3:5 NKJV). Romans 4:4–5 could hardly be clearer:

> *When a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does* not *work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.*

Finally, one of the strongest New Testament affirmations: "If by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace" (Rom. 11:6). Once again, the same can be said of faith—if salvation is by faith, then it is no longer by works, for if it were of works, then salvation would no longer be of

faith (cf. Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38).

Based on the foregoing analysis, the Protestant arguments against Roman Catholic insistence on works as salvifically necessary are summarized thus:

(1) It confuses gift and merit.
(2) It makes works a condition of eternal life.
(3) It makes works of sanctification a condition of one's ultimate salvation.
(4) It confuses working *for* and working *from* salvation.
(5) It makes a false distinction between "works of the law" (which they say *are not* necessary) and "works" (which they say *are* necessary).
(6) It embraces the error of Galatianism (cf. Gal. 3) by making works necessary for ultimate justification (glorification) before God.
(7) It confuses salvation and service.
(8) It loads works into its concept of faith.
(9) It sacramentalizes salvation, thereby making the Catholic Church to be the administrator of grace.
(10) It institutionalizes salvation, making the Church the official institution through which salvation is received, piecemeal, through its seven sacraments.[14]

In short, the Protestant response is that *faith* is the *sole* condition for receiving salvation. The reception of Christ's saving work is in no way, at any level,[15] conditioned upon works of any kind. We work *from* grace, not *for* it. We are saved by faith alone, even as the faith that saves us is manifest in good works. This truth was affirmed by the Second Council of Orange (529):

> We also believe and profess for our salvation that in every good work it is not we who begin and afterwards are helped by God's mercy, but He Himself who, without any previous merits on our part, first instills in us faith in Him and love for Him so that … we may with His help accomplish what is pleasing to Him. Therefore we must clearly believe that the wonderful faith of the thief whom the Lord called to His home in paradise (cf. Luke 23:43) … did not come from nature but was a gift from the bounty of divine grace, (as cited in S. J. Neuner and J. Dupuis, eds., *CF*, 608–09)

THE STRONG REFORMED VIEW ON THE CONDITION FOR SALVATION

Ironically, while one of the central principles of the Reformation was

justification by faith alone (*sola fidei*), some who strongly claim to be heirs of the Reformation (i.e., the Reformed) do not believe there is even one condition necessary for a human being to receive salvation. This tradition follows Theodore Beza (1519–1605) and the Synods of Dort (1618–1619). In response to Jacob Arminius (1560–1609) and his followers, these theologians developed what has come to be known as "T-U-L-I-P," an acrostic that, as we have seen, stands for five fundamental beliefs:

- *T*otal depravity
- *U*nconditional election
- *L*imited atonement
- *I*rresistible grace
- *P*erseverance of the saints

Given these five points, extreme Calvinists have concluded that there are absolutely *no conditions* for a person to meet before he or she can receive the gift of salvation. As the argument goes, humanity is so totally depraved that we cannot understand or receive the gospel. Persons "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1 NKJV) are incapable of doing anything with respect to receiving salvation. Humanity (in Adam) had the ability to kill itself, but once dead, it cannot be any part of its revitalization.[16] What is more, *election is unconditional*,[17] so there are no soteriological conditions for salvation, either for God or sinners. Further, the provision of *the Atonement is limited* to the elect,[18] and *the grace by which the elect are regenerated is irresistible*, and thus, comes before faith.[19] Indeed, faith itself is God's gift to only the elect and only after they are regenerated; once this has taken place, they are guaranteed to *persevere in their salvation*.[20] Justification (regeneration) is *logically* prior to faith, not the reverse.[21] In brief, according to strong Calvinists, one is not really justified *by* faith.[22]

One of the most popular proponents of the strong Reformed view, R. C. Sproul, makes the following related assertions in *Chosen by God*:[23]

> [Jesus says,] "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him" (John 6:44).… Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* defines [the word *draws*] to mean "to compel by irresistible superiority." Linguistically and lexicographically, the word means "to compel." To compel is a much more forceful concept than to woo. (69)

How does the Holy Spirit exercise irresistible grace on the unwilling? By regeneration:

> *One does not first believe, then become reborn*, and then be ushered into the kingdom. How can a man choose a kingdom he cannot see? How can a man enter the kingdom without being first reborn? … A cardinal point of Reformed theology is the maxim: "*Regeneration precedes faith*." Our nature is so corrupt, the power of sin is so great, that unless God does a supernatural work in our souls we will never choose Christ. *We do not believe in order to be born again; we are born again in order to believe*. (ibid., 72–73, emphasis added)

In response to the strong Reformed position on the condition(s) for salvation, several tenets and assumptions call for evaluation, including

(1) the belief that justification is prior to faith;
(2) the contention that God uses irresistible grace on the unwilling; and
(3) the idea that faith is a gift of God only to the elect.

Justification Is Not Prior to Faith

Scarcely anything could be clearer in Scripture than the logical order of faith first, *then* justification. Indeed, this is inherent in the very Protestant principle of "justification *by* faith alone." This is not only the general order, but it is universally true that in Scripture faith is the means by which we receive justification from God, not vice versa. Consider again the following verses (all emphasis added).

John 1:12

"To all who received him, to *those who believed* in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."

John 3:16

"God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that *whoever believes* in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

John 3:18

"*Whoever believes* in him is not condemned, but *whoever does not believe* stands condemned already because *he has not believed* in the name of God's one and only Son."

John 3:36

"*Whoever believes* in the Son has eternal life, but *whoever rejects* the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."

John 5:24

"I tell you the truth, *whoever hears my word and believes* him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."

John 5:40

"*You are not willing to come to Me* that you may have life" (NKJV).[24]

Acts 13:39

"Through him *everyone who believes* is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses."

Acts 16:31

"*Believe* in the Lord Jesus, *and you will be saved*."

Romans 3:22

"This *righteousness from God comes through faith* in Jesus Christ *to all who believe*."

Romans 3:26

"[God offered Jesus] to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies *those who have faith* in Jesus."

Romans 4:3

"What does the Scripture say? 'Abraham *believed* God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.' "

Romans 4:5

"To the man who does not work but *trusts* God who justifies the wicked, *his faith* is credited as righteousness."

Romans 5:1

"Therefore, since we have been justified *through faith*, we have peace with

God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Verses Used by Strong Calvinists

Acts 5:31

"God exalted [Christ] to his own right hand as Prince and Savior *that he might give repentance* and forgiveness of sins to Israel." This is supposed to support the extreme Calvinist contention that repentance is God's gift only to the elect. Second Timothy 2:25 adds that we "must gently instruct [those who oppose us], in the hope that *God will grant them repentance* leading them to a knowledge of the truth" (cf. Acts 11:18).

Response

First, according to Acts 5:31, repentance is a gift in the same sense that forgiveness is a gift, since they are tied together. If the strong Reformed position is soteriologically correct, then all Israel must be saved, since repentance *and* forgiveness were given to Israel. In reality, only a remnant of Israel will be saved (cf. Rom. 9:27), not all. The same is true of Acts 11:18: "God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life." This clearly does not mean that all Gentiles will be saved but rather that all Gentiles have the opportunity to be saved. In like manner, it means that all have the God-given opportunity to repent (cf. 2 Peter 3:9).

Second, repentance itself is not the gift of God—the *opportunity* to repent is His gift. He graciously grants us the chance to turn from our sin, but we must do the repenting. Repentance is an act of our will *supported and encouraged* by His grace.

Third, if repentance is a gift, then it is a gift in the same sense that forgiveness is a gift. Forgiveness was obtained by Jesus on the cross for "everyone who believes" (cf. Acts 13:38–39), not only for the elect.[25] Hence, by the logic of extreme Calvinism, every human being must have been given saving faith—a conclusion emphatically rejected, of course, by extreme Calvinists.

Acts 16:14

"One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. *The Lord opened her heart to respond* to Paul's message." Acts 18:27 adds that salvation is "to those

who by grace had believed." Allegedly, without this gracious work of God, no one would believe and be saved.

Response

One need not deny that God moves upon the hearts of unbelievers to persuade and prompt them to faith; what we deny is that God does this coercively (by irresistible grace) and that He only does it on some persons (the elect). The Holy Spirit is convicting "the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (John 16:8), but God does not force anyone to believe in Him (cf. Matt. 23:37; John 5:40). While the Lord opened Lydia's heart to believe, Luke does not say that He did so against her will.

Romans 10:17

"*Faith comes from hearing the message*, and the message is heard through the word of Christ." Here it appears that faith is actually produced in a person by the Word.

Response

First, there is no reference to faith as a gift given by God—this is an assumption that can only be read into the text.

Second, the order of events is sending the evangelist, preaching the Word, hearing the gospel, believing the truth, calling upon God (cf. Rom. 10:14–15), but the prior is not universally the cause of the latter, for not everyone who is sent goes, and not everyone who hears the Word of God believes unto salvation (cf. Matt. 13:19).

Third, whatever role the Word of God has in prompting saving faith, the faith itself must come from us—the context says so. Just a few verses earlier Paul writes, "If *you … believe* in your heart that God raised [Jesus] from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with *your heart* that *you believe* and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved (Rom. 10:9–10).

Romans 12:3

"Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, *in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you*."

Response

Paul is speaking to believers (cf. 1:7; 12:1), not to or about unbelievers. This is not the faith that unbelievers exercise for salvation (saving belief—see Acts 16:31); it is a special *gift of faith* given to some believers. Paul lists it among the gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12.

1 Corinthians 4:7

"What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?" The strong Calvinist insists that if *everything* we receive is from God, then so is faith.

Response

First, it should be noted that Paul makes no contextual application of this verse to the saving faith that receives God's gift; he is referring to spiritual gifts given to believers (cf. 1 Cor. 12:4–11) that should be exercised in humility. There is no idea of giving faith to unbelievers so that they can be saved.

Second, even if faith for unbelievers *were* envisioned here, there is no affirmation that God gives it only to some (i.e., the elect). In *any* sense in which faith is given, it is given to *all*. Some choose to exercise it, and some do not.

Third, once again, Scripture's uniform presentation is that faith is something unbelievers are to exercise to receive salvation (cf. John 3:16, 18, 36; Acts 16:31), not something they must wait upon God to give them.

1 Corinthians 7:25

"I give my judgment, as one that hath *obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful*" (KJV). Augustine, for instance, used this verse to support his belief that faith is a gift of God prior to regeneration (*E*, 31).

Response

In actual fact, Paul is not speaking about unsaved persons receiving faith unto salvation but about believers receiving mercy from God that enables them to be faithful (trustworthy). The context (given in the very same verse) involves believing virgins having the grace to remain sexually faithful. The NIV captures

the meaning: “Now about virgins: I have no command from the Lord, but I give a judgment as one who by the Lord’s mercy is trustworthy.”

1 Corinthians 12:8–9

“To one *there is given* through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another *faith* by the same Spirit.”

Response

To be sure, “faith” here is a gift from God. However, again, Paul is not talking about faith given to *unbelievers* by which they can be *saved*; rather, he is speaking of the gift of faith given to some *believers* by which they can *serve* (cf. vv. 5, 12).

Ephesians 2:8–9

“It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and *this* not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.” According to strong Calvinists, from the Synod of Dort to R. C. Sproul (e.g., *CG*, 119), this verse proves that saving faith is God’s gift.

Response

Oddly, extreme Calvinists completely ignore what John Calvin himself said about this text: “[Paul] does not mean that faith is the gift of God, but that salvation is given to us by God, or, that we obtain it by the gift of God” (*CC*, 11.145). The great linguistic scholar A. T. Robertson (1863–1934)[26] pointed out that in the Greek,

> “Grace” is God’s part, “faith” ours. *And that (kai touto)* [is] neuter [in gender], not feminine *(taute)*, and so refers not to *pistis [pisteos*— “faith,” feminine] or to *charis [chariti*—“grace,” feminine also], but to the act of being saved by grace [*sesosmenoi*] conditioned on faith on our part.[27]

While some have argued that a pronoun may agree in *sense*, though not in *form*, with its antecedent, this view has been soundly refuted:

> If Paul wanted [*kai touto*, “and that”] to refer to *pistis* (“faith”), he could have written the feminine *taute* instead of the neuter *touto*, and its meaning would have been clear.[28] [Further,] this position is supported by the parallelism between *ouk ex hymon* (“and this not of yourselves”) in 2:8 and *ouk ex ergon* (“not of works”) in 2:9. The latter phrase would not be meaningful if it referred to *pisteos* (“faith”). Instead, it clearly means salvation is “not of works.”[29]

Philippians 1:29

"*It has been granted to you* on behalf of Christ not only *to believe* on him, but also to suffer for him." This is taken by some strong Calvinists to mean that faith is a gift of God to unbelievers, namely, the ones who are of the elect.

Response

There are at least three indications that Paul had no such thing in mind.

First, the point is simply that God has not only provided us with the opportunity to trust Him but also to suffer for Him. The word *granted* (Gk: *echaristhe*) means "grace" or "favor." That is to say, both opportunities—to suffer for Him and to believe on Him—are favors with which God has graced us.

Second, Paul is not speaking of initial faith that brings salvation but of the daily faith and daily suffering of a Christian.

Third, it is noteworthy that both the suffering and the believing are our responsibility. Paul says it is granted for you to do this, not something God does for us.

Philippians 3:8–9

Paul said, regarding his "merits,"

> I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—*the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith*.

Response

It is not *faith* that comes from God but *righteousness*, and righteousness comes "by faith," namely, by the exercise of our belief.

1 Thessalonians 1:4–6

Paul assured the believers in Thessalonica,

> We know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because *our gospel came to you* not simply with words, but also *with power*, with the Holy Spirit *and with deep conviction*.… You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.

Response

It should be plain to anyone who takes time to read this text carefully that it says nothing about faith being a gift of God only to the elect. Neither "faith" nor "gift" is mentioned, and, furthermore, the gospel is "the power of God … *for everyone who believes*" (Rom. 1:16 NKJV). Or as verse 6 points out, it is God's power to those who *welcome* it. Faith precedes salvation.

1 Peter 1:21

"*Through him you believe* in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God."

Response

The phrase "through Him you believe" does not mean that faith is a gift of God to die elect but that apart from Christ no one would ever have come to believe. A. T. Robertson rendered it, "Who through him are believers in God" (*WPNT*, 6.91). Or, "It is in that same God that *you have been led thereby to believe*."[30] There is no affirmation here or anywhere else in the Bible that God gives faith unto salvation only to a select few.

2 Peter 1:1

"Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ. *To those who* through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ *have received a faith as precious as ours*."

Response

Faith, in this case, can be *objectively* understood as "the Christian faith," which all believers have received as a gift from God (cf. Jude 3). The plural *ours* fits with this view, as does Peter's earlier reference to "the faith" (1 Peter 5:9). Or, even if "faith" is viewed *subjectively*,[31] Peter neither says *how* we received it nor *that* we received it apart from our volition. Neither does he say God desires that only some have it; both Paul and Peter clearly teach God's salvific desire for *everyone* (cf. 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9), so if extreme Calvinism *is* correct on this matter, then God gives faith to all who will accept it (which extreme Calvinists reject).

1 John 5:1

"Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well." Since "is born" is a perfect participle (past action with continuing results), it is argued by some strong Calvinists that believing is a result of being regenerated.

Response

First of all, this text says nothing about how one becomes born of God. It is simply noting that all who confess Jesus as the Messiah have been converted; that is, born of God.

Second, John makes it clear elsewhere that one has to believe in order to be born of God. He told Nicodemus that one had to "believe" (John 3:15–18) in order to be "born again" (vv. 3:5, 7). Indeed, the very theme of his gospel declared that faith was prior to salvation. He wrote: "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and *that by believing* you may have life in his name" (20:31; cf. 5:24).

In every New Testament instance, faith is prior to salvation: Faith is the means, and salvation is the end. Nowhere does God's Word teach that we must be saved in order to believe; by contrast, everywhere it affirms that we must believe in order to be saved. Extreme Calvinism has the soteriological cart before the horse.

Two Important Points

Even *if* it *could* be scripturally demonstrated that saving faith is a gift of God, there are still several crucial errors in the extreme Calvinist view.

For one thing, salvation involves gifts that must be *received or rejected*. Contrary to popular belief, Jacob Arminius himself was so Calvinistic that he maintained grace as absolutely necessary for bestowing salvation; nonetheless, he rightly acknowledged that an act of human freedom is necessary for receiving it:

> "What then," you ask, "does Free Will do?" I reply with brevity, "It saves." Take away Free Will, and nothing will be left to be saved: Take away Grace, and nothing will be left as the source of salvation.… No one, except God, is able to bestow salvation; and nothing, except Free Will, is capable of receiving it. (*WJA*, 2.196.11)

Again, John wrote, "He came to that which was his own, but his own *did not*

receive him. Yet to all who *received* him, to those who believed in his name, *he gave* the right to become children of God" (John 1:11–12).[32]

Furthermore, if faith *is* a gift from God, then it is offered to everyone, not just some (i.e., "the elect"—cf. John 3:16; 1 John 2:2). As already established, numerous passages affirm that the atoning work of Jesus Christ is unlimited in its extent.[33]

God Does Not Exercise Irresistible Grace on the Unwilling

Another biblically implausible premise of extreme Calvinism is the belief that God exerts irresistible grace on the unwilling, which He allegedly does in the act of justifying people apart from will and against their will before they are able to believe. Once again, Scripture universally requires faith as the prior condition to being justified. In addition, there are many passages that speak of unbelievers having the ability to turn down the grace of God.

Matthew 23:37

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but *you were not willing*."

Luke 7:30

"The Pharisees and experts in the law *rejected God's purpose [will] for themselves*, because they had not been baptized by John."

John 5:40

"*You refuse* to come to me to have life."[34]

Acts 7:51

Stephen accused the Sanhedrin, "You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: *You always resist the Holy Spirit!*"[35]

2 Peter 3:9

"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, *not wanting anyone to perish, but [wanting] everyone to*

come to repentance."[36]

There are many other texts indicating that a person can defy the will of God.[37] Of course, God's ultimate will is always established (Isa. 55:11), but sovereignly He has willed to allow His gospel invitation to be resisted. God wills some things conditionally and others unconditionally; salvation falls into the latter category. As noted previously, C. S. Lewis (1898–1963) wrote, "There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, '*Thy* will be done' " (*GD*, 69). Again, Lewis elsewhere set forth the reason for this:

> The Irresistible and the Indisputable are the two weapons which the very nature of [God's] scheme forbids Him to use. Merely to override a human will… would be for Him useless. He cannot ravish. He can only woo. (*SL*, 128)

Saving Faith (and Repentance) Can Be Exercised by Anyone

Nowhere does the Bible teach that saving faith is a special gift of God to only a select few. Further, everywhere God's Word assumes that anyone who wills to be saved can exercise saving faith. Every scriptural passage that calls upon unbelievers to believe or repent for salvation implies this truth. A few familiar passages will suffice to make the point.

Luke 13:3

"Unless *you repent*, you too will all perish."

John 3:16

"God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that *whoever believes* in him shall not perish but have eternal life."[38]

John 6:29

"This is the work of God, that *ye believe* on him whom he hath sent" (KJV).

John 11:40

"Did I not tell you that if *you believed*, you would see the glory of God?"

John 12:36

"Put *your trust* in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light."

John 20:31

"These [actions of Jesus] are written *that you may believe* that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, *and that by believing you may have life in his name*."

Acts 16:31

"*Believe* in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved."

Acts 17:30

"In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now *he commands all people everywhere to repent*."

Acts 20:21

"I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must *turn to God in repentance and have faith* in our Lord Jesus."

Hebrews 11:6

"Without faith it is impossible to please God, because *anyone who comes to him must believe* that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."

Myriad other references affirm the same truth; consider Romans 3:22; 4:11, 24; 10:9, 14; 1 Corinthians 1:21; Galatians 3:22; Ephesians 1:16; 1 Thessalonians 1:7; 4:14; and 1 Timothy 1:16.

Exercising Faith Is Not a Meritorious Work

The dispute here is not over whether salvation is based on works: All orthodox Protestants agree that it is not. The question is whether an act of human faith constitutes a meritorious work. The answer is no, supported by both Scripture and good reason.

First of all, faith is clearly contrasted with works in the Bible; that faith is placed in opposition to works is evident in the passages just cited and many more (cf. Rom. 3:26–27; Gal. 3:11). Romans 4:4 affirms that "when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation."

Justification is either of faith or of works, but not both. Thus the faith exercised to receive the gift of salvation is not a work; rather, salvific belief is the admission that we cannot work for God's gift but must accept it by pure

grace.

What is more, the act of receiving a gift by faith is no more meritorious than a beggar receiving a handout; it is illogical to assert that a receiver gets credit for accepting a gift rather than the giver who offers it. The act of faith in receiving God's unconditional salvation accrues no merit to us—*all* praise and glory goes to the Giver of "every good and perfect gift" (James 1:17).

J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston have said that "Reformed theology condemned Arminianism as being in principle a return to Rome (because in effect it turned faith into a meritorious work)."[39] R. C. Sproul seems to agree:

> The Arminian acknowledges that faith is something a person does. It is a work, though not a meritorious one. Is it a good work? Certainly it is not a bad work. It is good for a person to trust in Christ and in Christ alone for his or her salvation.… [Thus,] the Arminian finds it difficult to escape the conclusion that ultimately his salvation rests on some righteous act of the will he has performed. He has "in effect" merited the merit of Christ, which differs only slightly from the view of Rome. (*CG*, 25–26)

This is an inaccurate description of Arminianism. As earlier cited, Jacob Arminius long ago replied to this charge:

> A rich man bestows, on a poor and famished beggar, alms by which he may be able to maintain himself and his family. Does it cease to be a pure gift, because the beggar extends his hand to receive it? Can it be said with propriety that "the alms depend partly on the liberality of the Donor, and partly on the liberty of the Receiver, though the latter would not have possessed the alms unless he had received it by stretching out his hand?" … If these assertions cannot be truly made about a beggar who receives alms, how much less can they be made about the gift of faith, for the receiving of which far more acts of Divine Grace are required! (*WJA*, 2.52.27)

No One Can Receive the Gift of Salvation Without the Aid of Grace

Finally, extreme Calvinism often mistakenly assumes that the exercise of faith as a condition for receiving the gift of salvation[40] must mean they can do this unaided by God's grace. As noted earlier,[41] *no one can believe unto salvation without the aid of God's grace*.[42] Although not all these verses refer to prevenient grace,[43] the point is the same: In the final analysis, no one can believe unto salvation without God's gracious initiative. However, while salvation comes from Him, it is actualized in our lives by our cooperation; again, His grace is not exercised on a passive object but on an active agent.

So in the final analysis, extreme Calvinists have denied one of the central premises of the Reformation: *faith alone*. According to them, we do not believe in order to be saved; we are saved in order to believe.

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST VIEW ON THE CONDITION(S) FOR SALVATION

With regard to soteriology, many consider the Church of Christ denomination to be part of the broader evangelical movement, while others believe it is borderline or even over the line. In most essential doctrines, the Church of Christ is clearly evangelical. The rub comes with their insistence that there are four necessary conditions for being saved.

The Churches of Christ[44] are independent congregations that share a common heritage in the Restoration Movement, organized by and spiritual heirs to Alexander Campbell (1788–1866). Most Churches of Christ believe the four necessary acts of obedience to God for salvation are *faith*, *repentance*, *confession*, and *water baptism by immersion*. Church of Christ Professor Jack Cottrell (b. 1938) gives an excellent summary of the position in his book on Bible doctrine, *The Faith Once for All*:[45] "We shall [now] present the following acts as conditions for salvation in the New Covenant (post-Pentecost) age: faith, repentance, confession, and baptism" (349).

Faith As a Condition for Salvation

Cottrell contends that "the primary condition for receiving (and retaining) God's saving grace always has been and continues to be *faith*" (ibid.). This faith includes obedience to the command to believe the gospel (John 6:28–29; Acts 16:31; cf. Acts 6:7), and in this sense faith is the opposite of disobedience (cf. John 3:36), while unbelief is synonymous with disobedience (cf. Heb. 3:18–19). Even so, he adds,

> This does not mean that faith includes obedience, however; it merely shows that *obedience includes faith*.… While we cannot say that faith *includes* obedience, we must indeed say that it *produces* or results in obedience. The faith that saves is a faith that obeys. (*FOA*, 352)

Faith is unique among the four supposed conditions of salvation, for "faith as a condition for salvation is the means by which grace is received" (ibid., 353). Hence, faith is more than a qualification—it is the medium by which salvation is obtained.

Repentance As a Condition for Salvation

Cottrell continues, “The second condition for receiving (and retaining) salvation is *repentance*” (ibid.). Numerous verses are listed in support of this, including Matthew 3:2; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; 5:32; 24:47; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 5:31; 8:22; 11:18; 17:30; 26:20; 2 Corinthians 7:10; and 2 Peter 3:9.

> Specifically, [repentance] is a change of mind or attitude toward sin, one’s own sin in particular. It includes remorse (sorrow, grief—2 Cor. 7:9–10). [It also] includes a sincere *desire* to be rid of it (the kind David expresses in Psalm 51), as well as a determination *to forsake [sin]* and walk before God (Acts 14:15). (*FOA*, 354, final emphasis added)

However,

> To speak of repentance as a turning from sin does not mean that repentance itself includes the actual change of lifestyle or reformation of life that flows from regeneration and constitutes sanctification. Faith does not include obedience, and neither does repentance, (ibid.)

There are several reasons repentance is said to be necessary for salvation.

> First of all, the very nature of salvation requires it. Salvation is salvation from *sin*, and we cannot be saved from our sin while we are still holding on to it in our hearts.… Second, the very nature of saving faith requires that it be accompanied by repentance.… The point is that we cannot sincerely accept what Jesus did for us on the cross without hating the sin that put him there, (ibid., 355)

If repentance is necessary for salvation, though, then why does the Bible mention faith alone? Cottrell’s response is to argue that faith does not include repentance as a “flip side”:[46] “This approach must be rejected; the integrity of both faith and repentance as distinct mental states must be preserved, as in Mark 1:15 and Acts 20:21” (ibid.). He adds,

> It is true that faith is often mentioned by itself, but this is because faith is the one act that is the specific *means* (instrument, vehicle, channel) through which God’s saving grace is received.… Faith is thus singled out as the sole *means*, but not as the sole *condition* for receiving salvation. All means are conditions, but not all conditions are means.[47] (ibid., 356)

Confession As a Condition for Salvation

According to Church of Christ teaching, “The third condition for salvation is *confession*, specifically, a confession before the world of one’s faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord” (ibid.). Many verses are listed in support, such as Matthew 10:32–33; Romans 10:9–10; 2 Corinthians 9:13; Philippians 2:11; 1 Timothy

6:12–13; Hebrews 3:1; 1 John 2:23; 4:2–3, 15; and 2 John 7.

This confession must be that Jesus is *Lord*,[48] because *Lord* means "Deity"; therefore, "What are we actually saying when we confess Jesus as Lord? We are ascribing to him two things: *ownership* and *deity*" (ibid., 357).

This confession must be spoken before others:

> It is important to note that this confession of Jesus as one's personal, divine Savior and Lord must be oral and public. Paul says this confession is with "your mouth" (Rom. 10:9–10). Jesus says our confession must be "before men" (Matt. 10:32). Timothy's good confession was "in the presence of many witnesses" [1 Tim. 6:12] (ibid., 358).

A prime contention for Cottrell's view comes from Paul:

> In Romans 10:9 the verbs "confess" and "believe" are both aorist tense, suggesting that Paul has in mind a specific past act associated with the sinner's initial and decisive confession of faith. In Romans 10:13 confessing Jesus as Lord is equated with "calling on the name of the Lord," which is the sinner's initial baptismal prayer for salvation. Thus it is appropriate for a new convert to announce his faith upon his acceptance of Christ and as a preparation for baptism. The two verbs[49] are identical in form[50] and are related to "if in exactly the same way, i.e., as equal conditions for salvation. If faith is a condition, then so must confession be. (ibid., 358–59)

He goes on,

> This is not to say that these two acts [faith and confession] are related to salvation in the same way. Both are conditions, but they do not both play the same role in bringing the sinner to salvation. Faith is still the primary condition because it is the sole *means* by which salvation is received, but this does not rule out the addition of other conditions that serve other purposes.… [The role of confession is that] it is a confession of faith, a faith that is directed specifically toward Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, (ibid., 359, emphasis added)

***Baptism* As a Condition for Salvation**

> The fourth and final condition for salvation in the NT age is baptism. The Bible is very clear about this. In every NT passage that says anything at all about the meaning of baptism, the only purpose with which it is connected is the salvation of sinners.… This is also why we speak of baptism (along with faith, repentance, and confession) as a *condition* of salvation" (ibid., 359–60).

Cottrell rejects the widespread view that baptism is a symbolic outward sign of an inward reality or something that primarily affects the psychosomatic state of the saved person, sealing assurance to his heart:

> Some have gone to the extreme of affirming a *causal* connection between baptism and salvation. They have attributed to the baptismal water or to the baptismal act the power to cleanse the soul from sin, or at least the power to convey that divine cleansing to the soul, (ibid., 361)

He goes on to say,

> There is no basis for attributing any saving power to the baptismal water or to the act of baptism itself. God's power and God's action alone can save; the sinner is saved when God applies the blood of Christ to his heart and gives him the gift of the Holy Spirit.… Most importantly, we affirm that the clear and specific teaching of the NT is that baptism is the *time during which* God graciously bestows upon the sinner the double cure of salvation. As such it is a divinely appointed condition for salvation during this New Covenant era. (ibid., 361–62)

Several related verses are then put forward, including John 3:3–5; Acts 2:38; 22:16; and Colossians 2:12. In Acts 2:38, Peter said, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

As to the mode of baptism, "We may state unequivocally that in its physical form, baptism is by definition the momentary immersion of the body into a pool of water. Nothing else really counts as baptism" (*FOA*, 368).

In response, the Church of Christ position is decidedly outside the evangelical mainstream as to how we receive the gift of salvation.[51] Since there is predominant soteriological agreement on the need for faith, we can move immediately to repentance.

Repentance Is Not a Separate Condition for Salvation

While most evangelicals *do* believe that repentance is a necessary part of (or condition for) salvation, they *do not* view it as a distinct and second step. Repentance is inseparable from true saving faith.[52] To support repentance as distinct and separate from faith, the Church of Christ has taken Scripture out of context. Cottrell specifically points to Mark 1:15 and Acts 20:21.

In the gospel of Mark, Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (1:15). This (and other passages) cannot be taken in support of the Church of Christ view for several reasons.

First, Jesus didn't say belief and repentance are separate steps. Repentance, part of faith, may have been listed separately for clarity, in the same way that loving the Lord with all our "mind" is added to "heart" (in Matt. 22:37).[53] Often the Bible lists several things without implying that they happen at different times or are different events.[54]

Second, when Paul said, "I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they

must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus" (Acts 20:21), here again Greeks are in view: It had to be made explicit to them that they repent (Gk: *metanoian*, "change their mind") about God and accept monotheism in opposition to polytheism. Hence, it was necessary to single out the kind of faith that involved a change of mind about God as needed for salvation. Nowhere does the New Testament list repentance as a second, separate step after faith, necessary for salvation.

Third, ironically, Cottrell accepts the New Testament affirmation of faith as the *means* of receiving the gift of salvation: "Faith is still the primary condition because it is the *sole means* by which salvation is received, but this does not rule out the addition of other conditions that serve other purposes" (*FOA*, 359, emphasis added). However, he does not appear to see the inconsistency of adding three more conditions for being saved. If faith is the only means of salvation, why is something else necessary?

Fourth, and finally, the New Testament lists faith and faith alone as the means of being saved. Accordingly, any other conditions (such as confession and baptism) cannot actually be salvific conditions—at best, they are soteriological *results*. Indeed, Cottrell recognizes this same relationship when it comes to the relationship between faith and obedience: "While we cannot say that faith *includes* obedience, we must indeed say that it *produces* or results in obedience. The faith that saves is a faith that obeys" (ibid., 352). Why then, cannot faith be the sole means of salvation, and confession and baptism be a matter of obedience in the Christian life after one exercises faith alone for salvation?

Confession Is Not a Separate Condition for Salvation

The most significant difference from evangelical soteriology is what the Church of Christ maintains as the third and fourth steps necessary for salvation: confession and baptism.

First, while the Bible speaks of confession unto salvation (cf. Rom. 10:9), it nowhere lists this as a separate and necessary step to being saved. Again, Cottrell admits,

> Certain NT references make a clear distinction between faith and obedient works (e.g., Rom. 3:28; 4:4–8; Eph. 2:8–10). This makes it impossible to include obedience in the definition of faith.… While we cannot say that faith *includes* obedience, we must indeed say that it *produces* or results in obedience. The faith that saves is a faith that obeys. (*FOA*, 352)

But if this is the case, why should confession be seen as a condition rather than a result of salvation? Someone who has saving faith will naturally want to manifest it in obedience (such as confessing Christ), but that doesn't make being obedient in confessing Christ a condition for being saved.

Second, Cottrell contends that faith is the means of salvation; consequently, a person is already saved by faith before he confesses his faith. Confession is a manifestation of salvation, not a stipulation for receiving it.

Third, verses used by the Church of Christ to support its belief that open confession of Christ is a necessary condition of salvation are taken out of context. These texts fall into two broad categories. The first category speaks of confession as *in connection with* saving faith, not as *a condition for* salvation. In Romans 10:9,[55] Paul is not saying that without a public confession of Christ one cannot be saved.[56] Confession is a natural outward concomitant of saving faith, but as Paul himself made clear, *saving faith alone saves* (cf. Eph. 2:8–9; Rom. 4:4–5). Furthermore, the Bible speaks of secret believers who did not confess Christ openly, while according to Church of Christ teaching, one must confess "openly" and "orally" in order to be saved. Here again, while open, oral confession is a natural *result* of salvation, it is nowhere given as a necessary *condition* of everlasting life.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary clarifies the issue correctly:

> Confessing *with the mouth* that *Jesus is Lord* is mentioned first to conform to the order of the quotation from Deuteronomy 30:14 in Romans 10:8. [Thus,] the confession is an acknowledgment that God has been incarnated in Jesus (cf. 5:6), that Jesus Christ is God.… The true order is given in verse 10: *For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified*. [Therefore,] these are not two separate steps to salvation. They are chronologically together.[57]

Indeed, if confession were a separate step, then the vast majority of the New Testament statements on how we become saved (including the whole gospel of John) would be wrong, since confession is not included in them at all.

Fourth, as to the second category of verses used, one is Matthew 10:32–33,[58] where Jesus exhorted His followers to confess Him before men. Nevertheless, confession is not laid forth as a condition to becoming a believer: Those to whom He spoke (His twelve disciples, vv. 1–5) were already saved (except Judas —cf. John 17:12). Confession here is a condition for receiving a reward, that of being honored by Christ before the angels: It is not a condition for being welcomed into heaven but for rewards once there.[59]

This is what Paul declares in 2 Timothy 2:12–13: "If we endure, we will also

reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us; if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself." There are two important reasons not to take this as a condition for salvation. For one thing, Paul is speaking of our reign with Him—which again is a matter of reward, not salvation. For another, even our unfaithfulness does not negate God's faithfulness to His promise of salvation: If this were not true, then salvation would not be a free gift, as the Bible says it is, but would be dependent on our good works. Peter denied the Lord three times before men, yet he was saved. As mentioned, there were secret believers even in Jesus' day (cf. John 19:38). Failure to confess Christ might lessen our reward in heaven, but not our place there (which comes only by faith in God's grace).

Fifth, and finally, confession of Christ is part of our work for Him. Unlike faith, it is not merely a heart-belief (Rom. 10:10), but is an overt action that flows from faith just as any other good work. Once again, God's Word clearly says that we are not saved by any "works of righteousness" (Titus 3:5 NKJV) but by faith apart from good works (Eph. 2:8–9).

Baptism Is Not a Condition for Salvation

The most controversial of all the conditions set forth by the Church of Christ is its insistence that water baptism is a necessary condition for receiving salvation. Before addressing the texts it uses to support this position, we will look at the plain biblical teachings affirming that baptism is not necessary for salvation.

First, faith and faith alone is scripturally set forth, repeatedly, as the only condition for salvation. Just as Luther discovered, "The just shall live by faith" (Rom. 1:17 KJV; cf. 4:4–5;Acts 16:31; Titus 3:5–7). This cannot be overstated:

> It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God —not by works, so that no one can boast. (Eph. 2:8–9)

Second, in John's gospel, only faith is listed as a condition for receiving eternal life (cf. 3:16, 18, 36; 5:24; 20:31). As noted before, if there were more conditions, then his entire narrative is not only seriously misleading and inadequate but never once presents the actual plan of salvation. This is absurd; John himself said, "*These [works of Jesus] are written [in my gospel] that you may believe* that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, *and that by believing you may have life in his name*" (20:31). The fact that repentance is not mentioned is

no exception, since true faith *includes* repentance;[60] therefore, to add repentance as a distinct and separate step is wrong, and both confession and baptism are separate acts that are nowhere Johannically mentioned as further conditions of salvation. *Faith* is the sole salvific requirement.

Third, Jesus called baptism a work of righteousness (Matt. 3:15), and Scripture emphatically rejects any work of righteousness as a condition for salvation (cf. Titus 3:5; Eph. 2:8–9). Water baptism is clearly a work we perform in obedience to God; hence, baptism (like any other work of righteousness) is not a *soteriological* mandate.

The Church of Christ's attempt to distinguish between *works* and *things we do* (like baptism—see Cottrell, *FOA*, 371) fails, since, again, the New Testament explicitly includes baptism as a work of righteousness (cf. Matt. 3:15). Further, the New Testament makes no such distinction between *works* and *outward acts we do* for salvation. Faith as an inward act in the heart is not an outward act or work. The latter naturally follows from the former (see chapter 10), but should not be confused with it. In addition, as Cottrell admits, faith, as the *sole* means of receiving salvation, is not an outward act or *thing we do*, but is simply the act of *believing* "in your heart" (Rom. 10:10 NLT) what *Christ has done* for us. Also, Paul separates baptism from what does save us—the gospel[61]—so what saves us cannot include baptism.

Nor, for several reasons, does the Church of Christ position avoid the problem by claiming that works (such as baptism) are to be distinguished from works of the law, which alone are opposed to faith (see *FOA*, 370).

For one thing, Cottrell defines works of the law as "any response of a man as creature to the law commands of the Creator" (ibid., 372), but he acknowledges that the Creator commanded all His creatures to believe in Christ (cf. Acts 16:31). Hence, on this definition, even saving faith would be a work, which God's Word says is not able to save us. Again, this distinction contains no actual difference.

In addition, the only way to avoid this dilemma is to make further distinction without a difference between God's law commands and non-law commands. The truth is that *whatever* the Creator commands His creatures to do is a law for us, since it is binding.

Cottrell implies another distinction, saying, "The primary sense in which baptism is a work is that it is a *work of God*. The only saving work accomplished in baptism is being done by God" (*FOA*, 372). Nonetheless, besides being for his argument a kind of "death by a thousand qualifications," this shifts the focus

from the topic at hand, which is: What we must do to be saved. Of course, it is God who does the saving—the question is, what must *we* do to receive the salvation only God can give? If water baptism (which is something *we* do, not God) is necessary for salvation, then it is not a work of God—it is a work of ours, and the Bible is emphatic as to the salvific insufficiency of any such effort.

Fourth, baptism is not part of the gospel. Paul said so himself. Even though he was baptized (Acts 22:16) and baptized others (cf. 1 Cor. 1:14, 16), he separated the gospel from baptism in these words: "Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power" (1 Cor. 1:17). If baptism is not part of the gospel, and if the gospel "is the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16 KJV), then baptism is not part of what saves us. Baptism then, like confession, is not a condition for eternal life but a manifestation of it. Baptism is a work that flows from the faith that alone brings salvation through the gospel.

Fifth, Paul was saved before he was baptized. Paul received salvation in Acts 9 on the road to Damascus, when he saw Jesus and acknowledged Him as his Lord (vv. 1–9). He points to this in later testimony as his conversion (cf. Acts 22, 26), yet he was not baptized until sometime later by Ananias (Acts 22:16).

Sixth, Peter affirmed that Cornelius was saved before he was baptized: "Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? *They have received the Holy Spirit* just as we have" (Acts 10:47, cf. 11:16–18). The order here is clear and distinct: First they "received the Holy Spirit," and then they were "baptized with water." This is exactly the opposite of what the Church of Christ teaches. In a subsequent passage, commenting on this event, Peter declares that they received the Holy Spirit when they believed, not later when they were baptized: "If God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?" (Acts 11:17). Once more, *baptism was not a condition, but a result of their salvation that came by faith alone*.

Seventh, and finally, baptism is a directive to those who are saved, not a condition for their being saved (cf. Matt. 28:18–20). It is *believers* who are commanded to be baptized: *Baptism is an act of a believer's obedience to Christ's command*. The order is belief (faith, involving repentance) that brings salvation, followed by an outward confession and obedience in baptism (cf. Acts 8:35–38; 10:47; 16:31–33). Saving faith (involving repentance) is the *only* condition for receiving the gift of everlasting life. Outward confession and baptism are the later acts of one who is already saved (i.e., a believer) and is

acting in obedience to Christ. *Baptism follows salvation*.

Response to Verses Used to Support Baptism for Salvation

Several verses are employed out of context to support the belief that baptism is a condition for salvation. The following are foremost among them.

Acts 2:38

Peter said, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Response

First, while the word *far* (Gk: *eis*) often does connote "to" or "toward," it can also mean "because of" or "in accordance with,"[62] in which case, regarding Acts 2:38, forgiveness would come before baptism.

Second, granted a broader sense,[63] *eis* does not necessitate that baptism come before forgiveness in Acts 2:38, since the view may be backward (to already being saved) instead of forward (to being saved through baptism).

Third, this may be a special command to Jews ("men of Israel" [cf. v. 22]) whose baptism (purification) was necessary for the national restoration of Israel (cf. 1:6; 3:21), something John the Baptist had told them earlier (cf. Matt. 3:1–8).

Fourth, even if Acts 2:38 does apply to everyone, the baptism was not before the converts were saved but after: "Those who *accepted his message* were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day" (v. 41). It is acceptance of the Word of God that brings salvation (cf. Rom. 10:17).

Fifth, the text doesn't say that those who were not baptized were not saved.

Sixth, since Scripture cannot contradict itself, and since, for example, baptism clearly follows salvation in Acts 10:47, an unclear passage (Acts 2:38) should be interpreted in the light of the clear one rather than the reverse.

Seventh, and finally, there are at least seven obvious biblical reasons[64] for rejecting the view that baptism is a condition for salvation. Acts 2:38, then, should be understood in harmony with these, not used to negate them.

Acts 22:16

Ananias said to Paul, " 'What are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.' "

Response

These words do not prove that baptism is a salvific condition. As indicated above, Paul was already saved (in Acts 9); his baptism was an act of an obedient Christian, not an act by which he *became* a Christian. *The washing away of sins is ceremonial, not actual*. Sins are taken away "through faith" in Christ's finished work (cf. Eph. 2:1, 8); Paul himself said,

> Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the *forgiveness of sins* is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who *believes* is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses. (Acts 13:38–39)

As we have seen, Paul also declared that baptism is not part of the gospel (1 Cor. 1:17). Thus, his baptism here must be separated from the earlier time when he was saved. *Baptism is an outward act symbolizing the salvation that had already taken place*. Baptism was Paul's public identification with the "name of the Lord," which he had once so vehemently opposed.

1 Peter 3:21

Peter wrote of the flood of Noah's time: "*This water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also*—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

Response

Including that the phrase "now saves you" is taken out of context, everything in this passage speaks against baptism as a salvific condition.

For one thing, the persons being baptized are no more saved by water baptism than Noah was through the Flood. Salvation is by God through faith: "*By faith* Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. *By his faith* he condemned the world and became heir of *the righteousness that comes by faith*" (Heb. 11:7). To be sure, Noah acted on his faith in obedience to God, but his salvation ("righteousness") came through his faith, not as a result of his obedience in building the ark.

In addition, the salvation spoken of in 1 Peter 3:21 is not from the penalty of sin (i.e., justification) but from a soiled conscience (i.e., sanctification). Since

Christ has commanded baptism for all believers, any who have heard His command and could be and yet have not been baptized are living with a bad conscience. Being obedient to God in baptism will save them from the knowledge of wrong in their conscience; Peter isn't talking here about saving souls from everlasting torment.

John 3:5

Jesus said to Nicodemus, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God *unless he is born of water* and the Spirit." This is said to prove that baptism is a necessary condition for salvation.

Response

There are many reasons to reject this interpretation.

First, the word *baptism* is not included, and the phrase "born of water" isn't used of baptism anywhere else in the New Testament.

Second, this position is contrary to the immediate context and, indeed, of the whole gospel of John. As we have repeatedly seen, only faith is mentioned in John as a condition (cf. 3:16, 18, 36; 5:24; 20:31). If baptism is part of what is necessary to be saved, then John's entire gospel fails to present God's plan of salvation.

Third, taking John 3:5 as a reference to the soteriological necessity of baptism is contrary to the rest of the New Testament, and God's Word does not contradict itself.[65]

Fourth, there are other possible ways to interpret John 3:5 that do not involve baptism as necessary for eternal life. (1) "Born of water" may refer to the *water of the womb*, that is, the first birth. This fits with the context; Jesus has just said that one's physical birth is insufficient, that one must have a spiritual birth as well. (2) "Born of water" may refer to the *water of the Word* (cf. Eph. 5:25), meaning, one can only be saved by the transforming power of the Word of God (cf. 1 Peter 1:23). Or, (3) since Jesus is speaking to a Jewish leader, just after the Baptist has announced that his baptism is not enough to enter the kingdom but that Christ would baptize with the Spirit (John 1:33), "born of water" may refer to the *baptism of John* mentioned earlier (1:26). This fits with John's message that listeners must "repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matt. 3:2) and that otherwise Nicodemus would not "see" the visible coming kingdom (cf. Matt. 19:28; 24:30). In any event, there is no reason to take this passage as teaching that baptism by water is required in order to be saved.

Titus 3:5–7

Paul wrote of God:

> He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. *He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit*, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

Response

Looking at the whole text, it is strange that anyone would attempt to use it to support the necessity of baptism for salvation; Paul teaches exactly the opposite.

First, Paul declares that we are *not* saved by "righteous things we had done," that is, works of righteousness.[66]

Second, Paul affirms that we are saved by "rebirth," viz., by spiritual regeneration.

Third, Paul also says that we are "justified by his grace," not by any action of our own.

Fourth, immediately following (v. 8), Paul refers to those who "have believed in God" (NKJV) as the recipients of this salvation.

There are, of course, verses that refer to our being saved by baptism, but the baptism of the Holy Spirit, not water baptism, is in view. Paul clarifies this in the following verse.

1 Corinthians 12:13

"We were all *baptized by one Spirit* into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink."

Response

This baptism first occurred on the Day of Pentecost (cf. Acts 1:5), when the initial believers were placed in Christ's spiritual body (of which He is the Head—cf. Eph. 1:22–23). Each subsequent believer is added by the same baptism into the same body at the moment he or she believes (cf. Rom. 8:9).

Ephesians 4:4–5

"There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when

you were called—one Lord, one faith, *one baptism"*

Response

The expression "one baptism" seems to be best understood as water baptism: (1) The baptism of the Spirit is already implied by the reference to the "one Spirit" who places us into "one body" (v. 4) upon our acceptance of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13); (2) the "one baptism" *follows* the "one faith" in the "one Lord," which is the order of priority throughout the New Testament (cf. Acts 8, 10, 16).

Colossians 2:11–12

> In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, *having been buried with him in baptism* and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

Response

The comparison of baptism with Old Testament circumcision makes it clear that *baptism does not save*. As Paul, the same writer, argues elsewhere, Abraham was saved long before he was circumcised; circumcision was a *later* sign of his *earlier* salvation (cf. Rom. 4:9–12). This is precisely the status of New Testament water baptism.

Furthermore, to carry the analogy through, circumcision was only required for males: If Old Testament circumcision *were* the same as New Testament baptism, then only males, accordingly, need to be baptized for salvation. In light of the Church of Christ's teaching on Colossians 2:11–12, *either* all women are unsaved *or* baptism is unnecessary for salvation.

Romans 6:1–7

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? *We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection*. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

Response

Although some take this as a reference to Spirit baptism (since it refers to being united with Christ), it can refer to water baptism without being a support of its necessity for salvation.

First, "baptized into Christ Jesus" need not mean salvation; the same word *into* (Gk: *eis*) can also mean "unto," or "with a view to."[67] Indeed, Israel (in 1 Cor. 10:2) was said to be baptized "into Moses[68] in the cloud and in the sea," but they were not actually put into (or "saved by") the covenant at that moment. Rather, they were identified with him who had also previously shown them that salvation comes from the Passover Lamb (Ex. 12; cf. 1 Cor. 5:7). Here again, *redemption comes before baptism*, and baptism is a later sign of our identification with Christ.

Second, the key word here is *like*.[69] The baptism of the Spirit into the body of Christ is the *actual* reality; water baptism is "like" Spirit baptism in the sense of being a *symbolic* reenactment of the occurrence of salvation.

Third, "buried with,"[70] as in Colossians 2:12, is indicative of the mode of water baptism, which here symbolizes Christ's burial and resurrection (v. 4). Obviously, the ones "buried with" Christ are not actually killed and then actually raised from the dead. Baptism by immersion is a symbolization of the saved person having passed from death unto life.

When the relevant texts are examined, these facts stand out:

(1) Nowhere does God's Word teach that water baptism is salvifically necessary.
(2) Only faith is required for salvation; and
(3) Water baptism is a symbol of our identification with Christ, an act performed in obedience to Christ *by believers* after salvation.[71]

THE LORDSHIP-SALVATION VIEW ON THE CONDITION(S) FOR SALVATION

In the contemporary North American theological climate, the issue of the condition(s) for salvation centers on another question: Is it sufficient to accept Christ as Savior only, or is it also necessary to accept Him as Lord in order to become a Christian? John MacArthur (b. 1939) has championed the latter

position, called *lordship salvation*.

Soteriologically, according to the lordship view, we must accept Christ as Lord (i.e., Master) of our lives (as well as Savior) in order to be saved.[72] In MacArthur's own words,

> Lordship salvation … is "the view that for salvation a person must trust Jesus Christ as his Savior from sin and must also commit himself to Christ as Lord of his life, submitting to his sovereign authority." It is astonishing that anyone would characterize that truth as unbiblical or heretical.[73]

Faith is not merely a cognitive assent without subsequent good works (*GAJ*, 186), nor is it a momentary act but rather a permanent one (ibid., 189). True faith involves both trust and obedience: Faith and faithfulness are the same (ibid., 190–92). Therefore, no one can receive justification without sanctification (ibid., 198).

Likewise, faith without repentance does not bring salvation. True repentance is more than a change of mind (ibid., 178); it involves turning from one's sin and forsaking it (ibid., 177), as well as the change of one's character (ibid., 37). There is no distinction between salvation and discipleship (ibid., 35–36).

For MacArthur, acknowledging that Jesus Christ is Lord means more than belief in His deity: "He does not become anyone's Savior until that person receives him for who he is—Lord of all (Acts 10:36)" (ibid., 35). Lordship involves a believer's accepting Christ's sovereignty over his life (ibid., 229–36). Thus, for one who is truly saved, good works are an essential and inevitable result (ibid., 260, 277–78).

Even though MacArthur teaches that those who fall away permanently or deny Christ were never saved in the first place (ibid., 252–53), he acknowledges that a true Christian can be a secret believer (ibid., 224) who, like Paul (in Rom. 7), can struggle with sin and may even backslide (ibid., 274, 281), for long periods of time (ibid., 274). Nevertheless, no one is truly saved unless he bears fruit (ibid., 211–12), and no one has eternal life who does not accept Jesus as the Lord of his life (ibid., 280): "Any doctrine that makes surrender to Christ optional is bad teaching" (ibid., 272).

Response to the Lordship-Salvation View

The most pointed reply to the lordship stance has come from the free-grace position, led by Zane Hodges (b. 1932). Criticisms of lordship salvation include the following:

(1) It overtly confuses salvation and discipleship.
(2) It makes the promise of doing good works (by submitting to Christ's lordship) a condition for receiving the free gift of everlasting life.
(3) It fails to distinguish what is implicit in faith (e.g., obedience) from what is explicitly necessary to be saved (faith alone).
(4) It overstates the important connection between faith and works by claiming that there is an "inevitable connection" between them.
(5) It stereotypes the free-grace view by labeling it *easy believism*.
(6) It fails to see that there can be a distinction between justification and sanctification without there being a dichotomy between them.
(7) It makes faithfulness to the end (perseverance) a condition for certain knowledge of individual salvation.
(8) With seeming inconsistency, it admits that a true Christian can be a secret believer and may even extensively backslide.

THE FREE-GRACE VIEW ON THE CONDITION(S) FOR SALVATION

The free-grace view, as expressed by Zane Hodges in *Absolutely Free*,[74] contends that saving faith cannot be distinguished from nonsaving faith by its fruits (*AF*, 27). Faith alone is the condition for our salvation. Repentance is neither a separate act nor a part of saving faith.[75]

The Free-Grace Position on Faith

False *faith*[76] is an empty term, unless it means "pretended" or "misplaced" faith (ibid., 28). *Saving faith* is ordinary faith (ibid., 207): There is no salvific difference between belief *that* and belief *in*. One can be saved simply by believing that Jesus Christ died for our sins and rose again (ibid., 42–43). Neither is there a legitimate distinction between intellectual faith and volitional faith (ibid., 30). The reason the faith of demons is not salvific is that it is faith only in the unity of God; human faith is not nonsalvific *merely* due to being an intellectual assent (ibid., 38–39). A Christian may have true faith that does not produce good works (ibid., 73); he is saved forever by a single act of faith (ibid., 57), not by a continual act of believing. He might even completely lose his faith,

yet he will still be saved (ibid., 105–06, 108–11).

At the same time, however, Hodges does accept that faith involves trust (ibid., 32, 60) and that Christ must be received in the believer's heart (ibid., 60). True faith involves a personal appropriation (ibid., 40), and a person with true faith ought to manifest it in good works (ibid., 63, 73). Even so, it is not inevitable that he will do this,[77] and he can be truly saved with no outward manifestation of his faith.

The Free-Grace Position on Repentance

As for repentance, Hodges claims it isn't necessary for salvation; only faith is (ibid., 145–46), and repentance is not part of faith (ibid., 145). Repentance may, but need not, precede the faith that saves us (ibid., 146); repentance *results* from salvation (ibid., 222). Repentance is for Christians rather than non-Christians (ibid., 153); repentance is designed to restore fellowship with God (ibid., 158, 160), not to obtain a saving relationship with Him. Repentance does not mean "to change one's mind"; instead, it means "to regret" (ibid., 146).

The Free-Grace Position on Obedience and Works

According to Hodges' free-grace view, obedience is not soteriologically required (ibid., 18); obedience is something that believers should embrace after they are saved, but it is not a condition for becoming a Christian (ibid., 132). Further, neither obedience nor works are a sign of one's salvation (ibid., 176); again, it is not inevitable that faith will produce good works (ibid., 216). God's grace teaches us to do good works, but works are not a result of faith (ibid., 215ff.); faith should, but need not, produce good works (ibid., 63). Obedience is necessary to become God's friend, but not to be His child (ibid., 176).

As we have seen, contrary to the traditional interpretation of James 2, Hodges believes that James is speaking about salvation from death, not from hell (ibid., 124). Dead faith (2:17, 26) signifies Christian faith without vitality rather than nonsaving faith (ibid., 126). "Can such faith save him?" (2:14) does not mean James is talking about nonsaving faith; rather, faith can't save a Christian from a dead spiritual life (only good works can [ibid., 125]).[78]

While a Christian should seek to perform good works, biblical exhortations for good works are given so that we can be fruitful, not so that we can be assured of our salvation (ibid., 120–21). The performance of works helps the believer to

make progress in his spiritual life (ibid., 122).

Summary and Contrast of Lordship Salvation and Free Grace

Once again, the traditional Protestant view (strongly supported by Scripture) is that there is only one condition for salvation: faith. Nonetheless, there has been a significant discussion as to precisely what is meant by *faith*. Several elements need to be discussed before a final conclusion can be drawn.

Lordship Salvation	Free Grace
Faith and repentance are necessary	Only faith is necessary
Must accept Christ as Lord and Savior	Only need to accept Christ as Savior
Faith itself involves obedience	Faith itself does not involve obedience
True faith necessarily brings change in one's life	True faith does not necessarily bring one's life
Works flow inevitably from saving faith	Works don't flow inevitably from saving faith
Real believers can't deny Christ	Real believers can deny Christ

In critique of the free-grace position, objections have been numerous, including those in the following list:

(1) It denies the vital and natural connection between faith and good works.
(2) It denies the scriptural relationship between faith and obedience.
(3) It denies the biblical truth that repentance (as part of faith) is a salvific requirement.
(4) It denies that a believer needs any works as evidence of saving faith.
(5) It makes the unsubstantiated claim that one may absolutely deny Christ and still be saved.
(6) It fails to acknowledge the difference between faith *that* (which does not save) and faith *in* (which does save).
(7) It reduces faith to a mere cognitive (rather than life-changing) decision.

These criticisms help to focus the differences between the views and call for some clarification.

The Difference Between Saving and Nonsaving Faith

The Bible contains many examples of faith that did not save those who exercised it. James said, "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder" (2:19). It is obvious that the kind of faith demons have (relating to God) is not the faith that would save us if placed in Christ (cf. Acts 16:17). Jesus warns against those who profess His name and yet never have belonged to Him:

> Many will say to me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?" Then I will tell them plainly, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!" (Matt. 7:22–23).

James cautions against nominal faith that produces no good works:

> What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? … But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. (2:14, 18)

Peter describes apostates who possessed a kind of "knowing" the Lord that did not lead to their salvation:

> If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. (2 Peter 2:20)

Likewise, Simon the sorcerer "believed" in some sense, but he is described in terms that best exemplify one who is unsaved:

> Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.…
>
> When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."
>
> Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin" (Acts 8:13, 18–23).

Jesus says that the person who believes with a stony heart was never saved:

> The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. (Matt. 13:20–21)

Thus, there *are* significant differences between saving and nonsaving faith.[79] The following chart illustrates:

Nonsaving Faith	Saving Faith
Act of mind only	Act of mind and will (James 2:19)
Mind understands; will does not accept	Will accepts (Rom. 1:18)
Mind only perceives	Will receives (1 Cor. 2:14)
Sees only its meaning	Sees its significance (James 2:14, 19–20)
Merely mental assent	Heart commitment (Rom. 10:9)
Only objectively apprehended	Subjectively applied as well (2 Peter 2:20)
Faith that is not willing to work	Faith that is willing to work (John 7:17)
Does not tend to produce good works	Does tend to produce good works (James 2:17)
Does not lead to salvation	Does lead to salvation (James 2:14, 18)

To summarize, saving faith isn't merely an act of one's mind (understanding) but also of his will (acceptance). Saving faith doesn't simply perceive the truth but receives it as well. Saving faith sees not only the meaning but also the significance of the truth. Saving faith involves a heart commitment, not merely intellectual assent. Saving faith sees beyond the meaning to the significance of the truth. Saving faith is not only objectively apprehended but also subjectively applied. Saving faith is willing to work, prompts actions, tends to produce good works, and results in salvation.

How Much Saving Faith Does It Take to Be Saved?

Our Lord made it clear that true faith was not a matter of quantity but of quality. He said the smallest amount is sufficient: "I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you" (Matt. 17:20). It is not only the *nature* of faith but the *object* of faith that makes it effective. For instance, if we're walking on a frozen lake, it isn't the strength of our faith in the ice that matters but the strength of the ice on which we stand that makes the difference.

How Can a Christian Know He Has Saving Faith?

There are two spheres in which a believer can be aware that he has saving faith: internal and external.

First, in the internal sphere, one must ask whether his faith is in the right object. Saving faith must be in God, not in faith itself. True faith is trusting God's faithfulness, not ours (2 Tim. 2:13; cf. 2 Cor. 13:5).

Second, one must ask whether he has the right motive, since even the greatest faith in the universe with the wrong intention will not be efficacious. Paul said, "If I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing" (1 Cor. 13:2).

Third, true faith will be confirmed by the right Spirit (the Holy Spirit) witnessing in our hearts that we are children of God (Rom. 8:16; cf. 1 John 4:1).

There are also external tests of true faith.

First, true faith manifests the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23).

Second, true faith naturally results in good works (James 2:14–18; 1 John 3:17). We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves us is not alone. It naturally produces good works.[80] We are saved *by* faith but *to* works (Eph. 2:8–10; Titus 3:3–8).

Third, true faith lasts (Matt. 13:21–23; 1 John 3:9; 2:19).

Fourth, true faith learns by discipline (Heb. 12:5, 11).

Fifth, true faith manifests love (1 John 3:18–20).

However, the relationship between true faith and works is not automatic, though it is *natural*; not inevitable but *normal*. Saving faith may be dormant, even for long periods of time. Nonetheless, it is difficult to hide life: If it is there, it will tend, naturally and normally, to manifest itself.

What Is the Relationship Between Saving Faith and Repentance?

There is considerable debate over the relationship between saving faith and repentance. While some evangelicals deny the need for repentance in salvation, others argue that repentance is a necessary step along with faith.[81] In order to get to the heart of the matter, a look at the biblical usage of both terms is necessary.

There are a number of views that can be summarized under the following major categories.

The View That Repentance Is Not Necessary for Salvation

On the one end of this spectrum is Zane Hodges' extreme free-grace view, which holds that repentance is in no way necessary to becoming saved. Only faith (without repentance) is salvifically required, and the role of repentance in the believer's life is after he is saved from the penalty of his sins. The scriptural references to repentance are either speaking of repentance from temporal and earthly matters (having nothing to do with salvation) or else with regard to what a believer needs to do after justification.

The View That Repentance Is a Precondition to Saving Faith

Some who maintain that repentance is not necessary for salvation, though, do admit that "repentance *may* precede salvation by way of preparation" (Radmacher, *S*, 135). They argue that we are saved by faith alone but that the precondition of saving faith is repentance from sin. While such repentance does not deliver salvation, it does set the stage for it. One must leave sin (in repentance) before he can cleave (by faith) to Christ; no one can accept Christ unless he is willing to relinquish sin, as clinging to sin and clinging to salvation from sin are incompatible. Repentance, then, does not save, but it clears the salvific path. Leaving sin does not automatically save, but it is a necessary condition for becoming saved through accepting the Savior.

The View That Repentance of Sin Is Necessary for Salvation

On the other end of this spectrum is John MacArthur's lordshipsalvation position, which insists that repentance of sin is a salvific demand. Mere faith without true repentance is not enough to save anyone; this is a form of easy believism that is the essence of nominal (not genuine) Christianity. All authentic saving faith has repentance as a necessary precondition.

The View That Repentance Is a Necessary Part of Saving Faith

One last view can be placed broadly between the extreme free-grace view and the lordship-salvation position. Charles Ryrie (b. 1925) holds a moderate view, claiming that faith and repentance are two facets of one saving act. Repentance is a change of one's *mind*, not a change in one's *life*.[82] But Radmacher notes, "If changing one's mind doesn't change one's life, what does it do? …. Surely there is an inviolable principle that our actions are nothing more than the blossom of our deepest thoughts" (*S*, 132). Thus, it is suggested that there is more to saving faith than repentance about Christ and obedience to the gospel. It also has an

implicit willingness to obey Christ's commands and an implicit willingness to repent of our sin. While no overt obedience and willingness is *soteriologically* necessary, nonetheless, the very nature of saving faith and true repentance is such that it *naturally* tends to lead people to become willing and obedient.[83] In order to resolve this issue, a study of the New Testament meanings of the key terms *faith* and *repentance* is necessary.

THE MEANING OF *REPENTANCE*

The root meaning of *to repent* (Gk: *metanoeo*) is "to think differently" or "to reconsider."[84] Virtually all the Greek lexicons agree that to *metanoeo* is "to reconsider" or "to change one's mind." Joseph Thayer (1828–1901) said it means "to change one's mind, i.e., to repent (to feel sorry that one has done this or that)" (*GELNT*, 405). William Arndt (1880–1957) and F. Wilbur Gingrich (1901–1993) affirmed that the sense is to "change one's mind …. then feel remorse, repent, be converted" (ibid., 513). William E. Vine (1873–1949) listed its meaning as "to perceive afterwards (*meta*, after, implying change, *noeo*, to perceive). [Hence, *metanoeo* is] to change one's mind or purpose, always, in the N.T., involving a change for the better, an amendment, and always, except Luke 17:3–4, of repentance from sin" (*EDNTW*, 951–52).

Gerhard Kittel (1888–1948) noted:

> The popular Gk. sense is most likely at [Luke 17:3ff.], where *metanoiein* denotes regret for a fault against one's brother, and [2 Cor. 7:9ff.], where with the combination with *metamelomai* … suggests remorse.… Elsewhere, the only possible meanings are "to change one's mind," "change of mind," or "to convert," "conversion" (*TDNT*, V, 999).

In short, as used in the New Testament of Christian conversion, repentance entails not only a genuine change of mind about whether we are sinners and need Jesus as our Savior, but also a willingness to have our lives changed by Christ so as to bear fruit for Him. This is evident from Acts 26:20: "They should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds." John the Baptist preached the same, exhorting unbelievers to "produce fruit in keeping with repentance" (Matt. 3:8).

Louis Berkhof (1873–1957) observed that true repentance involves intellect, emotion, and will (*ST*, 486). This should be no surprise, since repentance is what a *person* does, and *personhood* is defined as the makeup of one who has

intellect, emotion, and will.[85] Geerhardus Vos (1862–1949) commented,

> Of the three words that are used in the Greek Gospels to describe the process [of repentance], one emphasizes the emotional element of regret, sorrow over the past evil course of life, *metamelomai* (Matt. 21:29–32). [Then,] a second expresses reversal of the entire mental attitude, *metanoeo* (Matt. 12:41; Luke 11:32; 15:7, 19). [Finally,] the third denotes a change in the direction of life, one goal being substituted for another, *epistrephomai* (Matt. 13:15 [and parallels]; Luke 17:4; 22:32). [Thus,] repentance is not limited to any single faculty of the mind: it engages the entire man, intellect, will and affections. (*KGC*, 92–93)

Biblical Usage of *Repentance*

As free-grace proponents often rightly observe, biblical repentance frequently relates to temporal and moral matters that are not connected with the reception of eternal salvation. Many verses are simply referring to believers repenting of their post-salvation sins. The famous text of 2 Chronicles 7:14 fits in this category, since it begins with "If my people.…"

Nonetheless, repentance is also commanded of non-Christians as a condition for their salvation.[86] The point, however, is that whether *repentance* is used of believers or unbelievers, it involves a change of both mind and heart (which leads naturally to a change of life). *Aided by God's grace*, repentance is within the grasp of fallen human beings.

2 Chronicles 7:14

"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land." Clearly repentance here involves turning from wickedness, seeking God, and choosing humility. However, the reference to "my people" indicates that believers are in view.

Isaiah 1:16–17

"Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow." This is more than a change of mind—sincere desire to change one's life is entailed. But again it seems to be referring to believers.

Isaiah 55:6–7

"Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the

wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon." Forsaking sinful ways and seeking God are both part of true repentance. The reference to "the wicked" would seem to indicate that the unsaved are also in view, as well as the fact that they are out of covenant relation to God (v. 3) and are offered the free gift of salvation (v. 1).

Ezekiel 33:18–19

"If a righteous man turns from his righteousness and does evil, he will die for it. And if a wicked man turns away from his wickedness and does what is just and right, he will live by doing so." True repentance involves an actual change in life, whether for an unbeliever or a believer.

Jonah 3:10

"When God saw what [the Ninevites] did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened." The kind of repentance that brought salvation to the pagans of Nineveh was clearly more than an alteration of their minds; it resulted in a radical change in their lives.

It seems unlikely that, as free-grace people hold, Nineveh's conversion was related only to temporal things and not to their eternal salvation, for many reasons:

(1) Eternal salvation was their biggest need; to send Jonah there for less trivializes his mission.
(2) "Salvation is of the LORD" (2:9 KJV) seems to have a definite salvific ring to it.
(3) Jonah's confession about the grace of God (4:2) goes deeper than mercy in mere temporal matters.
(4) Jesus' statement about the people of Nineveh rising up on Judgment Day (Matt. 12:41) indicates that God had their eternal destiny in view in the mission of Jonah.
(5) Jesus' use of Jonah as a prime sign of His death and resurrection, which are necessary to salvation (Rom. 10:9), reveals a soteriological connection.

Mark 1:15

"The time has come," [Jesus] said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and

believe the good news!" Both repentance and faith are inherent in accepting the gospel. And unbelieving Jews were clearly included in the call to repent.

Luke 3:3

"[Jesus] went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." Salvific repentance is linked to salvific forgiveness. And to limit this only to temporal and national matters is to trivialize Jesus' mission.

Luke 5:32

Christ said, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." This is usually taken as a contrast between the saved and the lost, meaning that repentance is necessary for sinners to become saved.

Luke 13:3

Jesus warned, "Unless you repent, you too will all perish." Here too it is unlikely that unbelievers are exempt, since the text refers to "sinners" (v. 2) and "all" who dwell in Jerusalem (v. 4).

Luke 24:47

"Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in [Christ's] name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." This is an important passage because it connects both repentance and faith with the Great Commission to the entire world. It stretches logic to claim that these words refer only to the discipleship of believers.

Acts 2:38

"Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.' " Difficult to interpret as this text may be on the relationship between baptism and salvation,[87] it is clear that repentance is necessary to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 3:19

Peter said to the unrepentant Jews, who had not accepted Jesus Christ as the Messiah: "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord."

Acts 5:31

"God exalted [Jesus] to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel." Here again, the unsaved and salvation from sin seem to be in view regarding the call to repent.

Acts 8:22

Peter said to Simon the sorcerer, "Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart." While it is possible that Simon was a true believer (cf. 5:13), the description Peter gives of him sounds very much like that of a lost person (cf. vv. 20–23).

Acts 11:18

"When [the leaders in Jerusalem] heard [Peter's affirmation of the Caesarean Christians' salvation], they … praised God, saying, 'God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.' " The context indicates that Peter is referring to the conversion of "Gentiles" through repentance. Hodges' suggestion is that this isn't a reference to eternal life (AF, 153); others argue that since Peter is relating how these believers had received the Holy Spirit, it refers to salvation.

Acts 17:30

Paul said to the Athenians: "While God has [in the past] overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent" (NRSV). It is agonizing to try to follow the contorted reasoning that this somehow refers to repentance after salvation (ibid., 145–46, 160). Paul is obviously speaking to unbelieving Greeks who mocked his message (v. 32) and plainly were not believers; others who were saved as a result of Paul's evangelization (v. 34) were clearly unbelievers before their conversion. *Paul's exhortation about repentance was directed toward unbelievers*; his words are for "all people everywhere," and not all people everywhere were (or are) believers.

Acts 19:4

"John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." Rather than repentance preparing the way for faith, it would appear that they are linked by interchangeable parallels. Thus, just as John the Baptist preached repentance followed by baptism, even so the Christian message prescribes the same for unbelievers toward Jesus (cf. Acts

2:38).

Acts 20:21

"I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus." It is hard to understand this in any other way than as an exhortation for all unsaved persons to repent and believe in order to be saved. Nor can it be limited to Jews, since it explicitly mentions Greeks. While some take repentance and faith as two steps, Ryrie's comment is to the point; he notes that both words "are joined by one article, which indicates that the two are inseparable, though each focuses on a facet of the single requirement for salvation" (*SGS*, 87–88).

Acts 26:19–20

Paul testified, "I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds." Once again both Jewish and Gentile unbelievers were commanded not only to repent but also to demonstrate through good deeds that they had repented and been saved.

2 Corinthians 7:10

"Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death." In context, this seems to be a call upon believers who have fallen into sin to repent of it, since Paul is writing to "the church of God" at Corinth (cf. 1:1).

2 Timothy 2:25

"Those who oppose [the Lord's servant] he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth." This could be taken as referring either to believers who have fallen into error or to unbelievers who have not yet accepted the truth of the gospel.

Revelation 2:5

Jesus exhorted the professing believers who had fallen into sin to "remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place." This too could be a call either for believers to repent of sin in their lives

or for professing (though not possessing) Christians to repent. Other exhortations to repent fall into the same category (cf. 2:21; 3:3).

In summary, while some of the above texts refer to believers repenting of sins after they are saved, others may be taken either as referring to true believers or otherwise, and *some seem clearly to be directed toward unbelievers* (e.g., Luke 24:47; Acts 17:30; 20:21). Repentance, then, is a salvific condition, which raises two remaining questions: What does faith mean? And what is the relationship between repentance and faith?

The Meaning of *Faith* (Belief)

As for the meaning of faith, *to believe* (Gk: *pisteuo*) is a common New Testament term meaning "to have faith (in, upon, or with respect to a person or thing) … by implication to entrust (especially one's spiritual well-being to Christ) … commit (to trust), put in trust with" (Strong, *NSECB*). With this all the major Greek dictionaries are in agreement.

Thayer said,

> "To believe" means to think to be true; to be persuaded of; to credit, [to] place confidence in. [And in] a moral and religious reference, *pisteuein* [from pisteuo] is used in the N.T. of a conviction and trust to which a man is impelled by a certain inner and higher prerogative and law of his soul. (*GELNT*, 511)

Arndt and Gingrich claimed *pisteuo* means to " 'believe (in) something,' 'be convinced of something.' And in certain combinations 'to be dependent on' or 'give credence to' " (*GELNT*, 666). Kittel maintained that "*pisteuein* means 'to rely on,' 'to trust,' 'to believe' " (*TDNT*, 6.203): "The fact that 'to believe' is 'to obey,' as in the OT … is particularly emphasized in [Hebrews] 11" (ibid., 6.205). *Belief* also involves to obey, to trust, and to hope (ibid., 6.205–07). In specifically Christian usage, belief "is thus the saving faith that recognizes and appropriates God's saving work in Christ" (ibid., 6.208). In short, *faith* (belief) implies trust in, commitment to, obedience to, and hope (confidence) in its object. As applied to faith in Jesus, the implications for saving faith are clear: It is the kind of belief that has trust and confidence in Christ for salvation and thereby implies a commitment to follow and obey Him.

The Relationship Between Faith (Belief) and Repentance

As for the second question,[88] there is a tight connection between faith and

repentance, as two facets of the same action. Rather than being two separate acts—which violates the Protestant (and biblical) principle of "faith alone"—both faith and repentance are necessary for salvation, but each is a part of one saving act by which a person receives the gift of everlasting life. Faith implies the kind of commitment to and trust in Christ that will naturally make an actual change in one's life. Likewise, true repentance (a real change of mind about our sin and about who Christ is, viz., our Savior) is life-altering as well.

As we have seen, faith and repentance are inseparable in the same way that the command to *come here* cannot be fulfilled without *leaving there*.[89] True faith and repentance regarding one's salvation involve embracing right *and* rejecting wrong—one cannot be exercised without the other. Genuine repentance toward God contains faith, and true faith in God entails repentance. Accordingly, *there is only one condition for receiving God's gift of salvation: saving faith* (the kind of faith that entails repentance).

Again, salvific faith involves a true change of mind about sin and the Savior, so that by the appropriation of faith, He becomes one's own Savior. Unlike nonsaving faith, saving faith naturally tends to redirect one's life; under normal conditions it *will* result in change. True faith is not simply "belief that" but also "belief in." My belief *that* Jesus saves does not rescue me (cf. James 2:19); it is my belief *in* the finished work of Christ that delivers me (cf. John 3:16).

THE NATURE OF SAVING FAITH

In view of the foregoing discussion, several characteristics of saving faith can be unpacked. Together, these traits reveal why saving faith is significantly different from nominal faith (see chart above).

Saving Faith Involves Trust

True faith involves trust in God. Jesus commanded, "Put your trust [faith] in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light" (John 12:36). Likewise, Paul shows in Romans 4:5 there is trust in true faith,[90] which, again, even free-grace defender Zane Hodges admits (*AF*, 32, 60).

In the New Testament, the interweaving of faith and trust is expressed not only by the meaning of the word *pisteuo* as "trust" but also by the oft-repeated directives to "believe *in*" Christ[91] and "believe *on*" Christ.[92] Kittel, who took

such phrases as generally meaning “to believe” Christ or “to believe” Christ’s message, acknowledged:

> Certain verses show that a personal relation can really be expressed by the initially formal phrase *pisteuein eis Christon Iesoun* [to believe in Christ Jesus]. One may refer first to [Romans] 10:9, which proves clearly that to believe in Jesus Christ is to acknowledge Him as Lord.… [Again,] in [Romans] 10:14 the *pisteuein eis auton* [to believe in Him] leads to calling upon Him, so that *pisteuein* … brings [one] into a personal relation with Christ [cf. Acts 14:23; Rom. 6:8 and Gal. 2:20; Phil. 1:29; 1 Peter 1:8]. (*TDNT*, 6.212)

Saving Faith Involves Commitment

David wrote: “Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him” (Ps. 37:5). Paul’s faith led him to say, “I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted [committed] to him for that day” (2 Tim. 1:12). Faith is not merely acknowledging that Christ can bring us to heaven; faith is also the willingness to place our very lives in His hands, to fully commit ourselves to Him as the means of delivering us to our destiny.

Saving Faith Involves Obedience

An act of true faith involves obedience to God; Paul uses *belief* and *obedience to the gospel* in parallel: “Not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed our message?’ ” (Rom. 10:16). The apostle also writes of “what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to *obey God* by what I have said and done” (Rom. 15:18). He says of unbelievers that God “will punish those who do not know God and *do not obey* the gospel of our Lord Jesus” (2 Thess. 1:8). Hebrews declares that obedience follows from faith, for “by faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, *obeyed* and went, even though he did not know where he was going” (11:8).

Certainly, then, saving faith involves obedience to the gospel. In addition, saving faith leads to an obedient life. However, there is no evidence that one must express obedience to the lordship of Christ as *a condition for receiving salvation* (justification). As shown above,[93] obedience leading to good works is a natural result of saving faith but not a qualification for being saved.

Saving Faith Involves Love

True faith involves love, which is the greatest commandment: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matt. 22:37). Unbelievers “perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved” (2 Thess. 2:10). Paul speaks of “faith working through love” (Gal. 5:6). And John said,

> Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us. (1 John 3:18–20)

Saving Faith Involves Humility

Jesus said,

> I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 18:3–4)

As previously mentioned, even Hodges (while holding to the extreme free-grace position) acknowledges that true faith involves childlike trust entailing humility (*AF*, 32, 60). Saving faith in Christ is a childlike action in which one acknowledges that he or she is a sinner and in desperate need of the Savior.

SUMMARY OF THE THREE PRIMARY VIEWS ON FAITH, REPENTANCE, AND OBEDIENCE IN REGARD TO SALVATION[94]

Lordship	Moderate Free Grace	Extreme Free Grace
John MacArthur	Charles Ryrie	Zane Hodges
Faith and repentance of sin are necessary	Faith and repentance about the Savior are necessary	Only faith is necessary, not repentance
Must be willing to obey all Christ’s commands	Must be willing to obey Christ’s command to believe	Faith itself does not involve obedience
True faith brings	True faith brings change	True faith does not

change in one's life	in one's life	necessarily bring change in one's life
Works flow inevitably from saving faith	Works flow naturally (not inevitably) from saving faith	Works do not flow inevitably or naturally from saving faith

In the lordship-salvation view, one must repent of one's sins in order to be saved; the moderate free-grace position demands only repentance about whether Christ is the Savior from sin, not repentance of all one's sins;[95] no repentance of any kind is necessary for the extreme free-grace view. Those who follow John MacArthur claim that one must be willing to obey all Christ's commands as a condition for being saved. Charles Ryrie affirms that one must be willing only to obey Christ's command to receive eternal life. Zane Hodges does not believe that obedience is involved (in any way) with the conditions for salvation—only faith. While lordship proponents hold that a change in one's life and good works inevitably flow from saving faith, and the moderate free-grace view affirms good works naturally (though not inevitably) follow saving faith, the extreme free-grace position denies that good works and a changed life result either inevitably or naturally.

CONCLUSION

Contrary to the Roman Catholic view, the performance of works is not a condition for salvation. The extreme Reformed view, in the final analysis, has *no* conditions for receiving the gift of salvation. And, in opposition to the view of many Churches of Christ, there are not four conditions of salvation (justification). Soteriologically, true faith and repentance are part of one and the same act; confession and baptism are results of (not conditions for) salvation. Those who truly believe will have the natural desire to openly confess Christ and to follow His command to be baptized.

Since saving faith is an act of trust in and obedience to Jesus Christ regarding the gospel, it is evident from its very essence that saving faith (which involves repentance) will naturally tend to produce good works—a nominal, noncommittal, purely intellectual-type faith will not. Therefore, *whereas we are saved by faith alone, saving faith is not alone but is inclined to produce good works*.[96]

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE CONTENTS OF SALVATION

The question in this chapter revolves around the *content* of belief that is necessary for salvation in this age. This is related to (but not identical with) the issue of the *condition* of salvation, which answers the question, What does one need to do in order to receive the gift of eternal life? This we have already answered: One does not need to *do* anything, only believe, for *faith alone* is sufficient.[1] The focus now is on *how much* one must believe in order to be granted salvation.

DISTINCTIONS

Before we can resolve this matter, we need to establish several important distinctions for the purpose of clarifying the discussion's terms.

Conditions for Giving vs. Condition for Receiving

As previously explained, there is a big difference between the condition(s) for *giving* something and the condition for *receiving* it. If a parent bequeaths an inheritance (for instance, a lump-sum check) with no conditions attached, the heir must meet no conditions to *qualify* for the inheritance, but if he does not accept the check and cash it, he has not met the conditions for actually *receiving*

what is, from the giver, an unconditional gift.[2]

The Object of Faith vs. the Basis of Faith

There is also a difference between the *object* of one's faith and the *basis* for that same faith. For example, *believing* that a chair will support me and *knowing* for a fact that certain laws of physics make it possible are not the same. All the physical conditions for the chair's solidity can be true without my explicitly believing that the chair is sufficient to support me.

The Object of Faith vs. the Content of Faith

Another significant distinction is between the *object* of my faith and the *content* of my faith. The chair is the object; I may believe it will keep me from crashing to the floor, but I might not know whether it is constructed from steel or wood, whether it is old or new, whether it is an antique or contemporary, how often it has supported or failed to support others, and so forth.[3]

Conditions for Obtaining a Gift vs. Conditions for Losing a Gift

It is also evident that there is a difference between conditions for *receiving* a gift and conditions for *keeping* it. If I receive a gift of jewelry with no strings attached, subsequent effort may need to be invested in order to keep the treasure from being stolen or lost.

Absolute Conditions vs. Normative Conditions

Absolute conditions are not synonymous with *normative* conditions. For instance, it is normatively necessary to wear seat belts to save lives, since that is the law in certain states. However, it is not absolutely necessary to do so, both because some states don't have laws requiring it and because some people survive an accident without having used their seat belts.

One-Time Normative Conditions vs. All-Time Normative Conditions

Some stipulations may be normatively necessary for *one time* but not for *all time*. Laws change, and when they do, what is normatively necessary is likewise

altered. During the Prohibition era, the sale of alcoholic beverages was illegal in the United States; now it is not. The standard was changed between that time and this time.

Explicit Necessary Conditions vs. Implicit Necessary Conditions

What is *implicitly* necessary is not always *explicitly* necessary. In order for human interaction to take place, it is implicitly necessary for there to be at least two minds and a common medium (e.g., a language). Nevertheless, it is not explicitly necessary for the people involved to believe that this is true, since they might communicate without ever actually thinking about what makes their connection possible.

Consistent Beliefs vs. Inconsistent Beliefs

Certain beliefs are necessary in order for a given paradigm (model) to be *consistent*; however, a person might hold to some of the necessary beliefs within a model while not accepting them all—while this is *inconsistent*, the truth or falsehood of the ones he does acknowledge is not contingent on whether he eventually becomes willing to embrace the rest. For instance, maintaining belief in an absolute moral mandate (the law) without having belief in God (the Lawgiver) is inconsistent; there cannot be a moral prescription (law) without a Moral Prescriber (Lawgiver). Even so, it is possible to hold to a moral law (as many unbelievers do) without making this logical connection.

Denying vs. Not Believing

Denial of a certain reality is to be distinguished from nonbelief of that same truth. Not all people in ancient times denied that the world is round—some of them simply didn't know. Consequently, *not believing* that the world is round wasn't the same for them as *denying* its round shape.

APPLICATIONS OF THESE DISTINCTIONS TO THE QUESTION OF SALVATION

Applying these distinctions to salvation helps to clarify the question of what a

person must necessarily believe in order to obtain eternal life.[4] Each differentiation brings further focus in our efforts toward a final conclusion.

Faith Is the Only Condition for Receiving Salvation

As discussed earlier, there are no conditions for God *giving* salvation (cf. Rom. 11:29; 2 Tim. 2:13) and only one for our *receiving* it.[5] We are saved by God's magnificent grace, "and if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace" (Rom. 11:6). Accordingly, our attention here is centered not upon God's unconditional bestowal of salvation but upon our reception of it by faith alone (Rom. 4:5).

The Difference Between the Object of Faith and the Basis of Faith

Again, there is a difference between the *object of* and the *basis for* one's faith. For example, a man might believe that God (the object of saving faith) will save him, even though he may not have awareness of and, therefore, belief in all the theological truths (the basis for saving faith) that needed to be upheld and fulfilled for his justification to be made possible. In other words, he could have God as the object of His saving faith without knowing the basis by which the potential for his deliverance was accomplished. This seems to have been the case in the Old Testament, where not everyone understood that Christ's death and resurrection were necessary for their salvation.[6]

The Difference Between the Object of Faith and the Content of Faith

The differentiation between the object of faith and the content of faith is significant. For example, a person could have faith in God (*object*) without knowing (or, hence, believing in) all that was actually necessary (*content*) to believe in order for God to save him, namely, that Christ died for his sins and rose again (1 Cor. 15:1–6). During the Old Testament era, as well as for some even after the time of Christ, at least throughout the transitional period before the more complete gospel message had been officially and widely promulgated (cf. Acts 19), not everyone fully understood the content of the gospel.[7]

The Difference Between Conditions for Obtaining and Losing a Gift

We have established the difference between the conditions for receiving and retaining a gift. Relatedly, only faith is required of us in order to *receive* the gift of salvation; however, some Christians (e.g., Roman Catholics and Arminians) believe that we must expend effort to keep from *losing* it. However, the focus of this inquiry is not whether salvation can be lost[8] but on the necessary content of belief for receiving eternal life.

The Difference Between Absolute and Normative Conditions

It is normally but not absolutely necessary to use dry wood in order to build a fire. Similarly, God could will as *normatively necessary* what is not *absolutely necessary* for someone to be saved. For example, He could will as a *normative* salvific condition that all people believe in Christ's substitutionary death (atonement) on their behalf, even if this particular belief were not an *absolute* necessity for salvation.[9] The present issue is not whether *in fact* Christ needed to die for our sins in order for us to be saved[10] but whether *belief* in that reality is an absolutely necessary condition for salvation.[11]

The Difference Between Onetime and All-Time Normative Conditions

Likewise, God can determine a particular belief to be a normatively necessary salvific condition for one time and not for another time. For example, God could will that faith in Christ's death and faith in Christ's resurrection are normative conditions for salvation in the present New Testament era, while not in Old Testament times. Indeed, as we will argue below,[12] this seems to be exactly what God did (cf. Gen. 15:5–6; Acts 4:12; Rom. 10:9).

The Difference Between Explicit and Implicit Normative Conditions

What is implicitly necessary for salvation is not always explicitly so. It would seem that all essential salvific (saving) truth *itself*[13] is necessary for salvation in its comprehensive sense.[14] However, even granting this (as most evangelicals do) does not mean that a person must explicitly *believe* every element of it in order to receive the gift of everlasting life. It is possible, for example, that a certain truly saved person never heard about (let alone believed in) Christ's virgin birth or ascension at the time he believed the gospel and was saved (cf.

Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 15:1–6).

The Difference Between Denying and Not Believing

Another question is, Can someone know about these truths, deny any of them, and still be saved? One thing seems apparent: Explicit denial of any essential doctrine of the Christian faith is classically unorthodox and/ or heretical. There are differences of opinion among conservative scholars as to whether a person can reject any of these teachings and still be saved.

Some would claim that no fundamental doctrine can be denied without putting one's salvation in jeopardy. This seems unfounded, since some of Christianity's basic teachings are nowhere explicitly listed as absolutely essential *soteriological* conditions. For instance, the Virgin Birth, the bodily Ascension, and the Second Coming apparently are not part of the gospel message that one must explicitly believe in order to be saved. Paul's spelled-out gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:1–6 does not include any of these, nor are they listed in any of the New Testament presentations of what must necessarily be believed for salvation (e.g., John 3:16, 18, 36; 5:24; Acts 16:31). As a result, the denial of them, though inconsistent and aberrant, does not jeopardize one's salvation.[15]

For now, it appears evident that one must *at least* believe (and cannot deny) that Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead (as in 1 Cor. 15:1–6). Further, Paul's insistence upon our confession that Jesus is *Lord* would also make belief in Christ's deity a necessary salvific condition (Rom. 10:9; cf. Acts 16:31).

The Difference Between Consistent and Inconsistent Beliefs

Certain beliefs are necessary in order for our theological framework to be *consistent*, but this in itself doesn't make them necessary beliefs for our *salvation*. The truth of all major orthodox soteriological teachings is necessary for our salvation to be possible; nevertheless, it is salvifically conceivable (even though ideologically inconsistent) that a person could reject one or more and still be granted eternal life. For example, that it is inconsistent to deny the Virgin Birth does not thereby mean that the person who refuses to believe it cannot be saved.[16] Illogical belief does not negate actual reality, and while some Christians argue that the rejection of such a fundamental doctrine makes salvation impossible, neither Jesus nor the New Testament authors affirmed this to be true.

At any rate, if objectors insist upon a dichotomy, better to be inconsistently saved[17] than consistently lost.[18]

In view of the foregoing discussion, it is *logically possible* that people could be saved without explicitly embracing every major salvation doctrine (except perhaps the teachings as to their own sinfulness and God's necessary grace—cf. Heb. 11:6). It depends upon which beliefs are salvifically absolute, which are salvifically normative, and which are essential to the Christian faith but not directly related to salvation (soteriology).[19] Again, many Old Testament believers did not believe what we now know to be essential teachings about salvation, yet they were saved. Even if all of these doctrines must be true for salvation to be possible—and even if it is inconsistent to deny any of them—people *could* be saved on the basis that they are true, even if they have no explicit knowledge of or explicit belief in their truthfulness.

However, even though it may be *logically possible* for someone not to believe all or any of these things and still be saved, nevertheless, it may not be *normatively possible,* if God has normatively willed that it should be so. For the evangelical, it all boils down to what the Bible teaches about salvation. As we shall see, many of the above distinctions are helpful in explaining and illustrating what Scripture does and does not mandate on this matter.

BIBLICAL TEACHINGS ON THE NECESSARY CONTENT OF BELIEF FOR SALVATION

Several observations are crucial in understanding what the Bible reveals as to which beliefs are necessary for salvation. It appears that there are absolute conditions for all times and normative conditions for certain times.

Absolute Conditions

It seems that there are at least four sine qua non[20] explicit soteriological beliefs (or "elements of saving faith") for all times:[21]

(1) God exists.
(2) We cannot save ourselves from our sinfulness.
(3) God's grace is necessary for our salvation.

(4) We must believe in God and in His grace to receive salvation.

All of these are found in one crucial text: “Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him” (Heb. 11:6). The first, third, and fourth qualifiers are stated—(1) God exists, and (3) He graciously rescues those who (4) seek Him by faith—and the second is implied, i.e., (2) we sense the need to come to Him in faith and ask for His help, recognizing that we cannot overcome sin on our own. Without these aspects of faith (belief), it seems impossible for anyone, at any time, to be saved.

This is the “universal plan of salvation.” While God’s *stated content* of salvation differed for Abraham and Paul, the same basic message was preached to both. Paul says there is only one gospel (Gal. 1:8), but he quickly clarifies that Abraham believed this one gospel (Gal. 3:8). The content as revealed to Abraham was,

> [God] took him outside and said, “Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” *Abram believed the* LORD, *and he credited it to him as righteousness*. (Gen. 15:5–6)

This act of faith is used in the New Testament as an example of how we receive justification before God (cf. Rom. 4:3). When Paul *spelled out* the contents of this same gospel (cf. Gal. 1:8), he included far more revelation; namely, explicit belief in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ for our sins (cf. 1 Cor. 15:1–6). The gospel itself did not change; however, required salvific belief regarding the content of that gospel did change.

Even if it could be argued from certain verses (e.g., John 8:56; Gal. 3:16) that Abraham somehow foresaw the Messiah someday coming as his Seed,[22] it would still not be demonstrated that all believers in the Old Testament era had to know and believe the gospel as later (more fully) revealed in order to be saved. There is no evidence that every saved person from that time comprehended and embraced this,[23] nor did any of them know that Jesus of Nazareth was the foretold Promised One.

The New Testament makes believing in Jesus’ name explicitly necessary for salvation (cf. Acts 4:12; Rom. 10:9; John 3:16–18, 36). Therefore, while the mandated content of belief is different from one age to another, there is a minimal, absolutely necessary soteriological content of faith for all people during all ages in all places. For instance, Adam’s son, Seth, “also had a son, and

he named him Enosh. At that time men began to call on the name of the LORD" (Gen. 4:26). This is still required in the present era; Paul declares that "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Rom. 10:13), which he describes as confessing, "Jesus is Lord" (v. 9).

Normative and Dispensational Conditions

As noted above, what is normatively necessary sometimes differs from what is absolutely necessary. God, if He wishes, can require that persons at later times believe more than others at earlier times in order to receive eternal life.

Normative for One Time

The strongest reasons for this possibility appear to be based on progressive revelation and the corresponding responsibility for human beings to accept and believe the newer revelations as they are given.[24] Whatever the basis, it is God's prerogative to state the normative conditions for His plan of salvation—the Bank of Heaven sets the conditions by which debtors can draw upon its funds. During Old Testament times, apparently it was not normative to believe, in order to be saved, that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God who died for our sins and rose from the dead.

Normative for Another Time

Nonetheless, Scripture states that explicit acknowledgment of the Atonement and Resurrection are now necessary salvific conditions. Hence, in the progress of revelation, God not only revealed additional truth but also revealed new qualifications for explicit saving faith. Now we must not simply "call on the name of the Lord" (Gen. 4:26), but also "confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord" (Rom. 10:9 NLT) and "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 16:31 KJV), that He died and rose again for our sins (1 Cor. 15:1–6).

THE CONTENT OF THEOLOGICAL BELIEF NECESSARY FOR SALVATION

Assuming the foregoing conclusions, there are at least four truths we must keep in mind while answering the question regarding the minimal necessary theological *belief content* required for salvation today.

First, we are not asking what is absolutely necessary but what is normatively necessary. That is, we are not asking what God *must* require of us for salvation but what He has chosen, for His own reasons, to require of us so that we can receive everlasting life.

Second, we are not asking what was the normatively necessary content of saving faith in Old Testament times (or any other age) but what is the normatively necessary content of saving faith today.

Third, we are not only asking what is *implicitly* a normative necessity but also what is *explicitly* a normative necessity.[25]

Fourth, and finally, we are not asking about what someone may *not* affirm and still be saved but rather what he *must* affirm in order to be saved.

With this focus, we can look at the list of crucial Christian doctrines and ask which ones are *normatively, necessarily* part of salvific belief in this present age. For brevity we'll call this the *terms of salvation*.[26] That is, what are the beliefs required today in order for a person to receive the gift of eternal life?

The list of fundamental soteriological teachings in the broad sense[27] includes the following:

(1) Human depravity;[28]
(2) Christ's virgin birth;[29]
(3) Christ's sinlessness;[30]
(4) Christ's deity;[31]
(5) Christ's humanity;[32]
(6) God's unity;[33]
(7) God's triunity;[34]
(8) God's necessary grace;[35]
(9) The necessity of faith;[36]
(10) Christ's atoning death;[37]
(11) Christ's bodily resurrection;[38]
(12) Christ's bodily ascension;[39]
(13) Christ's present high priestly session;[40]
(14) Christ's second coming.[41]

Doctrines Absolutely Necessary for Salvation in the Broad Sense

As we have seen, salvation in the broad sense, from here to glory, includes justification, sanctification, and glorification:[42] It includes salvation from the past penalty of sin, the present power of sin, and the future presence of sin—the whole redemptive package.[43]

For this comprehensive salvation to be possible, it appears that all of these doctrines (1–14 in the list above) must be true. That is, they are *ontologically* (actually) necessary,[44] for without the reality of any one of them, some aspect of salvation would not be plausible. In short, either the whole of basic orthodox soteriological theology must be true or else complete salvation is not available. Again, this does not mean that all of these are *epistemologically* mandated for our reception of everlasting life.[45] That all of the tenets must *be true* (ontologically) in order for our salvation to be possible does not make it absolutely necessary that a given person *believes* all of them (epistemologically) in order to be saved.

It is noteworthy that scriptural inspiration and inerrancy[46] are not part of this fundamental salvific doctrinal package. *Biblical inspiration is not a soteriological doctrine but an epistemological truth*. The Bible is the basis on which we know the essential soteriological doctrines are accurate; hence, while inspiration and inerrancy are appropriately listed as fundamental in terms of being elemental to Christianity, they are not soteriologically fundamental but epistemologically fundamental, the basis on which rests the reliability of the faith's other foundational teachings (not all of which are directly connected to salvation).[47]

Doctrines Absolutely Necessary to Be True for Salvation in the Narrow Sense

Not all doctrines necessary for salvation in the broad sense (of justification, sanctification, and glorification) are necessary for salvation in the narrow sense (of justification alone). For example, it is not necessary for Christ to now be in heaven interceding for us (doctrine 13, above) or for Him to be bodily returning to earth (doctrine 14, above) in order for our *justification* to be possible. Doctrines 1–12, above, however, *must be* either explicitly or implicitly true by necessity (ontologically) to make our justification possible.

Further, it does not appear to be *absolutely* necessary that all doctrines 1–11 be true in order to make our justification possible,[48] but rather only that they be

normatively necessary, that is, because God has willed it this way. For example, God may have achieved our justification without Jesus being virgin-born (doctrine 2, above); His sinlessness (doctrine 3, above), soteriologically, is absolutely necessary, but virgin birth is not an absolute *condition* for His sinlessness (virgin birth is *evidence* of it). God instead could have had Christ born through an immaculate conception,[49] for example, but this would not have drawn the same attention to His supernatural origin, since a virgin birth is more empirically obvious than an immaculate conception. All that is absolutely necessary in this regard is for Christ not to have inherited Adam's sin nature; a virgin birth is one way (but not the only way) to accomplish this.[50] Thus, while the Virgin Birth is not absolutely necessary for Christ's sinlessness, either it or something like it is necessary (as willed by God) in order to ensure His sinless perfection of not inheriting Adam's sin. However, while the Virgin Birth (or its like) is actually necessary for salvation to be possible, it is nowhere specified in Scripture as either an absolute or normative belief that is explicitly necessary for one to be saved.[51]

Doctrines Normatively Necessary to Believe for Salvation in All Ages

We need to distinguish between (1) what must absolutely or normatively be *true* (ontologically) in order for us to be justified and (2) what we must absolutely or normatively *believe* (epistemologically) in order to be justified. God wants us to understand and embrace all orthodox truth, but He has not set belief in every orthodox truth as a condition for our redemption.[52] For example, there is no convincing evidence that it was normatively necessary for everyone during the Old Testament era to believe in God's triunity or Christ's virgin birth, sinlessness, deity, sacrificial atonement, bodily resurrection, bodily ascension, present session, and second coming.[53]

A case *can* be made, however, that most if not all of these truths are found at least implicitly in the Old Testament. Indeed, New Testament writers appeal to it in support of many doctrines, such as Christ's virgin birth (Matt. 1:23), death and purity (1 Peter 2:22–24), resurrection (Acts 2:30–32), and deity (Mark 12:36). We are *not* alleging that none of these truths had been made known before Christ came; we *are* observing that evidence is lacking for normative explicit saving faith in these truths being necessary for salvation in the case of Old Testament believers.

Nothing indicates that the average Israelite (or Jew) was required to have faith in all of these doctrines as a condition for his justification. Even the stated content of the gospel as revealed to Abraham (cf. Gen. 15:4–6; Gal. 3:8) does not include some of these teachings. Once again, certainly in the days when people began to "call on the name of the Lord" (Gen. 4:26) there was no stated requirement that they express explicit belief in God's triunity or Christ's virgin birth, sinlessness, deity, atonement, resurrection, ascension, present session, and return.[54] Of course, one could argue from silence that they were required to believe these doctrines; nevertheless, because the text does not say so, this argument from silence is exactly that—an argument without any evidence.

Walter Kaiser (b. 1933) clearly overstates the case in arguing that "the object of the OT believer's faith was no different from our own except for the fact that his [the object's] name was not yet announced as Jesus" ("SOT" in *JBT*, 11). This is the typical Reformed covenantal position. John Calvin said, "The covenant made with all the patriarchs is as much like ours in substance and reality as the two are basically one and the same" (as cited in Feinberg, *CD*, 169). Charles Hodge likewise saw no basic difference between the content of the gospel necessary to believe for salvation in the Old Testament and that in the New:

> The Redeemer is the same under all dispensations. He who was predicted as the seed of the woman … is our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God.… He, therefore, from the beginning has been held up as the hope of the world, the SALVATOR HOMINUM. (ibid., 170)

However, this conclusion is not borne up by the biblical evidence. As Allen Ross notes, "It is most improbable that everyone who believed unto salvation [in the Old Testament] consciously believed in the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (ibid.). John Feinberg (b. 1946) adds, "The people of the Old Testament era did not know that *Jesus* was the Messiah, that *Jesus* would die, and that His death would be the basis of salvation" (ibid., 171). Charles Ryrie aptly summarizes the issue:

> The *basis* of salvation in every age is the death of Christ; the *requirement* of salvation in every age is faith; the *object* of faith in every age is God; the *content* of faith changes in the various dispensations. (*DT*, 23)

In short, it appears that at most, the normative Old Testament salvific requirements (in terms of explicit belief) were (1) faith in God's unity, (2) acknowledgment of human sinfulness, (3) acceptance of God's necessary

grace,[55] and possibly (4) understanding that there would be a coming Messiah.[56]

Doctrines Normatively Necessary (Explicitly or Implicitly) for Salvation in This Age

Because revelation is progressive, and because with more light comes more responsibility, God has required more soteriological belief (either explicitly or implicitly) since the Advent than before it (cf. Heb. 1:1; 2:3–4). After a transitional period,[57] when the new message of Jesus Christ as the long-awaited Messiah and Fulfiller of prophecy was being promulgated, the "mandatory saving-faith content" was increased. Apparently, *the doctrines that must be either explicitly or implicitly believed for salvation (justification) appear to include those listed as 1–11, above: God's unity and triunity, human depravity, the necessity of God's grace, the necessity of faith, and Christ's virgin birth, sinlessness, deity, humanity, atoning death, and physical resurrection*.

While explicit saving faith in the bodily ascension, present session, and second coming of Jesus (doctrines 12–14, above) does not seem to be required for our *initial justification*, it is essential to our *ongoing sanctification* and *ultimate glorification*. Belief in these three doctrines is not related to our deliverance from the *penalty* of sin. However, without Christ's ascension, His present heavenly intercession for our sanctification and glorification would not be possible, and we could not then obtain victory over the *power* of sin: "Because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them" (Heb. 7:24–25; cf. Gal. 5:22; Eph. 5:18; 1 John 2:1–2). Likewise, His return (cf. Rev. 19) is essential for our salvation from the *presence* of sin: "We know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).

> We eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. (Phil. 3:20–21)

An example in which our explicit belief is not required for salvation is Christ's humanity. While Christ's humanity is absolutely necessary to make salvation *possible*, it does not appear to be an explicitly necessary faith condition for *receiving* the gift of everlasting life.

From the very beginning, the coming Savior was to be the Seed of the woman

(Gen. 3:15 NKJV). He was to be born of the virgin (Isa. 7:17) and "made of a woman" (Gal. 4:4 KJV). The only way He could reconcile God and man was to be *both* (see chapter 9): "There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5). Indeed, to deny Christ's humanity is a heresy. John wrote:

> This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ *has come in the flesh* is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world. (1 John 4:2–3; cf. 2 John 7)

However, again, while the humanity of Christ is a necessary basis for our salvation, *explicit* belief in it does not appear to be a condition for our receiving eternal life. There is ample evidence throughout the New Testament that *implicit* belief in Christ's humanity was a necessary condition for being saved. After all, it was obvious to everyone that He was a human being: He had a mother, was born, grew up as a child, had siblings, and did all the things that human beings do, except sin (Heb. 4:15). Since His humanity was predicted, expected, and observed, it did not need to be presented as an explicit condition for being saved. *Because* heretical docetists began later to deny it, the humanity of Christ was explicitly affirmed by the Christian church, based on Holy Scripture. Hence, all who truly believe in Him unto salvation must have either explicit or implicit faith in Christ's humanity; none can explicitly deny it and be saved.

Doctrines That Must Be Explicitly and Normatively Believed for Salvation in the Present Age

In addition to human sinfulness, God's unity, and the necessity of God's grace,[58] it seems there are three necessary explicit beliefs and one necessary implicit belief for salvation today. The *explicit* conditions of saving faith are Christ's deity, atoning death, and physical resurrection.[59] The *implicit* faith condition, acceptance of the Trinity,[60] is connected to belief in the deity of Christ, since believing that He is the Son of God implies that He has a Father who is God. The only basic element for the Trinity[61] not implied here is the exact number of persons involved.[62]

In the narrow sense (in terms of justification), it is not *absolutely necessary* to believe in Christ's atoning death (1 Cor. 15:1–16) and bodily resurrection (Rom. 4:25), since there are no real grounds for the idea that people prior to His first

coming were required to have saving faith in these truths.[63] Nonetheless, it seems evident that for salvation today, it is *normatively necessary* to place salvific faith in both His death and resurrection. As we have seen, Paul lists each as an inseparable part of the gospel message (1 Cor. 15:1–6; cf. Rom. 10:9), which alone is "the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16 KJV). Those who disobey this one and only gospel are lost forever (2 Thess. 1:7–9), and "if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (1 Cor. 15:17).

IS FAITH IN CHRIST'S DEITY NECESSARY FOR SALVATION?

While there is wide agreement among evangelicals that explicit belief in the *death and resurrection* of Christ is a soteriological mandate,[64] there is still considerable debate over whether belief in the *deity* of Christ is a salvific requirement for today. Two points are crucial in the discussion: First, is it necessary to believe that Jesus is Lord in order to be saved? Second, does the New Testament usage of *Lord*, in regard to Jesus, signify deity?

Is It Salvifically Necessary to Believe That Jesus Christ Is Lord?

The first question is the easiest to answer, since, again, this is precisely what Paul teaches in Romans 10:9: "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is *Lord*,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Acts 16:31 says, "Believe in the *Lord* Jesus, and you will be saved," and Acts 2:21 declares that "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved" (NKJV). In the same sermon (cf. v. 34), Peter calls Jesus *Lord* and adds: "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, *both Lord and Christ*" (v. 36). Acts 3:14–16 reads:

> You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed *the author of life*, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. *By faith in the name of Jesus*, this man whom you see and know was made strong.

Furthermore, they are told to "repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord" (v. 19 NKJV). In a later message Peter adds, "The God of our

fathers raised up *Jesus* whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. *Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior*, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5:30–31 NKJV). Again, when speaking to Gentiles, he asserts: "You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is *Lord of all*" (10:36); "whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins" (v. 43 NKJV).

Paul affirms in Romans 1:1–4 that the "gospel," which alone is "the power of God unto salvation" (v. 16 KJV) is "concerning *[God's] Son Jesus Christ* … who was … declared to be *the Son of God* with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by resurrection from the dead" (NKJV). He adds in 1 Corinthians 2:8 that "the rulers of this age" had "crucified the *Lord of glory*." In 2 Corinthians 4:3–4 he declares:

> Even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of *the gospel* of the glory of Christ, who is *the image of God*.

In the next verse he speaks of "Jesus Christ the Lord." He also mentions the salvation of his Jewish kinsman, "of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, *Christ* came, who is over all, *the eternally blessed God*" (Rom. 9:5 NKJV). It is this same "Lord over all" on whom people must "call" to be saved (10:12 NKJV). He adds elsewhere that "no one can say *Jesus is Lord* except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3). In brief, there are numerous passages that call Jesus both *Lord* and *God* in connection with our salvation; therefore, faith in Jesus Christ as God is salvifically required.

Does the Term *Lord* Used of Jesus Christ Mean "Deity"?

The remaining question is whether *Lord* (Gk: *kurios*) in reference to Christ means "deity."[65] The New Testament evidence points to an affirmative answer. Consider the following.

First, the Jewish Messiah that Israel believed in was regarded to be God-even in the Old Testament. Psalm 45:6 refers to Him as "God," saying, "Your throne, *O God*, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom." Confirmation that this was understood as a reference to the deity of Christ is its citation in Hebrews 1:8: "About the Son [God the Father] says, "Your throne, *O God*, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom." This in the context of the author asking,

> To which of the angels did God ever say, "You are *my Son*; today I have become your Father"? Or again, "I will be his Father, and he will be *my Son*"? And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, "*Let all God's angels worship him*" (vv. 5–6).

From this it is clear that they understood the Messiah to be the Creator rather than a creature like Michael the archangel.[66]

Second, Jesus silenced his opposition (the Pharisees) by citing Psalm 110:1, which He affirmed spoke of His deity:

> Jesus asked them, "What do you think about the Christ [Messiah]? Whose son is he?" "The son of David," they replied. He said to them, "How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls [the Christ] '*Lord*'? For [David] says, " 'The Lord [the Father] said to *my Lord* [the Son]: "Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet." ' If then David calls [Christ] '*Lord*,' how can [Christ] be [David's] son?" (Matt. 22:41–45).

Isaiah 9:6 is another clear affirmation of Christ's deity:

> For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, *Mighty God*, *Everlasting Father* [i.e., Father of eternity], Prince of Peace.

Likewise, Isaiah 7:14 confirms that Christ is God: "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel," which, according to Matthew 1:23, means "*God* with us."

Proverbs 30:4 speaks of God's "son":

> Who has gone up to heaven and come down? Who has gathered up the wind in the hollow of his hands? Who has wrapped up the waters in his cloak? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and the name of *his son*?

Psalm 2 also refers to God the Son:

> "You are *my Son*; today I have become your Father. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. You will rule them with an iron scepter; you will dash them to pieces like pottery." … Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling. Kiss *the Son*, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him. (vv. 7–9, 11–12)

Third, the Gospels affirm the deity of Jesus. Peter confessed Him to be "the Christ [Messiah], *the Son of the living God*" (Matt. 16:16). The Pharisees instantly recognized Jesus' divine claim—"Why does this fellow talk like that?

He's blaspheming! *Who can forgive sins but God alone*?" (Mark 2:7)—and so did the high priest when he asked Jesus if He was the Messiah:

> "*I am*," said Jesus. "And you will see the *Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven*." [At this] the high priest tore his clothes. "Why do we need any more witnesses?" he asked. "*You have heard the blasphemy*. What do you think?" They all condemned him as worthy of death. (Mark 14:62–64)

The apostle John, in his gospel, designates Jesus Christ as both God and Creator:

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and *the Word was God*. He was with God in the beginning. *Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made*. (1:1–3)

Jesus stunned the Jews when He claimed to be the "I AM," that is, Yahweh (Heb: *YHWH*), who revealed Himself to Moses by that Name (in Ex. 3:14).

> "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "*before Abraham was born, I am*!" At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.…
>
> [Later, Jesus said,] "*I and the Father are one*." Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus said to them, "I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?"
>
> "We are not stoning you for any of these," replied the Jews, "but *for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God*" (John 8:58–59; 10:30–33).

Thomas confessed to Jesus, "*My Lord and my God*!" (John 20:28). Even at Jesus' birth He was divinely acclaimed. Matthew calls Him "Immanuel, which is translated, 'God with us' " (Matt. 1:23 NKJV). The angels announced, "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is *Christ the Lord*" (Luke 2:11). The Magi treated him as Deity, for "on coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and *worshiped him*" (Matt. 2:11). *Worship was reserved for God alone* (Matt. 4:10).

Fourth, throughout the early book of Acts Jesus is called *Lord* (Gk: *kurios*),[67] which denotes *God*, as is indicated by the fact that it is the Greek translation of the Hebrew term LORD (*YHWH*). *YHWH* always means "Deity." In Acts Jesus is not only called *Lord* but is also treated as Deity. Peter's use of Psalm 110:1, which attributes divinity to Christ by means of the term *Lord* (*kurios*), confirms that it was not only understood to mean "Deity" but also that it was normative for early believers to confess that Jesus is God:

> God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. *Exalted to the right hand of God*, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said, "The Lord [the Father] said to *my Lord* [the Son]: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.' " Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, *both Lord and Christ*. (Acts 2:32–36)

Therefore, since the New Testament claims that Jesus is *Lord*, and since in this context *Lord* means "Deity," it remains only to ask whether belief in the lordship or deity of Christ is a New Testament requirement for justification.[68] If "confess[ing] with your mouth, '*Jesus is Lord*' " (Rom. 10:9) means acknowledging that Jesus is Deity, it follows logically that belief in His deity is normatively necessary for New Testament salvation. Even in Acts it is evident that belief in the deity of Christ is presented as an explicit part of the gospel. As mentioned earlier, Stephen, the first Christian martyr, prayed, "*Lord Jesus, receive my spirit*" (7:59), and other references to His deity are abundant (e.g., 2:32, 34, 36, 39; 7:60).

From the earliest New Testament times, then, believers understood that calling Jesus *Lord* was attributing deity. Accordingly, Paul's directive to confess that Jesus is Lord (Rom. 10:9) is referring to His divine status. Such confessions were not casual tribute in early Judaic Christianity, which is confirmed by the almost exclusive Christological use of *kurios* for Deity and in the context of worship. Again, the Philippian jailer was told: "Believe in *the Lord* Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household" (Acts 16:31).

Summing it Up

At this point, we will attempt to summarize the rather complex theological issue of salvation's terms. The chart below does *not* deal with what was necessary in the Old Testament to be saved, nor does it treat what needs to be *true* about Christ before salvation is made possible. Rather, it deals with what is necessary to *believe* today in order to be saved (justified)—the necessary conditions of belief stated in the New Testament as normative for salvation (justification) for the present age.

The fourteen items in the left column must be *true* before salvation in the broad sense (of justification, sanctification, and glorification) is possible, but only 1–11 are necessary for justification itself to be possible. Not all of these must be *believed* in order for us to be saved (justified).

Yes or *no* in the column marked *Absolutely* refers to what is or isn't an absolute necessity for belief today to be saved; that is, whether God could or couldn't save someone unless he or she believed it.[69]

Yes or *no* in the column marked *Normatively* refers to whether something is mandated by God but is not absolutely necessary; that is, whether the belief is required by God for His own reasons, not because salvation wouldn't be possible without that specific belief.[70]

Yes or *no* under *Explicitly* refers to whether a person must overtly believe in a specific truth in order to receive salvation. *Yes* or *no* under *Implicitly* refers to whether or not a certain truth, while not an explicit part of the belief content necessary for salvation today, is implied in *another* truth in which belief *is* explicitly necessary for salvation today.

What Is Necessary to *Believe* Today to Be Saved

	Absolutely	Normatively	Explicitly	Implicitly Only
(1) Human Depravity	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
(2) Christ's Virgin Birth	No	No	No	Yes
(3) Christ's Sinlessness	No	No	No	Yes
(4) Christ's Humanity	No	Yes	No	Yes
(5) Christ's Deity	No	Yes	Yes	No
(6) God's Unity	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
(7) The Trinity	No	Yes	No	Yes
(8) The Necessity of Grace	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
(9) The Necessity of Faith	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
(10) Christ's Atoning Death	No	Yes	Yes	No
(11) Christ's Bodily Resurrection	No	Yes	Yes	No
(12) Christ's Bodily Ascension[71]	No	No	No	No
(13) Christ's Present Session[71]	No	No	No	No
(14) Christ's Bodily Second Coming[71]	No	No	No	No

In summation, for salvation today, it is necessary that a person explicitly believe doctrines 1, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, and 11: these are human depravity, God's unity; Christ's deity, atoning death, and bodily resurrection; the necessity of God's grace; and the necessity of our faith. Doctrines 1, 2, 3, 4, and 7—human depravity; Christ's virgin birth, sinlessness, and humanity; and the Trinity—need only be believed implicitly and not denied explicitly in order for a person to receive salvation.[72]

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR THE CONTENT OF SALVATION

The question of the content of salvation was not a major issue with most of the major fathers of the church. They generally concentrated on more pressing issues[73] and outright denial of the faith.[74] Nonetheless, a basic understanding of their perspectives can be culled from their writings.

Early Church Fathers

John Chrysostom (347–407)

> At the same time the Apostle [Peter] strikes fear into them [in Acts 2], by reminding them of the darkness which had lately occurred, and leading them to expect things to come. "Before that great and notable day of the Lord come." For be not confident, he means to say, because at present you sin with impunity.… For if these things are the prelude of that day, it follows that the extreme of danger is impending. But what next? He again lets them take a breath, adding, "And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved." [cf. Rom. 10:13]. This is said concerning Christ. (*HA*, 5)

Medieval Fathers

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)

> The salvation of man could not be achieved otherwise than through Christ, according to Acts 4:12: "There is no other name … given to men, whereby we must be saved." Consequently the law that brings all to salvation could not be given until after the coming of Christ. But before His coming it was necessary to give to the people, of whom Christ was to be born, a law containing certain rudiments of righteousness unto salvation, in order to prepare them to receive Him. (*ST*, II.1.2.91)

Reformation Leaders

John Calvin (1509–1564)

> All that we have hitherto said of Christ leads to this one result, that condemned, dead, and lost in ourselves, we must in him seek righteousness, deliverance, life and salvation, as we are taught by the celebrated words of Peter, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). The name of Jesus was not given him at random, or fortuitously, or by the will of man, but was brought from heaven by an angel, as the herald of the supreme decree; the reason also being added, “for he shall save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). In these words attention should be paid to what we have elsewhere observed, that the office of Redeemer was assigned him in order that he might be our Savior. (*ICR*, II.16.1)

Post-Reformation Teachers

Jacob Arminius (1560–1609)

> The necessity of faith in the cross does not arise from the circumstance of the doctrine of the cross being preached and propounded to men; but, since faith in Christ is necessary according to the decree of God, the doctrine of the cross is preached, that those who believe in it may be saved. Not only on account of the decree of God is faith in Christ necessary, but it is also necessary on account of the promise made unto Christ by the Father, and according to the Covenant which was ratified between both of them. This is the word of that promise: “Ask of me, and I will give thee the Heathen for thine inheritance” (Psalm 2:8). But the inheritance of Christ is the multitude of the faithful; “the people, who, in the days of his power shall willingly come to him, in the beauties of holiness” (Psalm 110:3); “in thee shall all nations be blessed; so then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham” [Galatians 3:8–9] (*WJA*, I., Oration 2).

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758)

> Another remarkable place wherein it is plainly foretold, that the like method of professing religion should be continued in the days of the gospel, is Isaiah 14:22–25:
>
> Seek unto me, and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is none else: I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that unto me every knee shall bow, EVERY TONGUE SHALL SWEAR: surely shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength: even to him shall men come—in the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory.
>
> What is here called swearing, the apostle, in citing this place, once and again calls confessing; Romans 14:11—“Every tongue shall confess to God.” Philippians 2:10—“That every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.” Which is the word commonly used in the New Testament, to signify making a public profession of religion. So Romans 10:9–10.…
>
> Where a public profession of religion with the mouth is evidently spoken of as a great duty of all Christ’s people, as well as believing in him; and ordinarily requisite to salvation, not that it is necessary in the same manner faith is, but in like manner as baptism is. Faith and verbal profession are jointly spoken of here as necessary to salvation, in the same manner as faith and baptism are, in Mark 16:16. (*RWG* in *WJE*, III.2.2)
>
> In opposition to these different views the common doctrine of the Church has ever been, that the

> plan of salvation has been the same from the beginning. There is the same promise of deliverance from the evils of apostasy, the same Redeemer, the same condition required for participation in the blessings of redemption, and the same complete salvation for all who embrace the offers of divine mercy. (as cited in Hodge, *ST*, 2.367)

Philip Schaff (1819–1893)

> It is the Gospel of LOVE. Its practical motto is: "God is love." In the incarnation of the eternal Word, in the historic mission of his Son, God has given the greatest possible proof of his love to mankind. In the fourth Gospel alone we read that precious sentence which contains the very essence of Christianity: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life" [John 3:16] (*HCC*, I.1.12.2).

Westminster Shorter Catechism

> How are we made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ? "We are made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ, by the effectual application of it to us by his Holy Spirit" (Question 29). How doth the Spirit apply to us the redemption purchased by Christ? "The Spirit applieth to us the redemption purchased by Christ, by working faith in us, and thereby uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling" (Question 30).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The question of the terms of salvation is a complex and difficult subject over which there is much evangelical disagreement. It seems that this is due in large part to the failure to clearly distinguish various issues, but even then, residual differences remain. Regarding what is explicitly necessity and what is only implicitly necessary, the implied content of *fidei implicitus* is not as plainly spelled out in the New Testament as many would like it to be. *The broadest borders of orthodoxy contain those who confess the normative requirement of belief (either explicit faith or implicit faith) in all truths necessary for salvation, which in our view include at least doctrines 1–11, above.*

Two Important Texts

There are more pivotal issues that call for further examination than has been covered in the space allotted here. There are two, however, that we must briefly consider.

John 8:56

Jesus affirms that Abraham saw His day and rejoiced. Did Abraham see Christ's "day" from heaven, as Moses and Elijah did during the Transfiguration (cf. Matt. 17:1–3)? Or did Abraham see it from Old Testament times, looking ahead to the Cross? Did Abraham see it explicitly or only implicitly? In addition, no matter which way Abraham "saw" it, did everyone else in the Old Testament era also see it? And, was what Abraham believed normatively necessary for salvation in the Old Testament? Evidence seems to be lacking for an answer of yes to the last two questions; accordingly, what was normatively necessary then appears to have been less than what is normatively necessary today.

Galatians 3

Paul confirms that the gospel was preached to Abraham (v. 8). Was the content of this "gospel" the same as that spelled out by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:1–6? An examination of what the text says Abraham believed would suggest that it was not. While Galatians 3:16 NKJV speaks of a fulfillment in Abraham's "Seed," who is Christ, it is not clear that Abraham understood it this way, though this may be implied in the dual usage of *seed* in the text, once of Christ and once of Israel. Professor Thomas Howe, my colleague, has suggested that there are two different usages of *seed* in the related Old Testament texts, one referring to Abraham's Seed (Christ) and another referring to the multiplying of Abraham's seed (Israel). The word *seed* (Gk: *sperma*), both in the Greek Old Testament, from which Paul probably quoted, and in the New Testament, is *singular* (though it can refer either to an individual or to a collective group as one). This would account for Paul's argument in Galatians 3:16 that "Seed" refers to Christ, and yet also leave room for the obvious references to "seed" as the multitude of offspring Abraham would produce (cf. Gen. 15:5; 22:17–18).

Even if this is the case, it appears to be one of the Old Testament mysteries once concealed and now revealed (cf. Eph. 3:4–5). In any event, there is no evidence that Christ's person and salvific mission were normatively known in Old Testament times. It may be that just as He was the fulfillment of the Passover lamb (1 Cor. 5:7) without everyone who sacrificed knowing the full content of the gospel (cf. 1 Cor. 15:1–6), even so Christ fulfilled the "seed" promises to Abraham without everyone who believed them (including Abraham) having explicit understanding and faith in His death, resurrection, and deity.

If Abraham *did* have the same content of the gospel that Paul possessed, did all Old Testament believers have the same understanding? Again the lack of evidence favors the view that they did not. Further, even if some (or most) of

them understood the full content of the New Testament gospel—including the death, burial, resurrection, and appearances of the Lord Jesus Christ—was this kind of knowledge normative *for salvation* at that time? There is no evidence to support such a contention. At best, they had an implicit faith in this understanding of the gospel that with suitable understanding and opportunity would have come to fruition in explicit faith. Thus, it seems correct to affirm that while there is only one gospel (Gal. 1:8) and that this gospel was preached to Abraham (Gal. 3:8), nonetheless, there was a progressive understanding of the content of this one gospel that was not revealed in fullness until the New Testament.

One Final Question

Since we have concluded that it is normatively necessary today for a person to salvifically believe not only in the death and resurrection of Christ but also in His deity, it remains to ask, Can a person be saved today if he does not believe in the deity of Christ? Here also we must separate two questions.

First, Can one be saved today and *not believe in* Christ's deity? Second, Can one be saved today if he *denies* Christ's deity? As to the first question, in view of the above discussion, we must answer that it is *normatively* not possible, but it may be *actually* possible—if God wills to do so. God has done it in the past,[75] and He can do it again, if He so pleases. Whether He ever does must be left to Him. Our duty is to proclaim what is normatively necessary, which is to believe in Christ's deity as part of the faith condition for salvation.

As to the second question, it is difficult to see how someone who explicitly denies Christ's deity can be saved while he remains in this denial, since, unlike those who may not know about it and, hence, do not yet believe it, he does know about it but chooses to disbelieve it.[76] Of course, it is always possible that he disbelieves it because, for instance, he was poorly taught by an unorthodox teacher. What then? Again, first of all, we must fall back on what is normatively prescribed—any exceptions must be left up to the Prescriber rather than to us who subscribe. We can say that we have no explicit biblical teaching on which to pronounce the salvation of such a person. This being the case, it is best left to the God who knows the secrets of every heart as to who will ultimately stand in His presence. Meanwhile, we must teach and practice what we know to be true, including that no one who denies the deity of Christ qualifies for salvation by normative New Testament standards.[77]

In conclusion, it is possible that God could save someone without explicit faith in Christ's deity, provided if that one had a correct understanding, he or she *would* believe. Nevertheless, given the nature of God, heaven, and the need to believe in order to enter, it does not seem possible that God could save anyone today who, with proper understanding and subsequent opportunity, *does not* have (or *would not* have come to) explicit faith in Christ's deity.

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APPENDIX ONE

DOES HUMAN LIFE BEGIN AT CONCEPTION?

The evidence that there is a human soul (life) from the moment of conception is both biblically and scientifically strong.

SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE THAT THE HUMAN SOUL BEGINS AT CONCEPTION

At the United States congressional hearings on April 23, 1981, scientific experts testified concerning the origin of human life.[1] The following are samples of what they said.

> In biology and in medicine, it is an accepted fact that the life of any individual organism reproducing by sexual reproduction begins at conception, or fertilization. (Dr. Micheline M. Matthew-Roth, Harvard Medical School's Department of Medicine)

Matthew-Roth's testimony was supported from more than twenty embryological and other scientific texts. No one at the hearing, even those who were pro-abortion, provided evidence that human life begins at some other point.

Dr. Hymie Gordon (Chairman of the Department of Genetics at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota) added:

> Now we can say, unequivocally, that the question of when life begins is no longer a question for theological or philosophical dispute. It is an established scientific fact. Theologians and philosophers may go on to debate the meaning of life or the purpose of life, but it is an established fact that all life, including human life, begins at the moment of conception.

Modern fetology has brought to light some amazing insights into the growth of this tiny person[2] in her mother's womb. The following summary is vivid witness to the full humanness of the prenatal child.

FIRST MONTH—ACTUALIZATION

- She is conceived.
- All her human characteristics are present.
- She implants or "nests" in her mother's uterus (at one week).
- Her heart muscle pulsates (at three weeks).
- Her head, arms, and legs begin to appear.

SECOND MONTH—DEVELOPMENT

- Her brain waves can be detected (at forty to forty-two days).
- Her nose, eyes, ears, and toes appear.
- Her heart beats and blood flows (her own type).
- Her skeleton develops.
- She has her own unique fingerprints.
- She is sensitive to touch on her lips and has reflexes.
- All her bodily systems are present and functioning.

THIRD MONTH—MOVEMENT

- She swallows, squints, and swims.
- She grasps with her hands and moves her tongue.
- She can even suck her thumb.
- She can feel organic pain (at eight to thirteen weeks).

FOURTH MONTH—GROWTH

- Her weight increases 600 percent (to 1/2 birth weight).
- She grows up to eight to ten inches long.
- She can hear her mother's voice.

FIFTH MONTH—VIABILITY

- Her skin, hair, and nails develop.
- She dreams (i.e., has rapid eye movement [REM]).
- She can cry (if air is present).
- She can live outside the womb.
- She is only halfway to her scheduled birth date.

These characteristics make the human identity of the unborn unmistakable from the moment of conception: It is a human soul (life) from its very inception.

BIBLICAL EVIDENCE FOR THE FULL HUMANITY (PERSONHOOD) OF THE FETUS

Since most of the scriptural data has already been presented, the arguments pertinent to this position will simply be summarized here.

(1) Unborn babies are called *children*, the same word (Gk: *brephos*) used of infants and young children (e.g., Luke 1:41, 44; 2:12, 16; cf. Ex. 21:22) and sometimes even of adults (e.g., 1 Kings 3:17).
(2) The unborn are created by God (Ps. 139:13), just as God created Adam and Eve in His image (Gen. 1:27).
(3) The life of the unborn is protected by the same punishment for injury or death (Ex. 21:22) as that of an adult (Gen. 9:6).[3]
(4) Christ was human (the God-man) from the point when He was conceived in Mary's womb (Matt. 1:20–21; Luke 1:26–27).
(5) The image of God includes "male and female" (Gen. 1:27), and it is a scientific fact that maleness or femaleness (sex/gender) is determined at the moment of conception.
(6) Unborn children possess personal attributes, distinctive of humans, such as sin (Ps. 51:5) and joy (Luke 1:44).
(7) Personal pronouns are used to describe unborn children (Jer. 1:5 [LXX]; Matt. 1:20–21) just as they are of any other human being.
(8) The unborn are said to be known intimately and personally by God in the

same way He would know any other person (Ps. 139:15–16; Jer. 1:5).

(9) The unborn are even called by God before birth (Gen. 25:22–23; Judg. 13:2–7; Isa. 49:1, 5; Gal. 1:15).

Taken as a whole, these texts leave no doubt that unborn children are just as human—persons in God's image—as are babies or adults. They are created in His likeness from the very moment of conception, and their prenatal life is precious in God's eyes, protected by His prohibition against murder.

SOCIAL EVIDENCE FOR THE FULL HUMANITY (PERSONHOOD) OF THE UNBORN

In addition to the biblical and scientific evidence, there are many social arguments for protecting the human rights of unborn children. The following are the most significant.

No one disputes that human embryos have human parents. Why, then, should anyone insist that a human embryo is not human? No biologist has any difficulty identifying an unborn pig as a pig or an unborn horse as a horse. What is it that compels anyone to decide that an unborn human should be considered anything but human?

Human life doesn't stop and then restart—there is a continuous, uninterrupted flow of human life from generation to generation, from parent to child. New individual human life appears through conception; hence, the newly formed life is as fully human as his or her parents.[4]

The father of modern fetology, Dr. Albert W. Liley (1929–1983), noted that "this is the same baby we are caring for before and after birth, who before birth can be ill and need diagnosis and treatment just like any other patient" ("CAA" in *LS*, cited in Willke, *AQA*, 52). If it is the same baby and the same patient both before and after birth, then it is just as human before birth as after (see Geisler and Beckwith, *MLD*, 90).

Modern medical care has made it possible for premature babies to live much earlier outside the womb—some twenty-week-old fetuses have survived. If they are human when they come out of the womb at five months, then they are human if they stay in the womb. There are no grounds, consequently, for killing them up to nine months, which is what U.S. law permits. This contradiction can be dramatized in a modern hospital, where staff members in one room rush to save

a five-month-old preemie, while in another room others murder a baby who is younger or older than five months.

All the arguments in favor of abortion apply equally to infanticide and euthanasia. If unborn children can be killed because of deformity, poverty, or undesirability, then both infants and the aged can be disposed of for the same reasons. There is no legitimate difference between abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia—they all involve the same patient, undertake the same procedure, and end with the same result.

Abortion has been declared wrong by many societies, Christian and pagan, since the dawn of civilization. The Code of Hammurabi (eighteenth century B.C.) even contained a penalty for unintentionally causing a miscarriage. The Mosaic Law (fifteenth century B.C.) exacted the same penalty for injury to both baby and mother. The Persian ruler Tiglath-pileser (c. twelfth century B.C.) punished women who caused themselves to abort. The Greek physician Hippocrates (c. 460–377 B.C.) opposed abortion by oath, swearing, "I will neither give a deadly drug to anyone if asked for, nor will I make a suggestion to this effect. Similarly I will not give to a woman an abortive remedy" (Krason, *APMC,* 132).

Seneca (c. second century), whose stoic compatriots allowed for abortion, praised his mother for not killing him. Augustine (354–430), Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), and John Calvin (1509–1564) all considered abortion immoral. English common law exacted a punishment for taking life by abortion, as did early American law; in fact, before 1973, laws in nearly all fifty U.S. states opposed abortion.

Discrimination against anyone's life based on circumstantial matters (such as size, age, location, or functional ability) is morally wrong. *These are the actual grounds on which abortionists consider the unborn child to be non-human*. On this basis, we could discriminate against pygmies because they are too small, or against ethnic minorities because of where they live, or against the handicapped and elderly because they lack certain faculties. *If we can eliminate babies from the human community because they are unwanted, there is nothing to stop the elimination of other so-called societal undesirables.*

ARGUMENTS ATTEMPTING TO DEMONSTRATE SCRIPTURALLY THAT LIFE DOESN'T BEGIN AT CONCEPTION

A number of biblical texts are cited to support the position that an unborn child is not human. Brief comments can be made about and conclusions drawn from the most significant passages used for this viewpoint.

Genesis 2:7

Genesis declares that man "became a living being" only after God gave him life. Since breathing does not occur until birth, it is argued that the unborn are not human until they leave the womb.

Job 34:14–15

Elihu said that if God "withdrew his spirit and breath, all mankind would perish." Here again, since life is connected with breath, it is reasoned that there is no human life before a baby begins to breathe.

Isaiah 57:16

The text refers to "the breath of man that I [God] have created." This also seems to make the beginning of breath the point of the creation of a person.

Ecclesiastes 6:3–5

Solomon declares that "a stillborn child" comes into the world "without meaning, it departs in darkness.… It never saw the sun or knew anything." This is taken to indicate that the unborn are no more than the dead, who also know nothing but lie in the darkness of the grave (cf. 9:10).

Matthew 26:24

Matthew records Jesus' statement about Judas that "it would be better for him if he had not been born." The implication drawn from this is that human life begins at birth; otherwise, allegedly, Jesus should have said it would have been better for Judas never to have been *conceived*.

CONCLUSION

Some have attempted to argue that a conceptus is a human being but not a person.[5] As already established, this differentiation is arbitrary, a distinction without a difference. There are no actual, essential differences between being

human and being a human person—there are only functional differences. All attempts to distinguish personhood from humanness would lead, on the same grounds, to the denial of the personhood of the handicapped, the unconscious, and the senile.

Both Scripture and science support the view that an individual human life begins at conception, and both special and general revelation declare it is wrong to murder an innocent human life. Furthermore, the same arguments used to justify abortion apply also to infanticide and euthanasia; these reasons all violate the sanctity of human life.

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APPENDIX TWO

DOES HUMAN LIFE BEGIN AT IMPLANTATION?

In his important, thought-provoking *When Did I Begin*?[1] Norman M. Ford argues that while *genetic* human life begins at conception, nonetheless, *individual* human life does not begin until some two weeks after conception. His thesis deserves careful attention, since many significant scientific, ethical, and theological issues are at stake: Pre-embryonic experimentation, embryonic freezing, genetic engineering, and abortifacients[2] all bear on this two-week preconception period. Theologically, if true, this view would also support the creationist view (as opposed to the traducian view) of the origin of the human soul, demonstrating that the soul is created by God at the point of implantation.[3]

EXPOSITION OF FORD'S VIEW

According to Professor Ford, "It is necessary to distinguish between the concept of genetic and ontological individuality or identity" (*WDIB*, 117). Genetic identity is established at fertilization; however, Ford does not believe this is to speak "philosophically about the concept of a continuing ontological individual" (ibid.).

> [The] establishment of the new genetic programme at the completion of fertilization is a necessary,

> but not a sufficient, condition, for the actualization or coming into being of the new human individual at the embryonic stage of existence, (ibid., 118)

At the pre-embryonic stage,[4] "we could legitimately ask whether the zygote itself would be one or two human individuals" (ibid., 120). Why? Ford offers several reasons.

For one thing, as we have seen, twinning can occur up to the embryo stage (fourteen days after conception). Consequently, to Ford it seems implausible to speak of an individual human being where there is still the possibility of two. In such a case we would have to assume, for example, that the original individual (zygote) dies when it becomes twins:

> [The hypothetical] Susan, as in the case of the zygote, would cease to exist in giving origin to her identical twin offspring, [the hypothetical] Margaret and Sally. In this case these would be the grandchildren of their unsuspecting mother and father, (ibid., 136)

Ford adds, "There is no evidence to suggest an individual person ever ceases to exist when twinning occurs" (ibid.).

Furthermore, Ford maintains that experiments on sheep and mice (which, like humans, have intrauterine pregnancies) show there isn't one individual being before the completion of implantation into the uterus (fourteen days after human conception): "The early blastomeres of sheep and mouse embryos could easily be disaggregated and be variously combined by techniques of micromanipulation" (ibid., 139). That is to say, by taking cells from one embryo and combining them with those from another, scientists have been able to produce wholly new individual beings. For example, by this method "chimeric" animals have been produced that are part sheep and part goat. If different embryos can be "taken apart" and "reassembled" during the pre-implantation period, obviously there is not *necessarily* one continuing individual human being from the point of conception.

Ford concludes:

> Though these experimental manipulations have not been performed on human embryos, they do shed light on the character of the developmental and regulatory potential of the human embryo as well. This is because of the acknowledged similarity existing in the early stages of embryonic development of all eutherian mammals. [For example,] the mouse and sheep embryo in particular very closely resemble, but are not identical to, the human embryos … both before and after the implantation stage, (ibid., 144)

Ford, in view of this evidence, believes,

> It is very difficult to sustain that the human embryo could be a human individual prior to the blastocyst stage when it differentiates into that which will develop into the embryo, fetus and adult human.…[This] collection of cells, though loosely strung together, is hardly yet one thing, nor is it several. It is not yet determined to be either one or several.… [Only] from the fourteenth or fifteenth day onwards, there is no doubt that it is Tom or Dick or Harry that is developing, or all three of them, but as three individuals, (ibid., 156, 178)

What, then, is the conceptus before the end of the second week if not an individual human being? According to Ford, it is a "potential" human person (ibid., 122–23). It is genetically human but not actually and individually human; that is, it has all the human characteristics necessary for individual life, but it is not yet an individual human person.

Borrowing from Aristotle and Aquinas, who distinguished between form and matter and claimed that the soul is the form of the body, Ford believes that an individual human soul could inhabit a body that is not yet formed. Since the individual body does not appear until the "primitive streak" stage (about two weeks after conception), it is at this point that Ford contends the zygote becomes an actual, individual human person. Quoting Anne McLaren[5] with approval, Ford says:

> If we are talking not about the origin of life … but about the origin of an individual life, one can trace back directly from the newborn baby to the foetus, and back further to the origin of the individual embryo at the primitive streak stage in the embryonic plate at sixteen or seventeen days [after conception]. If one tries to trace back further than that there is no longer a coherent entity. Instead there is a larger collection of cells, some of which are going to take part in the subsequent development of the embryo and some of which are not. (ibid., 174–75)

So, according to Ford, it is at this "primitive streak" stage when an individual, indivisible[6] human life begins. It is here that he likewise places the origin of the human soul, which serves as the form of that body until death separates the two. Here the *ontological* individual begins, as opposed to the *genetic* individual (ibid., 179). After this point, no twinning is possible—there is one individual who is in continuity as an embryo, fetus, child, and adult.

CRITIQUE OF FORD'S VIEW

While Norman M. Ford is Catholic, claims to be pro-life, and even confesses that he cannot be dogmatic about his position, there are serious problems with his conclusions. Notwithstanding the many positive features, there are several

serious shortcomings that are worthy of note.

First, at best, Ford's conclusions show only that *individual* human life begins two weeks after conception, not that *actual* human life begins there. Indeed, he admits that there is a living human nature from the very moment of conception (ibid., 115). This being the case, the next point follows.

Second, if human life begins from conception, it is moot to debate when a continuous individual (person) begins. Human life has sanctity whether or not it is yet individuated.[7] Therefore, even if Ford were correct about when a *continuous* individual life begins, nonetheless, *protectable* human life admittedly begins at conception.

Third, Ford acknowledges that his argument is ultimately philosophical, not purely factual. This is precarious when dealing with life-and-death matters, for decisions to terminate or sustain life cannot be left to philosophers. Some philosophers (and/or theologians) argue that life begins at conception, some at or after implantation, some at animation, some at birth, and some later at self-consciousness. In short, unless a scientific (factual) basis is used to determine when human life begins,[8] there is no practical way to reach an agreement on which to formulate laws that protect human life.

Fourth, as Ford accepts, his opinion on this matter is not the only possible one:

> Though I believe my arguments show that the human individual begins with the appearance of the primitive streak, and not before, it would be presumptuous to declare that my claim was definitely right and opposing opinions were definitely wrong. (ibid., 182)

Indeed, in spite of Ford's arguments, it is possible, for instance, that individual human life begins at conception. Several points are relevant here.[9]

(1) The later splitting into twins could be a nonsexual type of "parenting" that is similar to cloning. (Ford acknowledges the possibility of this.)

(2) Every zygote before twinning is still a genetically unique individual distinct from the parent. That is to say, when identical twins result from a zygote split, it does not logically follow that a zygote prior to twinning is not fully human. To draw this conclusion is to beg the question. In other words, twinning seems to be neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition to reject the full humanness of the zygote.

Professor Robert Wennberg provides a parable that is helpful on this point:

> Imagine that we lived in a world in which a certain small percentage of

teenagers replicated themselves by some mysterious natural means, splitting in two upon reaching their sixteenth birthday. We would not in the least be inclined to conclude that no human being could therefore be considered a person prior to becoming sixteen years of age; nor would we conclude that life could be taken with greater impunity prior to replication than afterward.…

However, in all of this we still would not judge the individual's claim to life to be undermined in any way. We might puzzle over questions of personal identity … but we would not allow these strange replications and fusions to influence our thinking about an individual's right to life. Nor therefore does it seem that such considerations are relevant in determining the point at which an individual might assume a right to life in utero.[10]

(1) Ford's argument is based on the unproven assumption that human generation is the same as that of mice and sheep. He admits there is no experimental proof for this assumption.

(2) Ford's theory assumes the aristotelian premise that humans can generate a genetically distinct but nonhuman offspring that only later becomes human.

(3) Ford overlooks the fact that a new, unique, genetically individual human being is produced at the moment of conception (fertilization). This is not a potential human individual but an actual one. Ford even calls it an individual (*WDIB*, 102) and admits that it is alive and possesses all its genetic characteristics for life at fertilization: "At fertilization there begins a new, genetically unique, living *individual*, when the sperm and the ovum lose their separate individualities to form a single living cell, a zygote" (ibid., emphasis added).

(4) In this regard, Ford falls into the same trap as many pro-abortionists who argue that the zygote (or, for many, even the later embryo) is like an acorn, only a potential life (ibid., 124). This is incorrect. An acorn, similar to a human zygote, is a tiny, living oak tree in a dormant state. Planting the acorn does not begin the *life* of an oak tree; planting begins its *growth*. Likewise, a living human zygote being implanted in its mother's womb does not begin its unique, individual life but simply facilitates its further growth.

(5) As Ford seems to imply, if human life is protected not from conception but only from implantation, then a number of grave moral and legal implications follow. Noncontraceptive birth control (e.g., IUDs, RU-486)

and even experimentation on human zygotes are not absolutely ruled out. In brief, the after-implantation position results in the "unalienable" right to life being thereby alienated from an admittedly individual human person for the first two weeks of his or her life.

CONCLUSION

Philosophers and theologians will continue to discuss the precise point at which the human soul joins with the human body. Meanwhile, both biblical and scientific evidence points to unique human nature beginning at the point of fertilization (conception). As Professor Jerome LeJeune states, "A human nature … is entirely constant from fecundation [fertilization] to normal death" (as quoted by Ford, *WDIB*, 127). Ford's citation of a report by the New Zealand Royal Commission of Inquiry Into Contraception, Sterilization, and Abortion (1977) says it well:

> From a biological point of view there is no argument as to when life begins. Evidence was given to us by eminent scientists from all over the world. None of them suggested that human life begins at any time other than at conception. (ibid., 115)

From a theological perspective, there is no scientific evidence that contradicts the traducian view, which holds that the human soul is generated by a God-ordained process through the parents.[11] Indeed, the fact that animal cloning is possible would support traducianism. Human cloning also would seem to confirm the traducian position, since it would be entirely ad hoc and implausible to suppose that God would directly intervene and create a soul every time a clone is produced, particularly since the process itself carries heavily negative ethical implications.

APPENDIX THREE

DOUBLE-PREDESTINATION

A*ll* Calvinists must believe in *some* form of double-predestination—the logic of their position demands it. Augustine said of God, "As the Supreme Good, he made good use of evil deeds, for the damnation of those whom he had justly predestined to punishment and for the salvation of those whom he had mercifully predestined to grace."[1] R. C. Sproul confirms, "If there is such a thing as predestination at all, and if that predestination does not include all people, then we must not shrink from the necessary inference that there are two sides to predestination."[2]

This fact notwithstanding, there is an intramural debate among strong Calvinists as to whether God actively predestines both the elect and non-elect or whether the non-elect are predestined only passively. Moderate Calvinists call the *active* predestination of both the elect and the reprobate "double-predestination." Those who maintain it are called hyper-Calvinists.[3] Regarding the sense in which predestination is willed by God, hyper-Calvinism can be differentiated from other forms of Calvinism as follows:[4]

Hyper-Calvinists	Other Strong Calvinists
Elect and non-elect are actively predestined	Only elect are actively predestined
God is active in choosing both	God is passive in not choosing the non-elect

Unbelief given to the non-elect	Faith given to the elect
Symmetrical relation	Asymmetrical relation
Predestination is positive of both	Predestination is positive of the elect and negative of the non-elect
Equal ultimacy	Unequal ultimacy[5]

COMMON BELIEFS OF STRONG CALVINISTS

Both hyper-Calvinists[6] and other strong Calvinists hold to the doctrines presented by the acronym T-U-L-I-P.[7] They believe total depravity means that all people are so sinful they cannot volitionally take part in salvation. As to unconditional election, they maintain God chooses, on the basis of unconditional grace alone, that some will be saved and that some will not be saved. Likewise, they hold that the Atonement is limited (i.e., that Christ died only for the elect), and that God will work with irresistible grace so as to ensure that all the elect will believe. Finally, they believe that He will do so with efficacious grace to ensure that all the elect will persevere in their faith and enter heaven.

Hyper-Calvinists on Predestination

There is, however, a significant difference between the hyper-Calvinists and other Calvinists regarding election. It can be summarized as follows:

Hyper-Calvinists	Other Calvinists
God also elects unbelievers	God elects only believers
God also elects to hell	God elects only to heaven
God's election of unbelievers to hell is active	God's election of unbelievers to hell is passive

The Second Council of Orange (529)

The earliest council to speak against double-predestination was the anti-Pelagian Second Council of Orange:

> Not only do we not believe that some are predestined to evil by divine power, but if there are any

who wish to believe such an enormity, we with great abhorrence anathematise them.[8]

The Belgic Confession of Faith (1561)

> God then did manifest Himself such as He is: that is to say, *merciful* and just: merciful, since He delivers and preserves from this perdition all whom He in His eternal and unchangeable counsel of mere goodness has elected in Christ Jesus our Lord, without any respect to their works; *just*, in leaving others in the fall and perdition wherein they have involved themselves.

The Synod of Dort (1618–1619)

"Of Divine Predestination" Article VI states: "He [God] graciously softens the hearts of the elect, however obstinate, and inclines them to behave; while he *leaves* the non-elect in his just judgment to their own wickedness and obduracy."

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1648)

> As God has *appointed the elect to Glory*, so has He, by the eternal and most free purpose of His will, foreordained all the means thereto.… *The rest of mankind* God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of His own will, whereby He extends or withholds mercy, for the glory of His sovereign power over His creatures, *to pass by*; and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of His glorious justice. (III.6–7, emphasis added)

Hyper-Calvinists on God's Redemptive Love for Only Some

Hyper-Calvinists also deny that God has any redemptive love for the non-elect. Even strong Calvinist Charles Spurgeon opposed this, saying,

> Beloved, the benevolent love of Jesus is more extended than the lines of his electing love.… That [i.e., the love revealed in Matthew 23:37] is not the love which beams resplendently upon his chosen, but it is true love for all.

In addition, God has a special love for the elect that

> is not love for all men.… There is an electing love, discriminating, distinguishing love, which is settled upon a chosen people … and it is this love which is the true resting place for the saint.[9]

The hyper-Calvinist believes only in electing love, accepting no general redemptive love for the non-elect. Arminians (Wesleyans), on the other hand, believe in no special elective love but only in a general redemptive love for all sinners.

As we have seen, Spurgeon seemed to be aware of the inconsistency of his moderating view; in comments on 1 Timothy 2:3–4, he stated, "I would sooner a hundred times over appear to be inconsistent with myself than be inconsistent

with the word of God."[10] After all, this passage does say, "This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."

THE BIBLICAL ARGUMENT AGAINST HYPER-CALVINISM

All the arguments provided elsewhere against extreme Calvinism also apply to hyper-Calvinism.[11] In addition, a few can be added in particular.

First, hyper-Calvinism makes God the direct author of evil. Allegedly, God does not merely permit evil, He causes it. In response, God is absolutely good (Matt. 5:48), and He cannot perform, promote, or produce evil.[12]

Second, hyper-Calvinism explicitly teaches that God is not only *not* all-loving but that He also hates the non-elect. John Owen (1616–1683) bluntly confessed, "God, having 'made some for the day of evil' … 'hated them before they were born' … 'before [He] ordained them to condemnation.' "[13] Puritan theologian William Ames (1567–1624) affirmed, "There are two kinds of predestination: election and rejection or reprobation."[14] He added,

> God *hates* them (the non-elect; Rom. 9:13). This hatred is negative or privative, because it denies election. But *it has a positive content*, for God has willed that some should not have eternal life.[15]

May it never be! Perish the thought! God forbid!

A PASSIONATE PLEA

Charles Spurgeon, himself an ardent Calvinist, saw the dangers of the deadly doctrine of hyper-Calvinism. He said,

> I cannot image a more ready instrument in the hands of Satan for the ruin of souls than a minister who tells sinners it is not their duty to repent of their sins [and] who has the arrogance to call himself a gospel minister, while he teaches that God hates some men infinitely and unchangeably for no reason whatever but simply because he chooses to do so. O my brethren! may the Lord save you from the charmer, and keep you ever deaf to the voice of error.[16]

APPENDIX FOUR

WAS JESUS A PHYSICAL DESCENDANT OF ADAM?

Some theologians have argued that Jesus was not a genetic descendant of His mother, Mary, but that His human nature was directly created by God in Mary's womb. While this view has the decided advantage of explaining how Jesus avoided the inheritance of depravity, it has a serious, if not heretical, downside in that it appears to be a denial of His true humanity as part of Adam's race. If Jesus was created *ex nihilo* in Mary's womb, then He is *not* a physical descendant of Adam, which raises the question of whether He is qualified to be the redeemer of the human race.

In response to this issue, we will first examine the arguments for the creation view, then set forth the reasons for the traditional orthodox view.

ARGUMENTS FOR THE CREATION VIEW

Since Henry Morris (b. 1924) has written a widely circulated booklet on the matter, his perspective will be used as a contemporary representative for the view.[1] His position can be summarized as follows:

The virgin conception of Christ in the womb was not a supernatural fertilization of Mary's ovum; rather, it was a direct act of creation. The body of

Jesus was not genetically connected to Adam. In Morris's own words,

> The body growing in Mary's womb must have been specially created in full perfection, and placed there by the Holy Spirit, in order for it to be free of inherent sin damage.… He is truly "the seed of the woman" (Genesis 3:15), His body [was] formed neither of the seed of the man nor the egg of the woman, but grown from a unique Seed planted in the woman's body by God Himself. ("CVB" in *I*, 5)
>
> Thus, the body of Christ was prepared by the great Creator, with no dependence on prior materials, and was made in total perfection, ready to receive Him as the occupant.… That is, God directly formed a body for the second Adam, just as He had for the first Adam (Genesis 2:7). This was nothing less than a miracle of creation, capable of accomplishment only by the Creator Himself, (ibid., 9, 6)

In support of his view, Morris offers several arguments. *First*, this is said to be the only way to avoid inherited sin (ibid., 5). *Second*, the argument from analogy with the First Adam, who was directly created by God (ibid., 6). *Third*, the argument from analogy with our creation by God in the womb (Ps. 139); His preparation must have been even greater for His own Son (op. cit., 7–8). *Fourth*, Hebrews 10:5 speaks of God preparing (i.e., creating) a body of Christ in Mary's womb (ibid., 8). *Fifth*, the argument from analogy with the spiritual "body of Christ," the church, which is a supernatural creation of God (1 Cor. 12:13; John 1:13).

A RESPONSE TO MORRIS'S ARGUMENTS

Before defending the classical orthodox view, a point-by-point response will be offered to the reasoning of Morris.

First, direct creation is not the only way to avoid inherited sin—there are other possibilities. For instance, perhaps Jesus did not inherit sin because He had no human father, and both parents are necessary to inherit depravity. Further, the cause of His sinlessness does not have to be a direct creative act of His human nature in order for it to be supernatural. The birth of Isaac was supernatural, yet Isaac was genetically connected to his parents. And it is no more difficult for God to do the same with one parent than with two. Likewise, God could simply have intervened supernaturally to prevent Jesus from inheriting a sinful nature.

Second, the first argument from analogy fails. Arguments from analogy are often weak, especially since there are crucial differences. For example, Jesus was God, and Adam was not. Christ was not a *new* Adam (as Morris says) but the "*last* Adam" (as the Bible says—1 Cor. 15:45). Thus, He was in genetic continuity with Adam, not the discontinuity of a new creation.

Third, the second argument from analogy also fails; we were not directly

created by God in the womb. We inherit both our body and soul (and sin) through our parents;[2] otherwise, God would have to create a sinful soul each time a new baby is conceived. Since we were not thus created, it does not follow that Christ's human origin was by a direct act of creation.

Fourth, neither does the third argument from Hebrews 10 succeed; *preparation* does not mean *ex nihilo* creation. The Bible says Christ's body was "made of a woman" (Gal. 4:4 KJV); it was not directly made by God's creative act. "Made of" certainly implies that the physical and genetic makeup of Mary's child was rooted in her, however great a miracle it required to accomplish this without a human father.

Fifth, and finally, the last argument from analogy fails because, like other bad arguments from analogy, it overlooks crucial differences. God's Word never makes such a comparison. Christ's spiritual body (the church), which did not originate the way His physical body did, is composed of many individual human beings who already existed. They were not created *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) when placed in Christ's body by the Holy Spirit.

BIBLICAL REASONS FOR THE TRADITIONAL ORTHODOX VIEW

The traditional orthodox view—that Jesus is genetically connected to Adam through Mary—is demonstrated by several facts.

First, Jesus is said to be the "son of … Adam," who is the first name in the family tree of Jesus (Luke 3:23, 38). This indicates, as for everyone else on the list, that Jesus was a genetic descendant of Adam.

Second, again, Jesus was the "seed of the woman" (cf. Gal. 4:4), a phrase, biblically, that always implies genetic connection, from Genesis 3:15 onward. Indeed, when Eve had her first child (Seth) after Cain killed Abel, her response indicates that she expected her own physical child would be the redeemer: "Adam lay with his wife again, and she gave birth to a son and named him Seth, saying, 'God has granted me another child [seed] in place of Abel, since Cain killed him' " (Gen. 4:25).

Third, as we have seen, the human body of Jesus was "made of a woman" (Gal. 4:4 KJV), not directly created by God. The word *made* (Gk. *ginomai*) means "to generate" or "to cause to be." This strongly favors a physical connection with Mary, not a separate creation in her womb.

Fourth, Jesus came from the *loins* of David (1 Kings 8:19), a term whose meaning is clearly genetic. The Hebrew word *loins* (*chalats*) means "to pull off," "to strip," "to draw out," or "to deliver." All of these fit well with the classical idea that there is a physical (genetic) connection between the mother (Mary) and the child (Jesus).

Fifth, Jesus was the *last* Adam (not a *new* Adam), a term indicating continuity. The same is true of the close comparison between what Adam did and what Christ did for the whole race in Romans 5:12–21. As first and last, both Adam and Christ stand as the heads of the same human race, one for condemnation and the other for salvation. This too reveals a physical continuity between Christ and Adam that isn't possible if Jesus was a special creation in Mary's womb, genetically unrelated to her.

Sixth, Jesus was Jewish, and, as such, He had a distinctly genetic component, being the "seed" of Abraham (Rom. 4:13 KJV; Heb. 2:14–17). He apparently even looked Jewish, for the woman of Samaria immediately recognized him as such: "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (John 4:9).

Seventh, once more, Jesus could not be the mediator for Adam's race if He was not a genetic member of it. Yet the Bible declares that "there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5).

Eighth, Hebrews affirms that "since the children have *flesh and blood*, he too *shared in their humanity* so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil" (2:14). To put it in modern scientific terms, a blood sample from Jesus would have shown His connection with Mary. In short, He was her blood relative. Hebrews adds,

> For this reason *he had to be made like his brothers in every way*, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. (2:17).

Succinctly put, He could not save us unless he was really one of us.

Ninth, Jesus had human "flesh" (John 1:14), showing that He shared our nature apart from sin (Heb. 4:15). In His incarnation, He took on our human nature, becoming one of us (Phil. 2:7).

Tenth, Jesus is called *man* (1 Tim. 2:5), the race of which Adam was the "first" (1 Cor. 15:47). This implies His unity with Adam and, therefore, His ability to redeem any of Adam's race. This could not be the case unless he was truly a descendant of Adam (Rom. 1:3; Gen 3:15).

In conclusion, it is a serious doctrinal error to deny either the humanity (1 John 4:1ff.) or deity (Col. 2:8–9) of Christ. To deny His genetic connection with Adam is implicitly and logically to deny His humanity. Therefore, despite its appeal, the creation view is a grave mistake. The miraculous nature of the virgin conception of Jesus is not that it was a direct creation of a whole new human being *ex nihilo*. Rather, it is that God did something along the lines of supernaturally fertilizing an ovum in Mary's womb, bypassing the natural need for a male sperm. Any denial that Mary's genes were in Jesus is a denial of His true humanity and, consequently, our redeemability.

If, as the creation view posits, Mary gave birth to Jesus without His being her genetic descendant, it would no more show that He is truly human than a fertilized ovum from Caucasian parents transplanted in an African-American woman's womb, following birth, would prove that her baby is African. Mary was not simply a conduit for something that, genetically, was totally foreign to her. Mary's baby was "made" from her (Gal. 4:4), was "like" her (Heb. 2:17), and therefore shared her human nature, just as all physical descendants share the nature of their mothers.

APPENDIX FIVE

WESLEYAN PERFECTIONISM

John Wesley (1703–1791) explicitly addressed his doctrine of Christian perfectionism in *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*.[1] First we will expound Wesley's teaching, largely in his own words. Then we will offer the classic response to Wesleyan perfectionism from the Reformed tradition by B. B. Warfield (1851–1921). This will be followed by a brief critique of some of Warfield's teachings on sanctification and then concluding comments on Wesleyan perfectionism.

A DEFINITION OF PERFECTIONISM

According to Wesley,

> [Perfectionism] is that habitual disposition of the soul which, in the sacred writings, is termed holiness; and which directly implies being cleansed from sin, "from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit"; and, by consequence, being endued with those virtues which were in Christ Jesus; being so "renewed in the image of our mind," as to be "perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect" (*PACP*, 12).

Further,

> In this is perfection, and glory, and happiness: the royal law of heaven and earth is this, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength." The one perfect good shall be your one ultimate end. (ibid.)

Perfection is also said to be described in the words of Paul:

> "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." He is "holy as God who called" him "is holy," both in heart and "in all manner of conversation." He "loveth the Lord his God with all his heart," and serveth him "with all his strength" (ibid., 37).

Wesley stated perfectionism yet another way:

This it is to be a perfect man, to be "sanctified throughout"; even "to have a heart so all-flaming with the love of God" (to use Archbishop Ussher's words), "as continually to offer up every thought, word, and work, as a spiritual sacrifice, acceptable to God through Christ" (ibid.).

In short, perfection is "deliverance from inward as well as from outward sin" (ibid., 26).

Perfection Is a State of Sinlessness

> What is it to be sanctified? To be renewed in the image of God, "in righteousness and true holiness." What is implied in being a perfect Christian? The loving God with all our heart, and mind, and soul (Deut. 6:5). Does this imply that all inward sin is taken away? Undoubtedly; or how can we be said to be "saved from all our uncleanness"? [Ezek. 36:29] (ibid., 41).
>
> [Perfect people] are freed from self-will, as desiring nothing but the holy and perfect will of God … continually crying in their inmost soul, "Father, Thy will be done." They are freed from evil thoughts, so that they cannot enter into them, no, not for a moment. Aforetime, when an evil thought came in, they looked up, and it vanished away. But now it does not come in, there being no room for this, in a soul which is full of God. (ibid., 29)

Wesley continued,

> In times past, they had wandering thoughts darting in, which yet fled away like smoke; but now that smoke does not rise at all. They have no fear or doubt either as to their state in general, or as to any particular action.… They are in one sense freed from temptations; for though numberless temptations fly about them, yet they trouble them not. At all times their souls are even and calm, their hearts are steadfast and unmovable. (ibid., 30)

Furthermore,

> Now they see all the hidden abominations there, the depths of pride, self-will, and hell; yet having the witness in themselves… which continually heightens both the strong sense they then have of their inability to help themselves, and the inexpressible hunger they feel after a full renewal in His image, in "righteousness and true holiness." … Now, Saviour, now the power bestow, and let me cease from sin! (ibid., 32–33)

Wesley disallowed that perfectionism could be disproved by the fact that even great saints in the Old Testament sinned: "For what if the holiest of the ancient Jews did sometimes commit sin? We cannot infer from hence, that, 'all

Christians do and must commit sin as long as they live' " (ibid., 23).

Perfection Is Possible in This Life

> "True," say some, "but not till death, not in this world." Nay, St. John says, "Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because, as He is, so are we in this world." … [It is] not only at or after death, but "in this world," they are "as their Master" (ibid., 26–27).
>
> And it is equally evident, that if any sin remain, we are not cleansed from all sin. If any unrighteousness remain in the soul, it is not cleansed from all sin. If any unrighteousness remain in the soul, it is not cleansed from all unrighteousness. Neither let any say that this relates to justification only, or the cleansing us from the guilt of sin. (ibid., 27)

In short, "A Christian is so far perfect as not to commit sin" (ibid., 25).

Any Believer Can Attain Perfection

Though sanctification begins at justification, perfection is never made complete at that time; it always comes later. Wesley said,

> We do not know a single instance, in any place, of a person's receiving, in one and the same moment, remission of sins, the abiding witness of the Spirit, and a new, a clean heart.… [However,] St. John affirms [perfection] expressly; and it cannot be disproved by the examples of the Old Testament, (ibid., 31, 23)

Perfection, said Wesley, should be preached to those who are growing in godliness (ibid., 42).

How One Attains Perfection

Perfection is "spoken of as receivable by mere faith, and as hindered only by unbelief." Further, "this faith, and consequently the salvation which it brings, is spoken of as given in an instant.… It is supposed that instant may be now" (ibid., 34).

> Oh that I now, from sin released, Thy word might to the utmost prove, Enter into Thy promised rest; The Canaan of Thy perfect love! … To sin entirely dead. [For] He walks in glorious liberty, to sin entirely dead: the Truth, the Son hath made him free, and he is free indeed, (ibid., 39–40)

Wesley asked,

> When does inward sanctification begin? In the moment a man is justified. (Yet sin remains in him, yea, the seed of all sin, till he is sanctified throughout.) From that time a believer gradually dies to sin,

and grows in grace.

[But it can be sooner.] Why not? For, although we grant, (1) that the generality of believers, whom we have hitherto known, were not so sanctified till near death; (2) that few of those to whom St. Paul wrote his Epistles were so at that time; nor, (3) He himself at the time of writing his former Epistles; yet all this does not prove, that we may not be so today. (ibid., 42)

What Perfection Is Not

In what sense can Christians *not* be perfect?

They are not perfect in knowledge. They are not free from ignorance, no, nor from mistake. We are no more to expect any living man to be infallible, than to be omniscient. They are not free from infirmities, such as weakness or slowness of understanding, irregular quickness or heaviness of imagination.…

[Nor] such in another kind are impropriety of language, ungracefulness of pronunciation; to which one might add a thousand nameless defects, either in conversation or behavior. From such infirmities as these none are perfectly freed till their spirits return to God; neither can we expect till then to be wholly freed from temptation; for "the servant is not above his master." [But] neither in this sense is there any absolute perfection on earth. There is no perfection of degrees, none which does not admit of a continual increase, (ibid., 23)

Wesley clarified,

We willingly allow and continually declare, there is no such perfection in this life, as implies either a dispensation from doing good, and attending all ordinances of God, or a freedom from ignorance, mistake, temptation, and a thousand infirmities necessarily connected with flesh and blood. (ibid., 35)

We secondly believe that there is no such perfection in this life, as implies an entire deliverance, either from ignorance, or mistake, in things not essential to salvation, or from manifold temptations, or from numberless infirmities, wherewith the corruptible body more or less presses down the soul. (ibid., 36)

But whom, then, do you mean by "one that is perfect"? … The mind which was in Christ.… But neither in this sense is there any absolute perfection on earth. [Again,] there is no perfection of degrees, none which does not admit of a continual increase. (ibid., 36, 23)

Agreements and Differences With Non-Perfectionists

Wesley set forth some agreements and differences between perfectionists and non-perfectionists. He acknowledged that both agree:

(1) Everyone gets perfection at death.
(2) Until then we grow nearer to perfection.
(3) We should continually press on and exhort others to perfection.

Wesley also conceded certain things to the non-perfectionists, namely:

(1) Most believers never get it before death.
(2) The term *sanctified* is often used of justification.
(3) By *sanctified* Paul rarely, if ever, meant "saved from all sin."
(4) We should use *wholly* and *entirely* of sanctification when speaking of this state of perfection (ibid., 42–43).

However, Wesley insisted, over against the non-perfectionists, that we should expect to be saved from all sin before death and that there is a clear promise of this in Psalm 130:8: "He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities" (ibid., 43).

WESLEY'S SIGNIFICANT ADMISSIONS ABOUT PERFECTIONISM

Wesley made a number of fascinating concessions about perfectionism. Perhaps the most revealing is the first one.

Perfection Does Not Eliminate "a Thousand Nameless Defects"

As we earlier observed,[2] one of Wesley's most revealing acknowledgments is that supposedly one can be absolutely perfect and sinless and yet "not free from *infirmities*, such as *weakness* or slowness of understanding, irregular quickness or heaviness of imagination." Nor "impropriety of language, ungracefulness of pronunciation; to which one might add *a thousand nameless defects*, either in conversation or behavior (ibid., 23, emphasis added).

Even Chief Apostles Had Not Attained Perfection

Another noteworthy admission is that even the apostles Paul and Peter sinned and so were not wholly sanctified:

> The Apostles themselves committed sin; Peter by dissembling, Paul by his sharp contention with Barnabas. Suppose they did, will you argue this: "If two of the Apostles once committed sin, then all other Christians in all ages, do and must commit sin as long as they live?" Nay, God forbid we should thus speak. No necessity of sin was laid upon them; the grace of God was surely sufficient for them. And it is sufficient for us at this day. (ibid., 24)

Perfectionism Was Scarcely Preached to Those Not Pressing On

Wesley also professed that he scarcely urged perfection to those who were not rapidly growing: “In what manner should we preach sanctification? Scarce at all to those who are not pressed forward” (ibid., 42).

Inward Sanctification Begins at Justification—Death to Sin Is Gradual

Further, as we have seen, he also said that “inward sanctification” begins at justification:

> When does inward sanctification begin? In the moment a man is justified. (Yet sin remains in him, yea, the seed of all sin, till he is sanctified throughout.) From that time a believer gradually dies to sin, and grows in grace.… But may we expect it sooner? Why not? For, although we grant, (1) that the generality of believers, whom we have hitherto known, were not so sanctified till near death; (2) that few of those to whom St. Paul wrote his Epistles were so at that time; nor, (3) he himself at the time of writing his former Epistles; yet all this does not prove, that we may not be so today, (ibid., 42)

Wesleyan scholars have debated whether “entire sanctification,” or Christian perfection in this life, is a matter of eradication or of empowerment—that is, whether sin is *destroyed* or merely *suppressed*. Are passions such as anger and envy *removed* or merely *redirected*?[3] Texts can be cited on both sides. Wesley did believe, however, that all believers can reach a state of sinless perfection before death and that they should all seek to do so.

Blame for the eradication view is laid by some Wesleyan scholars at the door of more radical elements in the American Holiness movement. For instance, J. Kenneth Grider (b. 1921) points to J. A. Wood (*Perfect Love*, 1861), H. C. Morrison (*Baptism With the Holy Ghost*, 1890), and S. S. White (*Eradication*, 1954) as leaders.[4]

Wesleyan scholar Vic Reasoner argues that Wesley did not believe in eradication, citing his emphasis on the need for believers to continue the process of breaking sin’s power in their lives. He cites Wesleyan David Seamands[5] in claiming that sanctification is both the ultimate crisis and a never-ending process.

B. B. WARFIELD’S RESPONSE TO WESLEYAN PERFECTIONISM

The famous Princeton scholar B. B. Warfield (1851–1921) wrote the classic response to Wesleyanism,[6] though he did not directly address John Wesley so much as Wesley's disciples who were his contemporaries, such as Charles Trumbull (1872–1941), A. B. Simpson (1844–1919), Robert Pearsall Smith (1827–1898), and Hannah Whitall Smith (1832–1911). The following criticisms of Wesleyan perfectionism have been culled from War field's weighty tome.

Perfectionism Is a Quick-Fix Sanctification

Wesleyan perfectionism contends that perfect sanctification not only can be obtained in this life, but it can be received by an immediate act of God. Warfield chided this view for springing from spiritual restlessness, noting that "men grow weary of serving the Lord; they do not wish to fight to win the prize; they prefer to be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease" (*P*, 244–45). He called this "victory by freedom rather than victory by fight" (ibid., 380). Rather than fight against temptation, by this quick-fix sanctification they "simply let Christ dispose of it, while we stand by like onlookers" (ibid.). Further, "they were unwilling to await God's slow methods of developing this fuller salvation through the conflicts of life" (ibid., 264). Again, "Men are unable to understand why time should be consumed in divine works.… They demand immediate tangible results" (ibid., 349).

Perfectionism Separates Justification and Sanctification

Formally speaking, while justification (salvation from the penalty of sin) and sanctification (salvation from the power of sin) are different, nevertheless, Warfield maintained that there is no "sharp separation" between them (as perfectionists argue). According to perfectionists, justification and sanctification "are definitely separated as two distinct gifts of grace" (ibid., 356); "to wrest these two things apart and make [them] separable gifts of grace evinces a confusion in the conception of Christ's salvation which is nothing less than portentous" (ibid., 357). Indeed, "Mr. Trumbull is accustomed to begin the exposition of his teaching by actually [asserting] that justification and sanctification are two separate gifts of God, to be separately obtained, and by separate acts of faith" (ibid., 355). In short, "We are freed from the guilt of sin by one act of faith, and we are freed from the power of sin by another act of

faith" (ibid., 265).

Warfield cites A. A. Hodge (1823–1886) as saying,

> It is wholly a false view, never accepted by the Church, that the Christian undergoes two conversions—that the first accepts Christ for justification, and *afterwards*, by a separate act, accepts Him for sanctification.… No more, in any act of true faith, can forgiveness be separated from purification, (ibid., 358)

Perfectionism (by Its Own Admission) Is a New Doctrine

Piggybacking on Hodge's point, even perfectionists have admitted the lack of support for their doctrine in the teachings of the church fathers. John McClintock (1814–1870) said, "We are the only church in history, from the apostle's time until now, that has put forward as its very elemental thought … the holiness of the human soul, heart, mind and will" (ibid., 350). Warfield added, "Nothing less than a new epoch in the history of the Church has thus, in the view of Wesley's followers, been introduced" (ibid.). This alone, Warfield implies, should give cause for pause.

Perfectionism Is a Form of Spiritual Passivism

By insisting that one surrenders his will to God in an act of faith by which he obtains this supposed state of perfection, there comes "a cessation of moral effort on our part" (ibid., 397). Warfield insisted that the human will is active in the process of sanctification:

> Christ dwells within us not for the purpose of sinking our being into His being, nor of substituting Himself for us as the agent of our activities; *much less of seizing our wills and operating them for us in contradiction to our own immanent mind*; but to operate directly upon us, to make us good, that our works, *freely done by us*, may under His continual leading, be good also, (ibid., 390, emphasis added)

Perfectionism Is a Form of Quietism

Warfield also attacked the quietism that emerged from Wesleyanism in which "surrender is our part in the Victory" (ibid., 361). Warfield asserted that this is reducible to "a general attitude of renunciation, of apathetic inactivity, which has no specific reference to God and only supplies to Him an unresisting field in which He may freely work." This, he said, "is more mystical than Christian" (ibid.). He rejected the view that "the condition of the victorious life is that we must do nothing, absolutely nothing, except submit ourselves to Christ. Any

attempt to do anything further not only does not help on the work of our perfecting; it absolutely hinders it" (ibid., 377).

> Paul's view was different, for he continually exhorts us to efforts to realize our holiness, as for example in II Corinthians 8:1, where he urges us precisely to purify ourselves and thus bring our holiness to its completion. (ibid.)

Perfectionism Leads to Mysticism and Pantheism

Warfield also criticized a form of perfectionism, proposed by A. B. Simpson, that claims a mystical union with Christ, implying that "Christ thus does our very believing for us, and we live not by faith in Him, but by His faith in us" (ibid., 386–87). Warfield called this "unintelligible mysticism" (ibid., 384) and cited a passage from Wesley that if taken seriously is pantheistic:

> God seemed to speak to me so sweetly, saying, "Never mind, my child, you have nothing. But I am perfect Power, I am your life.… I am all within and all without, and all forever" (ibid., 386).

In brief, perfectionism "asserts that our individuality has been abolished and Christ has taken its place. We are told that He has 'constituted' Himself our very being.… Clearly 'we' no longer exist" (ibid., 383).

Perfectionism Opens the Door to Antinomianism

Further, Warfield believed that the state of moral passivism resulting from perfectionism may lead to lawlessness: In ceasing moral activity "that merely betrays the little regard we have for righteousness … it may even be but to open the door to antinomianism" (ibid., 397). Likewise,

> Quietism may easily run over into antinomianism. [For] all history teaches us how dreadfully easy it is to persuade ourselves that, if we have received as a sheer gift from Christ absolute freedom from sinning and need not concern ourselves further about it—then, of course, the things we do (whatever they are) cannot be sins, (ibid., 379)

Perfectionism Is a Form of Pelagianism

Warfield alleged that in Wesleyan perfectionism,

> Everywhere and always the initiative belongs to man; everywhere and always God's action is suspended upon man's will. We wish to make concealment of the distress with which this mode of representation afflicts us. (ibid., 398)

As Luther told Erasmus, Warfield believed that this is “outpelagianizing Pelagius” (ibid.).

Perfectionism Is a Form of Religious Magic

In an almost prophetic foresight into some of the more wild extremes that would be carried a century later into the contemporary Word of Faith Movement,[7] Warfield charged that perfectionism “is something far worse than Pelagianism, something the affinities of which are with magic rather than religion” (ibid., 397). The whole tendency is

> to place God at the disposal of man, and to encourage man to use Him in order to obtain results which he cannot attain for himself.… This is of course to stand things on their head, and in doing so to degrade God into merely the instrument which man employs to secure his objects. [In effect,] God stands always helplessly by until man calls Him into action by opening a channel into which His energies may flow, (ibid.)

Perfectionism Is Intrinsically Fallible

Further, Warfield contended that “perfectionism” is a classic misnomer, for it actually teaches “an intrinsically fallible perfection, a perfection out of which it is possible for us to fall—out of which, in point of fact, we may fall any minute—if we should not even say every minute” (ibid., 395). Warfield asked how we can trust God to keep us from falling again when, despite His promise (Jude 24), He did not do so on previous occasions (ibid.).

Perfectionism Is Self-Contradictory

Warfield pinpointed what he believed to be an inherent inconsistency in perfectionism:

> How can he who is free from even the desire of sin possibly resist Christ? Is not resisting Christ sin? And if resisting Christ is sin, how can he who may at any time resist Christ be said to be free from all necessity of fighting against sin? … Obviously, Mr. Trumbull cannot maintain both of these dogmas—the dogma of the substitution of Christ for us as the agent in all our activities, and the dogma of the possession by us of an ineradicable power to resist Christ, (ibid., 389)

Perfectionism Minimizes Sin

By claiming that sinless perfection is possible, Wesleyanism lowers the bar on evil and excuses many sins. One way this is done is by limiting the alleged state of perfection to only "known" sins (ibid., 392–93). Further, "All experience teaches us that it is terribly easy not to recognize sins when we see them; not to 'know' sins to which we are chance to be prone, to be sins" (ibid., 379). Indeed, it is one of "Satan's devices" to "get us to think that sin is not sin" (ibid.).

Perfection Is a Future Hope, Not a Present Reality

Warfield not only pointed to the gradual nature of biblical sanctification (see above) but to its future nature: "It is a thing not yet possessed but in petition" (ibid., 462). He noted,

> It is clear, therefore, that Paul, though promising this perfection as the certain heritage of every Christian man, presents it as a matter of hope, not yet seen; not as a matter of experience, already enjoyed.… [In this life] we are fighting the good fight; we are running the race. The prize is yonder, (ibid., 462–63)

Citing 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Warfield reminded his readers that complete sanctification is something we get "at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (ibid., 463). Indeed, he observed that perfect sanctification comes only when the soul, spirit, and body are sanctified:

> It is the perfecting of the whole man that [Paul] prays for, and this expressly includes the body as well as the resurrection, at the last day, which is the day of the second coming of Christ. Until then the body is mouldering in the grave. (ibid.)

Any sanctification before this point is gradual and incomplete. And it is a gross misnomer to call it *entire sanctification*, *complete sanctification*, or any such thing.

A BRIEF CRITIQUE OF SOME OF WARFIELD'S TEACHINGS ON SANCTIFICATION

Despite his many pointed criticisms of Wesleyan perfectionism as he understood it, there are some serious flaws in Warfield's own view. Briefly, several are worth noting.

Warfield Overstated the Danger of Antinomianism

It would seem that Warfield exaggerated the possible danger of Wesleyan antinomianism. Not only is there no firm logical connection between them, but there is little historical evidence that this has actually happened. To the degree that isolated examples may be available, one could argue that Warfield's strong Calvinism can and has led to antinomian extremes as well. Hence, his argument seems to be a self-canceling, double-edged sword. By the same logic, Warfield's predestinationism could be said to lead to fatalism.

Warfield Charge of Pelagianism Is Exaggerated

While some splinter group in Wesleyanism may be more Pelagian, the charge of Pelagianism is overstated as applied to Wesley or to many of his faithful followers. At the very worst, the Arminian view could be labeled semi-Pelagian, but no ecumenical council of the Christian church has ever condemned semi-Pelagianism as a heresy.[8] So it is simply an inaccurate exaggeration to claim that Wesleyanism, in general, is "outpelagianizing Pelagius" (*P*, 398). Only if one presupposes the strong Calvinist's view of monergism as the norm can one press the charge of Pelagianism against Wesleyans—and then it applies equally to plenty of non-Wesleyans and even moderate Calvinists. For all of them agree that God's grace works cooperatively, not just operatively, on the human will in salvation.[9]

Warfield Embraced a Form of Eradicationalism

Ironically, while Wesley is often accused of holding to an *immediate* form of eradicationalism, Warfield himself has a *process* form of the same teaching; he insisted that salvation involves a "deliverance from sin itself" (ibid., 367). This involves "our deliverance from the central thing—the corruption of man's heart" (ibid.). For "He [God] cures our sinning precisely by curing our sinful nature; He makes the tree good that the fruit may be good" (ibid., 368). Indeed, Warfield went so far as to say that in Romans 7 there is no "deadly warfare between the two natures." Rather, "*that chapter depicts for us the process of the eradication of the old nature*" (ibid., 371, emphasis added). He criticized Griffith Thomas (1861–1924) for teaching that our new nature merely "counteracts" the old nature now, awaiting its eradication in the "hereafter." By contrast, said

Warfield, "*It is progressively extirpating it now*, and that is the fundamental fact in supernatural sanctification" (ibid., 372, emphasis added). However, this is contrary not only to Paul's constant struggle with sin in his life but to the concept embraced by Warfield that our whole life is one of fighting the good fight of faith (ibid., 378).

Warfield Was Inconsistent on the Role of Free Will

Warfield fell prey to his own criticism of not allowing humankind to play an active role in salvation. Over and over, he criticized Wesleyan perfectionism for passivating the human will in sanctification (see above); he argued that there is a synergism between the human will and God's grace in the purification process. However, when it comes to the first step of salvation (justification), Warfield ceased quickly to be a synergist and became a monergist, suggesting that God alone acts apart from our free choice. He said boldly,

> *It is not true that "God forces the salvation of no man." It would be truer to say that no man is saved on whom God does not force salvation*—though the language would not be exact.… It is not true that the "eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord," which is the "free gift of God," is merely put at our option and "our wills are free" to accept or reject it. (ibid., 392, emphasis added)

He derided the view that "Christ's call to Lazarus must have been ineffective until dead Lazarus, by a voluntary and deliberate act of his will, decided to take what God offered him in that call" (ibid., 391). As was shown earlier, this is a misuse of the phrase "dead in sins,"[10] which means "without spiritual life" and "separated from God," and not "total inability to respond to God's grace and gift of salvation."

Warfield Accepted Lordship Salvation

While it is improper to separate the natural connection between justification and sanctification,[11] Warfield seems to have seen an almost automatic connection between them: "Justification and sanctification are indissolubly bound together" (ibid., 356). Indeed, he criticized the view that separates accepting Christ as Savior from accepting Christ as Lord (ibid., 375). But nowhere does the New Testament demand that making Christ the Lord (Master) of one's life is a condition for receiving the free gift of salvation. This is tantamount to demanding that a person promise to work for Christ as a ground

for being saved (justified), which, as shown earlier,[12] is an unbiblical denial of justification by faith alone. It is to front-load justification with sanctification and to deny in effect the classic Reformation principle of *sola fidei*.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Notwithstanding Warfield's overstatements, unbiblical premises, and the misdirection of some criticisms, most of his points are penetrating and well taken, particularly when addressing the Wesleyanism of his day, if not always John Wesley himself.

What is more, Wesley's own admissions about "entire sanctification" or perfectionism are telling. Consider again the following admissions from Wesley: "Entire sanctification" does *not* mean

(1) that we will never sin again;
(2) mat we cannot lose our salvation;
(3) that we cannot have/make "a thousand" different "weaknesses," "defeats," "mistakes," and "infirmities" (which cover a multitude of sins);
(4) that the great apostles Paul and Peter had it;
(5) that any more than a few believers of all time have ever attained it;
(6) that most who get it do so not much before death; and
(7) that Paul rarely, if ever, uses the term *sanctified* in this sense.

In short, the Wesleyan belief that we can reach a point of sinless perfection (whether by eradication or not) in this life is unbiblical, unrealistic, contrary to experience—and it minimizes sin. Perfectionism is a quick-fix scheme, can lull a person into a false sense of spiritual attainment, and undermines the God-ordained gradual process of sanctification. Nonetheless, the spirit of Wesleyanism's quest for true holiness is biblical, commendable, and has been very fruitful in both spiritual formation and social action through the last three centuries.

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[1] See Volume 2, chapter 14.

[2] Cf. James 1:17; see also Volume 2, chapter 19, under “The Nature of Humankind.”

[3] Again, the word *anthropology*, meaning “the study of human beings,” comes in part from the Greek word *anthropos*, which frequently occurs (biblically) in either original or derivative form. While some translations unilaterally render variations of *anthropos* as “man” or “men” (e.g., Rom. 5:18, above), there are scriptural instances where *anthropos* refers to “a human person” (of either gender) or “people” (of both genders). Lexigraphically, this is widely confirmed; for instance, Harold K. Moulton defines *anthropos* as “a human being,” “an individual” [metaphorically], “the inner man” (*Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978], 30). When plural, then, the derivatives of *anthropos* can also mean “human beings” or “individuals.” Cf. William D. Mounce, *The Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 77–78. In regard to the soteriological (salvific) usages of *anthropos*, those who argue that this word, in all its forms, *only* and *always* refers to “men” are thus compelled to maintain that God desires to save only males.

[4] All scriptural emphasis added.

[5] It is contradictory to propose that God gave Adam supernatural righteousness at Creation while also suggesting that there was a “disease or languor of human nature.”

[6] However, Adam’s righteousness was *original*; Job, though upright and pure, lived *after* the Fall. The fact that Job “shunned evil” demonstrates his awareness of evil, which Adam, according to Genesis, did not initially have.

[7] See chapter 3, below.

[8] ibid.

[9] See Volume 2, chapter 14.

[10] See Volume 2, chapters 3–5.

[11] See Volume 1, chapters 7–9 for more detail.

[12] See Volume 2, chapter 2.

[13] A being *becoming* something other than what it *is* is an example of substantial change; a being *obtaining* something other than what it *has* is an example of accidental change. See also Volume 2, chapter 4, under the arguments of Thomas Aquinas for God’s immutability.

14 See Volume 2, chapter 2.

15 The others are the *creation* view and the *traducian* view, explained below.

16 See Volume 2, chapters 18–19.

17 See appendix 1.

18 ibid.

19 Again, fourteen days after conception in humans.

20 See appendix 2 for further explanation.

21 A product of conception, at any point between fertilization and birth.

22 That is, where a new individual life begins without any sexual act by parents.

23 We reject this differentiation.

24 For more on the inheritance of original sin, see chapters 3 and 5.

25 Gnosticism held the erroneous belief that all matter is inherently evil.

26 Some of Augustine's later views contradicted his earlier ones. This is further explained in subsequent chapters.

27 When the rational soul is created.

28 See Volume 1, chapters 6 and 10 for a treatment of causes.

29 Some traducianists are inconsistent and do not see these as logical entailments of their view.

30 ibid.

31 ibid.

32 Most of these arguments are also found in William G. T. Shedd's *Dogmatic Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1894), 2.19ff.

33 Abraham was Levi's ancestor.

34 See chapter 2.

35 See appendix 4.

36 See chapters 3 and 5.

[37] See chapter 3 for detailed definition, explanation, and analysis.

[38] See appendix 1.

[39] See chapter 2, under “The Analogy With Animals.” Recall that (above) we denied the alleged difference between “animal soul” and “rational soul.”

[40] See chapter 3.

[41] See chapter 2 for a broader treatment of *soul* and *spirit*.

[42] Again, see Volume 1, chapters 6 and 10 for definition and explanation of causes.

[43] Op. cit.

[44] As opposed to certain creative acts being indirect and intermediate.

[45] See Volume 2, chapter 3.

[46] Soul and body in opposition.

[47] Soul and body in unity. See chapter 2.

[48] “Previous agreement” referring to the dialogue’s prior conclusion, immediately above.

[49] Knowledge previous to birth.

[1] See Volume 2.

[2] The terms *soul* and *spirit* are compared and contrasted below.

[3] See chapter 16.

[4] The Old Testament writers used the same word for *body* and *flesh* (Heb: *basar*), while the New Testament writers used both *soma* (*body*) and *sarx* (*flesh*). The authors of the Greek texts used two words because they were lingually available and provided additional clarification.

[5] The term *flesh and blood* is used as an idiom for mortal human beings (cf. Matt. 16:17; 1 Cor. 15:50).

6 Recall that *anthropology* is “the study of human beings.”

[7] Or “metaphysical monist”—see Volume 1, chapter 2.

8 This view is also known as “anthropological parallelism.”

9 See below; also called *recollectionism*.

10 The following three views—interactionism, occasionalism, and pre-established harmony—are varying forms of dualism.

11 A monad is a singular metaphysical entity perceived to be the basic, primary element of reality. On monism, see Volume 1, chapter 2.

12 *Hulo* (or *hulas*)—*matter*, and *morphos*—*form*.

13 Trichotomy, not addressed above (defined and explained below), accepts a dualism between soul and body, even though it also sees a dualism within the soul.

14 Anthropological epiphenomenalism is here treated as a modified form of materialism.

15 Rev. 6:9; James 2:26; Phil. 1:23; 2 Cor. 5:8; Heb. 12:23. See also vol. 4, chap. 8.

16 See *Miracles* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), chapter 3.

17 Or, "operating *above* material existence."

18 Or, "operating *within* material existence."

19 Idealists attempt the opposite—see below.

20 In Volume 1, chapter 2.

21 See Volume 1, chapter 2; and Volume 2, chapters 18–19, 21, appendices 3, 6.

22 Op. cit.

23 ibid.

24 See C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1953), 17–19.

25 Including extra-mental beings.

26 *Begging the question* (Lat: *petito principii*) is the logical fallacy committed when one assumes, as a premise, the same conclusion that the argument is intended to demonstrate.

27 See Volume 1, chapter 10.

28 See Volume 2, chapters 7 and 14.

29 Note that the "mon" in *monism* signifies the belief that the human being has one

part. The “di” in *dichotomy* (or “dual” in *dualism*) postulates two parts, while “tri” in *trichotomy* indicates three.

30 Again, even though idealism (see above) was promulgated by a Christian theist (George Berkeley), it does not fit into the Christian theistic framework.

31 In contrast to a deceased person passing into the next world as only a soul.

32 See below, under “An Examination of Anthropological Hylomorphism.”

33 “So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.”

34 This response is covered more fully in Volume 4, chapter 8.

35 “I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory.’ ”

36 *Above* or *beyond* the physical.

37 Volume 1, chapter 2.

38 This, however, has already been disproved (see Volume 1, chapter 9).

39 This is a partial list, containing the major problems with anthropological monism.

40 See above, sections under “Various Biblical Terms Used to Describe Human Beings.”

41 Referring to both Jesus and believers—e.g., Eccl. 12:6–7; Luke 23:43; Phil. 1:23; 2 Cor. 5:8; Rev. 6:9.

42 The eventual elimination of being.

43 See Volume 4.

44 See above, under “Response to the Biblical Arguments Given for Anthropological Monism.”

45 Again, parallelism, pre-established harmony, interactionism, and occasionalism are included as forms of anthropological dualism (dichotomy).

46 Indeed, this is the inversion of the false-disjunction fallacy within monism, against dualism.

47 Anthropological trichotomy is addressed below.

48 Cf. 1 Corinthians 5:3; 6:20; 7:34; Matthew 10:28; Acts 2:31; 2 Peter 2:11.

49 Cf. Mark 8:12; John 11:33; 12:27; Matthew 26:38.

50 See below, under “An Examination of Anthropological Hylomorphism.”

51 These teachings are also set forth below, under “An Examination of Anthropological Hylomorphism.”

52 For a succinct comparison of the platonic and biblical views on soul/body, see chart below: “Two Contrasting Views of Human Nature.”

53 See above, under “Other Evidence Against Anthropological Dualism (Dichotomy),” 2nd and below, under “An Examination of Anthropological Hylomorphism.”

54 *Special pleading* is the logical fallacy in which someone (or a particular view) applies standards or principles to others (or a different view) while taking himself to be exempt from those same standards or principles (without adequately and acceptably explaining the exemption), creating a double standard.

55 The fact that *soul* is not used in a similar context does not mean it couldn’t be; it simply means that it isn’t.

56 See above, under “Terms Used of the Immaterial Dimension of Human Beings.”

57 Again, from the Greek *hulo* (or *hulas*), which means “matter,” and *morphos*, which means “form.”

58 Remember that Augustine’s occasionalism (recollectionism or illuminationism) implies that the connection between matter and form is one-way; the lower (body) cannot directly impact the higher (soul). God allegedly illumines the mind (or soul) as to the body’s experience.

59 See Volume 1, chapter 9.

60 See Volume 2, chapter 20.

61 George Eldon Ladd, “The Greek Versus the Hebrew View of Man” in *The Pattern of New Testament Truth*.

62 By *Christian* is meant a unity view as expressed in the Bible, especially the Hebrew Old Testament.

63 Plato, *Republic*, Book I.

64 Above, we noted that dualism differentiates between soul and body, while trichotomy also posits a dualism within the soul itself.

65 1 Thess. 5:23.

66 Psalm 104:26.

67 Peter Lombard (1100–1160) and the schoolmen.

68 In referring to God's "created nature," Melanchthon is simply communicating that the stoics believed Him to have one.

69 See Volume 1, chapter 5 on logical thinking.

70 See chapter 1.

71 See chapter 5.

72 See Volume 1, chapter 2.

73 See Volume 1, chapter 4 on general and special revelation.

74 See Volume 4.

1 For more information on the various worldviews, see Volume 1, chapter 2.

2 ibid., chapter 3.

3 See Volume 2, chapter 7.

4 ibid., chapter 14.

5 When Isaiah quoted God as saying, "I make peace, and create evil" (Isa. 45:7 KJV), he did not imply that God does anything that is *morally* evil. Rather, he is speaking about *physical* evil or calamity. The NIV more properly renders the verse, "I bring prosperity and create disaster." For an excellent definition and explanation, see the citation from Tertullian in chapter 4.

6 See Volume 2, chapter 13.

7 Likewise, when God permitted the lying spirits to go to deceive King Ahab (in 1 Kings 22), He was neither sinning nor encouraging sin. He simply allowed the evil spirits to do what He knew they, as followers of the father of lies, would do when given the freedom to carry it out. God accomplished His sovereign purposes through these lies, as He also did through the sin of Joseph's brothers (see Gen. 50:20).

8 Below, and in chapter 5, we discuss how God's allowance for sin *not only* accomplishes His greater good *but also* preserves the love demonstrated by the

giving of freedom to His creatures.

9 “Free will” and “free choice” are here used synonymously.

10 See also Volume 1, chapter 10, for detailed treatment.

11 The scholastics were medieval scholars who taught in the schools, and hence were called schoolmen.

12 See also chapter 5.

13 This inquiry, as well as others, will be addressed in chapter 5.

14 See chapter 1, under “The Biblical Basis for the Original State of Innocence and Perfection,” especially “A State of Moral Responsibility” and “The Presence of the Tempter.”

15 Again, an efficient cause is the cause *by which* something (in this case, sin) comes to be. See Volume 1, chapters 6 and 10, for further illustration of the principle of causality.

16 Meaning, God is the efficient cause of His own choices.

17 That is, according to the self-determinism view, God is different from humans in the category of “contrary act” (see “Human Free Will: Three Views” table above).

18 For a detailed explanation of God’s all-goodness (omnibenevolence) and its implications, see Volume 2, chapter 15.

19 See Volume 4, chapter 9.

20 The ideas that either God or the devil is responsible for causing human sin are *determinist*.

21 It is noteworthy that John uses the word *prompted*, not *forced*, in regard to the decision of Judas. That Judas’s act was free and uncoerced is evident from the use of the word *betray* (Matt. 26:16, 21, 23), which signifies a deliberate act (cf. Luke 6:16). And, even though Satan had put the idea into the heart of Judas (John 13:2), Judas performed the act freely—he admitted later that he had “sinned” (Matt. 27:4). Jesus directed him, “What *you* are about to do, do quickly.” Mark even says that what Judas did, he did “conveniently” (Mark 14:10–11 KJV).

22 *Chosen by God*, 31.

23 The criminal’s completely evil (“totally depraved”) nature—*as* posited by extreme Calvinists—could not have caused his actions, for if it did, he would not have been free, in which case he should not be held responsible by God for his choices (which, of course, he is). The extreme Calvinist and moderate Calvinist understandings of total depravity are described in chapter 5.

24 The idea that a lack of wholeness or completeness in the original humans is responsible for causing human sin is *indeterminist*.

25 See chapter 2.

26 The concept of human sin resulting from human free will is *self-determinist*.

27 See Volume 2, chapter 9, under “Objections to God’s Wisdom.”

28 It should not be hard for even an atheist to believe that something can be uncaused, since many maintain that the universe is uncaused. If the universe can be uncaused because it was always there, as atheists allege, then so can God be without a cause because He was always there. Of course, the primary problem with this atheistic claim is that there is overwhelming evidence that the universe had a beginning, since it is running down and thus had an original cause. See Volume 2, chapter 18, and William Lane Craig, *The Kalam Cosmological Argument* (London: Macmillan, 1979).

29 Of course, there can be a cooperation of one’s will with someone else (e.g., God), by which the person is a free but cooperating cause. In this sense, God can be the primary cause and a creature the secondary cause. Nevertheless, this secondary cause (a free agent) is not a mere instrument through which the primary cause operates; rather, a secondary cause is an efficient cause whose causal powers were given by the primary Cause (God), and who freely exercises its power of choice.

30 The only significant deviation from this, up to the Reformation, came from the later Augustine (354–430), whose views on human choice (formulated in response to the donatist controversy) were contrary to the standard of church history, both before and after him, up to the time of Martin Luther (1483–1546). Luther’s systematic theologian, Philip Melanchthon (1497–1560), reversed his view, as have Lutherans since. This leaves the extreme Calvinist school, following Jonathan Edwards, isolated from mainstream orthodoxy on the nature of free will in fallen human beings (see chapter 5).

31

John Calvin (1509–1564) consciously pitted himself against Chrysostom and the rest of the Fathers in saying,

> “*We must, therefore, repudiate the oft-repeated sentiment of Chrysostom, ‘Whom he draws, he draws willingly’; insinuating that the Lord only stretches out his hand, and waits to see whether we will be pleased to take his aid*. We grant that, *as man was originally constituted, he could incline to either side*, but since he has taught us by his example how miserable a thing free will is if God works not in us to will and to do, of what use to us were grace imparted in such scanty measure?” (*ICR*, 1.2.3.10, 260–61, emphasis added).

32 These texts are taken from Augustine’s earlier writings, those that he penned before his position changed following the controversy with donatist schismatics; Augustine came to believe that they could be coerced into accepting the doctrine of the Catholic Church.

[33] Additional specific views of Luther, Calvin, and others will be examined in later chapters.

[1] See chapter 2.

[2] See chapter 3.

[3] From the time of the Fall until the law was received.

[4] Although David's sin pointedly affected many other people, besides himself, he recognized that transgression against God's law is sin against God Himself.

[5] That is to say, illicit bodily cravings ("lust of the flesh"), covetous desires ("lust of the eyes"), and boasting about what one has and does ("pride of life") are not of God.

[6] For definition, explanation, and analysis, see chapter 11, especially under "Matthew 12:31–32."

[7] See Volume 2, chapter 4.

[8] See Volume 2, chapters 18–21

[9] This was shown to be untenable in Volume 1, chapter 2, and Volume 2, chapter 18. See also Volume 2, chapter 9, under "Objections to God's Wisdom."

[10] See Augustine, *Two Souls, Against the Manichaeans*.

[11] See Volume 2, chapters 1–12 and chapters 13–17, respectively. See especially Volume 2, chapter 1 for a listing of God's attributes and characteristics.

[12] For example, Ps. 71:22; 78:41; Isa. 5:19; 29:23; 43:3; Jer. 51:5; Hos. 11:9, 12; 1:12; 3:3; Mark 1:24; Luke 1:35; 4:34; John 6:69

[13] Acts 2:33; 4:31; 5:32; 7:55; 10:38; 15:8; 20:28; Rom. 14:17; 15:13, 16; 1 Cor. 6:19; 12:3; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:30; 1 Thess. 4:8; Heb. 2:4; 2 Peter 1:21

[14] 1 Chron. 16:35; 2 Chron. 29:16; Ps. 106:47

[15] Deut. 32:2; Job 15:15; Acts 10:22

[16] 2 Chron. 30:27; Ps. 46:4; 68:5; Rev. 21:2, 10, 19

[17] See part 2, "Salvation."

[18] Even what God has entrusted to the care of someone else is ultimately still His.

[19] See Volume 1, chapter 7.

[20] The sin of untruth can be committed omissively as well as commissively.

[21] See chapter 3.

[22] See chapter 1, under “The Original Created Conditions.”

[23] See above, under “The Metaphysical Nature of Sin” as well as Volume 2, chapter 19.

[24] See part 2, on justification, sanctification, and glorification.

[25] For an explanation of why this freedom is superior, see chapter 3, under “The Nature of Human Freedom in Heaven” and “Freedom to Do Only Good Is Not the Loss of True Freedom.”

[26] See chapter 3.

[27] See chapters 5 and 16.

[1] Adam eventually died physically at the age of 930 (Gen. 5:5)

[2] It appears that they did accept it, since God covered them in the skins of animals (Gen. 3:21), which had undoubtedly been sacrificed for their sins. Further, in an act of faith, Adam called Eve “the mother of all the living” (Gen. 3:20). Finally, Eve expressed her faith in the messianic promise of the seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15) when she said at the birth of Seth that he was a “seed” from the Lord (Gen. 4:25 KJV).

[3] In Revelation 20:14, this is called “the second death.”

[4] Indeed, some have suggested that if a “day” is taken as a thousand years (see, for example, Ps. 90:4; 2 Peter 3:8), Adam literally died within that time frame (930 years).

[5] Christ’s physical death was not a result of being naturally born but as a result of His offering of Himself as our replacement.

[6] Called “the second death” because it is the second death involving a body.

[7] Because all humans are *already* spiritually dead when physically born, they only *actually* undergo physical and eternal death *in terms of experience* (implying, then, that the spiritual death of everyone occurred *in the sin of Adam*.

[8] That is, in seed form (cf. Hebrews 7:9–10).

[9] Or “federal head”; see chapter 9.

[10] To *impute* means to “attribute” or “give,” meaning that responsibility must be taken for what has been imputed.

11 See chapter 9 on the nature of salvation, and chapter 12 on the extent of salvation.

12 That *the many* (Gk: *hoi polloi*) means "all" in Romans 5:18–19 is clear from the facts that, first, *many* is used in contrast to the *one* (Gk: *enos*, from *heis*), rather than in contrast to the *few*, and that, second, *the many* and *all* are used interchangeably (see chapter 12 for an expanded discussion).

13 See part 2.

14 See chapter 1.

15 See chapter 3 for an examination of traducianism.

16 Also, spiritual *death* (here, as elsewhere; e.g., Rev. 20:14), does not mean "annihilation" (or "nonexistence"—see chapter 13 below) but rather "separation from God" and "lack of spiritual life."

17 Titus 2:14; Heb. 1:3; 9:14; 10:22.

18 Isa. 53:5; Mark 2:17; 1 Peter 2:24.

19 John 8:12; 12:36, 46; 2 Cor. 4:4–6

20 See chapter 16.

21 *Guilt* coming from the reality of his failure and *shame* coming from his recognition of the failure.

22 Again, spiritual *death* in the Bible does not mean "annihilation" but "separation": "Your iniquities have *separated* you from your God" (Isa. 59:2). Likewise, the "second death" (Rev. 20:14; cf. 19:20; 20:10) is not permanent non-existence but eternal conscious separation from God.

23 See chapter 4.

24 Note that Genesis 9 is *post*-Fall; see also James 3:9.

25 That is, they willfully "hold it down."

26 See Luther, *Bondage of the Will*, especially 75–76; 126–28; 198; 216; 316–18 and Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, especially 1.1.15; 1.1.18; 1.2.4.

27 See chapters 12 and 16.

28 As to how one can be saved.

29 See chapter 16

30 *Efficacious* means “producing (or capable or producing) the effect that is desired.”

31 As has been established, the ultimate standard of truth is God’s own nature, to which He is fully accountable, and, therefore, according to which He must act. See chapter 12 on voluntarism and essentialism.

32 Whether or not saving faith itself is a gift from God is an intramural debate among those opposed to extreme Calvinism. Certainly the Bible is lacking in clear verses demonstrating that it is (see chapter 16). Nevertheless, even if saving faith to believe *is* a gift, then it is one offered to *all* and can be freely accepted or rejected (see chapters 7 and 10). Jacob Arminius (1560–1609) also spoke of “the gift of faith,” but he added that it must be “received” by free will (*WJA*, 2.52.27). When Paul refers to “the gift of faith” (cf. 1 Cor. 12:9), he is not speaking of a gift to unbelievers enabling them to be saved (by exercising salvific faith), but rather a spiritual gift to some believers that empowers them to trust God for the common good of the body (cf. vv. 7, 12). With this the vast majority of Church Fathers have agreed.

33 From Isaiah 53:1

34 From Isaiah 6:10

35 Including the resurrection of Lazarus—see John 11

36 That is, have *saving* faith.

37 See Volume 2, chapter 22.

38 See also chapter 3.

39 See Volume 2, chapter 8.

40 In Volume 2, chapter 20.

41 There is, of course, the curious case of the “sons of God” (Heb: *nephilim*, in Gen. 6:1–4), whom many believe involved angels sinning with humans (cf. Job 1:6; Job 2:1; 38:7; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6). Even so, besides the fact that many other scholars believe that the “sons of God” were not angels, there is no clear biblical indication of any direct effect that humans had in luring them into sin.

42 Op. cit.

43 ibid.

44 See Volume 2, chapter 6.

45 Some have argued that angels can marry, based on Genesis 6:1–2, where the “sons of God” (angels in Job 1:6, 2:1, and 38:7) married the “daughters of men.” The Greek Old Testament (Septuagint) translates this (Gen. 6:2) as “angels,” and the New Testament seems also to refer to these beings as angels (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 1:6–7).

However, there are other possible interpretations of the Genesis 6 passages (such as "sons of God" being believers or great men on the earth). Further, even if this *is* a reference to angels, they may have been fallen angels who possessed human beings, who then intermarried. In any event, it seems best, in view of the unequivocal statements of Jesus that angels do not marry (Matt. 22:30; Luke 20:35–36), to reject the view that angels as such engaged in physical marriage with humans.

46 Characteristics that are not essential to them.

47 The "annihilation" of angels being posited *potentially*, not actually.

48 See Volume 2, chapter 20, under "Objections."

49 That is, these actions are avoidable.

50 For more information on both classical and Wesleyan Arminianism, see chapter 11 and appendix 5.

51 "Strong Calvinism," as a title, is used to acknowledge some distinction between extreme Calvinism (or "hyper-Calvinism"), those who believe in double predestination, and those who do not (see chapter 7)

52 For an explanation of how both moderate Calvinism and strong Calvinism use the term *total depravity* but intend different meanings, see below, under "The Image of God in Humans Is Effaced but Not Erased" and "Total Depravity Is Extensive, Not Intensive."

53 Some strong Calvinists speak of a "natural likeness" to God remaining in fallen humans, while the spiritual image is supposedly gone (erased), but no such division is made in Scripture. The one and only image of God clearly remains in fallen human beings (e.g., Gen. 9:6; James 3:9).

* Many strong Calvation deny this in principle, but in practice their view amounts to this, since they deny unsaved people have even the ability to understand and/or accepted the gosple.

54 See chapter 2

55 From the Greek *nous*, "mind."

56 Or, "to our credit."

1 This chapter deviates from the normal format (of this series) for treating the biblical, theological, and historical evidences separately, since it is a summary and expansion of the groundwork laid in other chapters. As such, then, the biblical and historical are woven together, while the historical can be found in the other areas (referenced below).

2 See Volume 2, chapters 19–20

[3] See Volume 2, chapter 4

[4] See Volume 2, chapter 8

[5] See Volume 2, chapter 15

[6] See Volume 2, chapter 7

[7] See chapter 3

[8] See Volume 2, chapter 9

[9] This problem is agitated for an evangelical, since the orthodox doctrine of eternal punishment (see Volume 4) posits that many people will never be saved but will suffer conscious, never-ending torment. (See Volume 4, chapter 10)

[10] Since God is all-knowing (see Volume 2, chapter 8), He knew what would happen if He created this world.

11 That is, has the *possibility* of sinning.

[12] That is, has the *inevitability* of sinning.

[13] If God *can* do less than His best, then the critic loses the basis for his objection that God should have done better. *Why* should He have "done better," if He does not have to do His best?

[14] A *category mistake* is a fallacy that takes place when a person ascribes to an object (or idea) characteristics or properties that it does not (or cannot) possess, such as asking how blue tastes.

[15] *Amoral* as neither moral nor immoral but rather nonmoral.

[16] It is also important to point out that conversely neither is *something* (i.e., *being*) better than *nothing* (i.e., *nonbeing). Nonbeing* does not exist, and hence there is no basis on which to compare it with *being*.

[17] See chapter 3.

[18] See Volume 2, chapter 7.

[19] This is the essence of morality; see chapter 2.

[20] See also chapter 13.

[21] Heaven; see Volume 4, part 2.

[22] Even if it were, it would not be a world where the greatest possible good is

achieved, which would seem to be incumbent upon the greatest possible Being to accomplish.

23 Or, again, if it has, then the opponent loses the basis for his argument that the best achievable world has not been realized.

24 See chapter 13.

25 Once more, if it is, then the objection (that there could have been a better world had God chosen differently) fails.

26 See Volume 4, part 2.

27 The ending of one period (dispensation) with God's judgment does not mean that the condition (standard) of that era has passed away, but rather simply that the special test God set up for them has been applied and that they failed. For example, humans are *still* on probation, even though that special period (of probation) ended. Also, we still have conscience after the age of conscience ends, just as human government after *that* period is superceded by the next, and so on. The special *time* of each period ends, but the *conditions* under which people are tested continue until the close of history.

28 See Volume 4, chapter 1.

29 Likewise, this promise given during the patriarchal administration continues on after the period is over (see Volume 4, chapter 15).

30 See Volume 4, chapter 17.

31 See Volume 4, chapter 13.

32 See Volume 2, chapter 8.

33 See Volume 4, chapters 9–10

34 See chapters 1–2.

35 For more detail on this Christ-centered approach to the Old Testament, see Norman L. Geisler, *To Understand the Bible, Look for Jesus* and *A Popular Survey of the Old Testament*.

36 See Volume 1, chapter 10.

37 See chapter 9.

38 Isa. 53:4–7; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18 See chapter 9.

39 Luke 9:51, in which Jesus is looking forward to Jerusalem, where He will be crucified, and to the final assumption into heaven after His resurrection.

40 Citing Psalm 68:18 in Ephesians.

41 As to the question of where Christ's physical body is at the present time, see Volume 2, appendix 1.

42 Or "Last Things"; see Volume 4.

43 See part 2, "Salvation," for further discussion.

44 See Volume 4, chapter 16

45 ibid., chapters 9 and 16.

46 ibid., chapter 11

47 See Volume 2, chapter 20.

1 See part 1.

2 *Decrees* meaning *eternal decisions*.

3 See chapter 3.

4 See below, under "The Nature of God's Freedom."

5 See part 1.

6 See also chapters 16–17

7 See chapter 16

8 The question as to whether *faith itself* is a gift of God is discussed elsewhere (see chapter 12). It is sufficient to note here that even if saving faith is a gift, then since it is a gift received by a free creature, it must be received freely.

9 *Amyraldianism* (or *Amyraldian Calvinism*) comes from the name of Moise Amyraut (1596–1664), a French theologian. Its most critical difference from extreme Calvinism relates to the Atonement; supralapsarianism necessitates limited atonement, while sublapsarianism maintains unlimited atonement (see chapter 12).

10 *Predestination* means that God has chosen some to be saved. *Double-predestination* means that God has both chosen some to be saved *and* some to be damned (see appendix 3).

11 See chapter 11.

12 See Volume 2, part 1.

13 See Volume 2, chapters 2 and 8.

14 See Volume 2, chapter 2.

15 See chapter 12.

16 ibid.

17 See chapter 13.

18 See Volume 2, chapter 13.

19 See Volume 2, chapter 7.

20 See chapters 3 and 5.

21 See chapter 2.

22 See chapter 5.

23 See chapter 3 for an explanation of determinism, indeterminism, and self-determinism, and Volume 2, chapter 3, for a distinction between *self-caused being* and *self-caused action*.

24 See Volume 1, chapters 2 and 10.

25 See Volume 1, chapter 5.

26 Likewise, of course, God cannot love evil (Hab. 1:13; James 1:13)—He loves sinners, but He hates sin. To love evil would be contrary to His nature as the absolute Good.

27 See Volume 2, chapter 15

28 ibid., chapter 5.

29 ibid., chapter 2.

30 ibid., chapter 3.

31 See chapter 5.

32 See also chapter 13, below.

33 See chapter 2.

34 1618–1619; see chapter 16.

35 The Canons of Dort, articles 11–12.

36 See chapter 6.

37 See chapter 16.

38 See chapter 12.

39 For other objections and responses, see Volume 2, chapter 15, as well as chapter 3, above.

40 See Volume 2, chapter 3.

41 John Calvin acknowledged this in *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.2.2.5.

42 For a more complete response to the doctrine of limited atonement, see chapter 12.

43 Cf. Rom. 5:6; 2 Cor. 5:14, 19; 1 Tim. 2:6; Heb. 2:9; 1 John 2:2.

44 Cf. Luke 14:26, where Jesus says, “If anyone comes to me and does not *hate* his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple.”

45 See Volume 2, chapter 23.

46 See note on *category mistake* in chapter 6.

47 See Volume 2, chapter 1, for definition and explanation of God’s moral and nonmoral attributes and characteristics.

48 Unlike *power* and love, *justice* and love are both moral attributes.

49 See Volume 2, chapter 3.

50 See chapter 3, under “The Nature of God’s Free Will,” for an explanation of libertarian vs. self-determining freedom.

51 See Volume 2, chapter 8

52 See Volume 2, chapter 4

1 *Recapitulation*, according to *Merriam-Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary*, is “the process by which according to Irenaeus the Logos [Jesus, the Word] passed through all phases of human experience thus reversing the evil caused by sin and winning complete salvation for man.”

2 See below, under “The Necessary-Satisfaction Theory of the Atonement.”

3 To *remit* is to “pardon,” “cancel,” or “lay aside.”

4 Bushnell, *The Vicarious Sacrifice, Grounded in Principles of Universal Obligation* (New York: Scribner, 1886) and Rashdall, *The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology* (London: Macmillan, 1920).

5 Hence, his response to the moral-example (Socinian) view.

6 Irenaeus.

7 Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine.

8 Pelagius, Socinius.

9 Anselm.

10 Abelard.

11 Calvin.

12 See chapter 12.

13 Aquinas.

14 Grotius.

15 Schleiermacher.

16 See also the necessary-satisfaction view.

17 See chapter 9, below, and “eschatology” in Volume 4.

1 See below, under “The Three Stages of Salvation.”

2 Matt. 22:14, 22, 24, 31; cf. Mark 13:20, 22, 27; 2 Tim. 2:10; Titus. 1:1; 1 Peter. 1:2; 2 Peter. 1:10

3 For example, Rom. 8:33; 11:5; Eph. 1:11; Col. 3:12; 1 Thess. 1:4; James. 2:5; 1 Peter 1:2; 2:9; 5:13; 2 John 1:1, 13; Rev. 17:14.

4 For instance, Matt. 22:14; Rom. 9:24; 1 Cor. 1:2, 9, 24, 26; Gal. 1:6; Eph. 1:18, etc.

5 Cf. Rom. 5:17, 21; 1 Cor. 15:10; 2 Cor. 9:14; 12:9; Eph. 1:5–6; 2:9–10; Phil. 1:6; 2:13; Titus 2:12; 1 Peter 5:10.

6 See chapter 9, under “The Three Stages of Salvation,” and chapter 17.

7 Luke 21:28—ultimate; Rom. 3:24; 8:23—bodily; 1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 1:7, 14; 4:30—

ultimate; Col. 1:14; Heb. 9:15—general.

8 See chapter 8.

9 See below, under “Sacrificial (Substitutionary) Atonement.”

10 Such as Ezek. 37:1–10; Matt. 17:11; John 1:13; 3:6–7; Acts 3:21; Rom. 8:21; 1 Cor. 15:27; 1 Peter 1:3, 23; 1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18; Rev. 21:1.

11 *Huiothesia*: Rom. 8:15, 23—of resurrection; 9:4—of Israel; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5.

12 Far from being a denigration of women, Galatians is a revolutionary declaration of their equality and freedom (cf. 3:26–29).

13 Rom. 5:10 [twice]; 1 Cor. 7:11—regarding marriage; 2 Cor. 5:18–20.

14 Rom. 5:11; 11:15—of Gentiles; 2 Cor. 5:18–19.

15 Matt. 3:15; 5:6, 10; 6:13–20; Phil. 1:11.

16 Rom. 1:17; 4:3–13, 22; 5:17; 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 2:21; 3:6, 21; 5:5; Phil. 3:9; Heb. 11:7; James 2:23.

17 Acts. 13:39; Rom. 2:13; 3:4, 20–30; 4:2–5; 5:1, 9; 8:30, 33; Gal. 2:16; 3:8, 11, 24; James 2:21–25.

18 See chapter 13.

19 ibid.

20 See also chapters 11 and 16.

21 See also *Regeneration*, above.

22 NKJV, hearkening back to the Old Testament image of God meeting the sinner at the mercy seat and blood atonement being made for his sins.

23 See Volume 2, chapter 4.

24 See chapter 5, above.

25 See Edwin Hatch and Henry A. Redpath, *A Concordance of the Septuagint*, 1.890–91.

26 For example, Rom. 5:8; Gal. 3:13; 1 Tim. 2:6; Titus 2:14; Heb. 2:9; 1 Peter 2:21; 3:18; 4:1.

27 The use of *anti* in the sense of substitution is also found in other passages—e.g.,

Rom. 12:17; Heb. 12:2; 1 Peter 3:9.

28 Cf. Rom. 1:18; 2:5, 8; 5:9; 9:22; 12:19; 13:4–5; Eph. 2:3; 5:6; Col. 3:6; 1 Thess. 1:10; 2:16; 5:9.

29 See chapter 5.

30 See chapters 10–11.

31 See appendix 5 for more detail.

32 In the Greek aorist tense.

33 Op. cit.

34 See appendix 5 for further discussion.

35 See chapter 3.

36 ibid., under “Freedom to Do Only Good Is Not the Loss of True Freedom.”

37 See Volume 4, chapter 3.

38 See chapter 6.

39 See Volume 2, chapters 13–15.

40 ibid., chapters 4–5.

41 See chapter 4.

42 See Volume 2, chapters 4 and 15.

43 See Volume 2, chapter 12, and Volume 1, chapters 16 and 26.

44 See chapter 13.

45 See chapter 12.

46 See chapter 16.

47 See chapter 13.

48 Op. cit.

49 That is, for it to be applied.

50 We all die—Romans 5:12.

51 See chapter 16.

52 By preferring hell, which is absolute separation from God.

53 See Volume 2, chapter 12, and Volume 1, chapters 16 and 26.

54 See above, under *Atonement*.

55 Recall also that it is incorrect to make *salvation* wholly synonymous with *justification*. Salvation also includes sanctification and glorification, and sanctification (purification) is indeed what "redirects human behavior" and "alters our propensity to sin."

56 To have nominal faith is to have faith in name only rather than true or actual faith.

57 See chapter 16.

58 See also citations from chapter 8 and from earlier in this chapter.

59 See chapter 8.

1 The first part of this chapter is based on the discussion in Norman L. Geisler and Ralph E. MacKenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Differences* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995).

2 See chapters 16–17 for an extensive examination of these and other beliefs about salvific conditions.

3 That is, while God does not save us *as a reward* for our works, He does save us for good works—see, for instance, Ephesians 2:10.

4 Named after the city in which it was held—Trento, about seventy miles northwest of Venice. Trent (1545–1563, in discontinuous sessions) confirmed and restandardized Catholic doctrines that its attendees felt were threatened and/or denied by the Protestant Reformation. Its established liturgy, to be exclusively used by the Church, was called the *Tridentine Mass*.

5 Luther was a devout Catholic monk whose original intention was to reform the Roman Catholic Church, not to start a new movement outside of it. The Church took that step itself by excommunicating him.

6 However, extrinsic justification was not totally absent, particularly in the writings of the early church fathers. Thomas Oden has unveiled patristic material that reveals Paul's teaching on "salvation by grace alone through faith alone" was by no means foreign or unfamiliar (see his *Justification Reader* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002]).

7 John Calvin was one of these "others."

[8] Meaning that justification is not immediately complete or final but is carried into the process of sanctification (purification).

[9] Meaning, then, that justification is not complete without sanctification.

[10] Adherents to the comprehensive doctrine of Thomas Aquinas.

[11] This is true, but it is necessary to further affirm that He does so without eliminating human freedom.

[12] Justification through God's work, and then justification through our own work, respectively.

[13] Or at least the "quality" of it—"the reward is in proportion."

[14] While Protestants sometimes refer to the "reward" of eternal life in the sense of it being a gift graciously given by God, they do not believe *salvation* is based on our works—eternal life is founded on God's grace, received through our faith.

[15] Catholics believe justification occurs at infant baptism. See Trent, "Decree on Justification," chapter 8.

[16] That progressive justification (i.e., sanctification) is obtained by good works.

[17] See chapter 16.

[18] Recall that the English word *salvation* refers to three stages: justification, sanctification, and glorification.

[19] The Second Council of Orange (A.D. 529) stated: "We also believe and profess for our salvation that in every good work it is not we who begin and afterwards are helped by God's mercy, but He Himself who, without any previous merits on our part, first instills in us faith in Him and love for Him so that… we may with His help accomplish what is pleasing to Him. Therefore we must clearly believe that the wonderful faith of the thief whom the Lord called to His home in paradise [Luke 23:43] … did not come from nature but was a gift from the bounty of divine grace." (See Neuner and Dupuis, eds. *The Christian Faith: Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*.

[20] A belief we do not share—see chapter 11.

[21] e.g., John Wesley, William Carey, George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, Hudson Taylor, William and Catherine Booth, Charles Finney, Billy Sunday, Dwight Moody, Billy Graham, Bill Bright, Luis Palau.

[22] See Volume 1, chapter 5, for a detailed explanation of the principles of rational thinking.

[23] Scripture also condemns homosexual activity among pagans who did not have the

law of Moses (cf. Lev. 18; 20). That moral law (e.g., natural law) exists outside the Mosaic Law demonstrates the Protestant point that "works" in Romans 3 is not limited to works of the Mosaic Law; the condemnations of sin are more broadly applicable than the immediate context in which they arose.

24 *Eisegesis* is the interpretation of a text using preconceived ideas—reading *into* a text rather than reading *out of* a text (which is *exegesis*). In this case, eisegesis is reading into the text a distinction that isn't there. (From the Greek *eis*, *into* or *in*, and *ek* *from* or *out from*.)

25 That is, declared forensically or legally righteous.

26 If we are wrong—that is, if Paul *did* mean the Galatians could lose their justification (as Arminians contend)—it would not help but would merely intensify the problem for the Catholic view. In such a case, for Christians, failure to do good works leads to the loss of both sanctification (progressive righteousness) *and* justification (initial righteousness), meaning that lack of good works is a forfeiture of eternal life.

27 In this case, not only reading into the text what isn't there but reading exactly the *opposite* of what's there.

28 The Catechism of the Catholic Church, in its teaching on sin (mortal and venial), says, "*Mortal sin* destroys charity in the heart of man by a grave violation of God's law; it turns man away from God, who is his ultimate end and his beatitude, by preferring an inferior good to him. *Venial sin* allows charity to subsist, even though it offends and wounds it."

29 For more on the role of repentance in justification, see chapters 16–17.

30 Again, some even admit to God's forensic declaration of the believer's righteousness.

31 "After All He's Done for Me," words and music by Betsy Daasvand and Wendell P. Loveless.

32 Vatican II was the most prominent Catholic council after Trent.

33 The seven sacraments administered by the Roman Catholic Church are *baptism, confirmation, communion (Eucharist), marriage (matrimony)*, the *priesthood (Holy Orders), penance (confession, reconciliation)* and *extreme unction*.

34 *Fiducial* faith is faith involving trust or confidence.

35 Yet not in the same way as through the Catholic Eucharist.

36 For an explanation of the various views on this sacrament, see Volume 4.

37 The need for priestly consecration of the elements.

[38] See Volume 1, chapters 6 and 10 on causes.

[39] Again, Protestantism contains intramural differences on this—subsequent works are variably believed to be *natural, automatic, inevitable*, or *necessary*. See under "True Believers Manifest Their Faith in Good Works," below.

[40] As stated earlier, according to Roman Catholics, works are normatively but not absolutely necessary, since a convert may die immediately after regeneration at baptism.

41 In this section, biblical, theological, and historical dimensions are examined together.

[42] Through the process, intramural debate among evangelicals will become apparent.

[43] Strong Calvinists insist they affirm that synergistic acts (by which we are sanctified) are *free* acts; in response, we note that strong Calvinism does not mean these acts are free in the sense that a person could have chosen otherwise (i.e., libertarian freedom); for strong Calvinism, such decisions flow from a God-given desire that cannot be resisted or rejected. Hence, it is meaningless for strong Calvinists to call these choices "free" while holding that they ultimately resulted out of "irresistible grace on the unwilling." See Norman L. Geisler, *Chosen But Free*, chapters 2, 6; appendices 1, 4–5, 9.

[44] New life can be stunted if it is not cultivated (cf. Heb. 5:12–6:1); thus, the Bible urges us to feed this natural desire for growth (1 Peter 2:2).

[45] Cf. Eph. 2:8–10; Phil. 2:12–13; Titus 2:11–13; 3:5–8; James 1:26–27; 2:12–13; 2 Peter 1:5–8; 1 John 3:16–18.

[46] See chapter 17.

[47] For instance, Zane Hodges writes: "The faith that receives so great a salvation has the utter directness of childlike *trust*" (*AF*, 60, emphasis added). Also, of Abraham's act of saving faith, "this act of *trust* was put down to his account as righteousness" (ibid., 32, emphasis added).

[48] Regarding faith and repentance, Ryrie makes a solid point in teaching that repentance without faith does not save, since *repentance*, on its own, simply means "to change one's mind" (about anything). Thus, "the only kind of repentance that saves is a change of mind about *Jesus Christ*" (*SGS*, 88, emphasis added).

[49] Hodges' attempt to make "repentance" refer only to the believer *after* conversion (*AF*, chapter 12) is without foundation. For specifics, see chapter 17, below. For a more balanced view, see Ryrie, *So Great Salvation*, 82–90.

[50] Acts 5:32; 2 Thess. 1:8; cf. Rom. 15:18; Heb. 5:9; 1 Peter 4:7.

51 A symbol for believers, as opposed to “tares,” which are unbelievers; cf. Matthew. 13:25 KJV.

52 Since there is no Greek indefinite article (*a* or *an*), the sentence might better be translated, “There is sin that leads to death.”

53 James addresses them as “brothers” (v. 19); the context is about believers who sin (v. 16) and “wander from the truth” (v. 19).

54 See chapter 11.

55 See his *Absolutely Free* 105–12.

56 Hodges’ view on James 2 (see his Epistle of James, 62–63) is that James is not referring to the nonsaving faith of an unbeliever but to sterile faith of an actual believer. While this is a textually possible interpretation, it is against the mainstream historical interpretation of James’ letter (see chapter 17, below). At any rate, this is not a critical link in the overall argument that works flow naturally from true faith.

57 Hodges takes this as a reference to the seed of a new life planted by God in believers that is incapable of sin. In other words, a believer controlled by the new nature cannot sin; if he continues in sin, it is evidence he is not controlled by his new nature. Since interpretation of this section of 1 John is difficult and hotly debated, one cannot be dogmatic about it.

58 See Volume 2, part 1.

59 See Volume 2, part 2.

60 See chapters 4–6.

61 See chapter 16.

62 Some Wesleyans sould balk at putting it this way, but they do admit that certain bad works can prompt the loss of salvation.

63 “Serious” means a deliberate sin but not apostasy.

64 *Classical* Arminians (the followers of Arminius) disagree.

1 The others are *T* for *total depravity*, *U* for *unconditional election*, *L* for *limited atonement*, and *I* for *irresistible grace*.

2 For a more elaborate discussion of the positions addressed here, see J. Matthew Pinson, ed. *Four Views on Eternal Security*.

3 Thomas Brooks offered these as signs of “well-grounded assurance”: (1) Be active in exercising grace; (2) Obtain assurance by obedience; (3) Follow diligently the

instructions of the Holy Spirit; (4) Be diligent in attendance upon [Christ's] ordinances; (5) Pay particular attention to the scope of God's promises of mercy; (6) Excel in those particular things that may clearly and fully distinguish you not only from the profane, but also from the highest and most glittering hypocrites in all the world; (7) Seek to grow and increase in grace more and more (*Heaven on Earth*, 150–71).

4 To be sure, many strong Calvinists speak about both the reality of present assurance and the evidences for it (e.g., see William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 172, and R. C. Sproul, *Chosen by God*, 167–68). However, they then proceed to remind themselves that such assurance could be false and that Christians must endure faithfully to the end in order to be sure.

5 Some take these verses as referring to confirmation of a believer's election *to outsiders* (e.g., see Hodges, *AF*, 174ff., 200). Be that as it may, this would only make the confirmation indirect (through outsiders). Further, given the many warnings about false believers (e.g., cf. Matt. 7:22), every confessing believer is well advised to know what genuine saving faith is and whether he has exercised it.

6 See Volume 1, chapter 5, on practical logic.

7 He is—see Volume 1, chapters 15–16, 26, and Volume 2, chapter 12, appendix 1.

8 See also Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:11, 22–24; 5:13–21; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9.

9 Contrary to the claims of strong Calvinism, Romans 8:29–30 does not prove that the Atonement is limited in its *extent*; what it demonstrates is that the Atonement is limited in its *application*. The "call" here refers to the *effectual* calling of the elect, not the *general* call, offer, or command for all to be saved (cf. Acts 17:30; 2 Peter 3:9; see also chapter 12).

10 God still loves even people who are in hell, but they are *separated* from His love, having refused it in favor of isolation. See, for example, C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*.

11 See chapter 16.

12 *Sanctified* (Gk: *egapemenois*) is in the perfect tense, which indicates here a past action with continuing results in the present.

13 Calvinists of various varieties interpret the "warning passages" differently. Some, following John Calvin, take them as hypothetical rather than actual (meaning that *falling* cannot truly happen, even though the concept is posed theoretically). Others, like this author, consider them to be actual (literally possible) but regarding the loss of our *rewards* (cf. 1 Cor. 3:15) not the forfeiture of our *salvation*. See Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant King*, for a treatment of "loss of rewards."

14 Remember too the distinction that has been made between *faith* and *faithfulness*.

15 Robert Gromacki has a similar list in *Salvation Is Forever*, 177–83.

16 This implausibility is precisely what Paul, in Romans 8:29–30, implies isn't accurate.

17 The reasons that salvation cannot be *returned or relinquished* are contained in the responses below.

18 See Norman L. Geisler and Ralph E. MacKenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Differences*, chapter 12.

19 *Life in the Son*, 334–37.

20 That is, this passage refers not to the possibility of a believer losing eternal salvation but to the possibility of a believer losing eternal rewards.

21 See below; see also chapter 16.

22 Even though, again, true faith may be dormant at times.

23 In which case, it is argued, if Scripture wanted to designate past action, it would contain the aorist tense.

24 On this matter, see Charles Stanley, *Eternal Security: Can You Be Sure?* chapter 9.

25 An example of a present participle is *realizing*, which can refer to an ongoing action, but not necessarily.

26 See Zane Hodges, 210–11.

27 The aorist indicates a decisive kind of action, not the duration of the action.

28 Not only has this been shown to be incorrect, but we have actually demonstrated that this would be the opposite of the truth—see chapters 3 and 5.

29 See Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 882–86, for a complete listing of such verses. Also, consult Charles Stanley, *Eternal Security*, for a discussion of the most important of these passages.

30 Or *hell* (John 17:12); this phrase is also used of the antichrist in 2 Thessalonians 2:3.

31 *Metanoeo* means "repentance."

32 As mentioned earlier, free-grace proponent Zane Hodges recognizes that true faith involves "trust" (*AF*, 32, 60). But what we truly trust, we naturally act upon—true faith involves repentance and obedience (cf. Acts 20:21; Rom. 16:26). Hodges also acknowledges that true faith "appropriates" Christ (*AF*, 40), thereby implying that

there is a kind of faith that does not. Hodges' admittance that there is a difference between a dead faith and an operative faith amounts to tacit acceptance of the "belief *that*/belief *in*" distinction (which he rejects), namely, the former does not bring salvation while the latter does.

33 The fundamental point of Galatians is that progressive sanctification, like initial justification, is by faith and not by works. The emphasized and bracketed words help bring out the contextually correct meaning: *Did you receive the Spirit [initial justification] by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?* Are you so foolish? *After beginning with the Spirit [by faith], are you now trying to attain your goal [of progressive sanctification] by human effort?*... Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard? ... All who rely on observing the law are under a curse.... "*The righteous will live* [the life of sanctification as well as the act of justification] *by faith*. (3:2–3, 5, 10–11)

34 See chapter 10.

35 The references to these "books" are possibly figures of speech describing God's omniscience about all things.

36 See above, under “God Cannot Deny Himself.”

37 *Apollutai*, in 1 Corinthians 8:11, is derived from *apollumi*.

38 Paul says in 1 Cor. 8:13 that “if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall.” The word translated *fall* is the Greek *skandaliso*, from which the English terms *scandal* and *scandalize* net derived. Paul, in teaching that we must not scandalize a weaker brother, is not implying that we can be the cause of his *salvific* loss; to *skandaliso* is “to cause to stumble, to offend, to shock, to pain.”

39 Paul called them “brethren” (6:1) *after* he told them they had “fallen away from grace” (5:4).

40 See below on 6:4–6 and 10:26–29.

41 Which is an “eternal redemption,” 9:12.

42 From the Greek *metanoia*.

43 Notice that the church is then invited by Christ to “dine” (i.e., “commune”) with Him in verse 3:20 KJV.

44 A survey of the Gospels shows that when the subject of hell *was* relevant, Jesus addressed it.

45 The rendering “book of life” does not follow the best manuscript tradition; “tree of life” is better attested. Either way, it possesses no insurmountable problem for eternal security; it could be another way to designate unbelievers by noting that they have no place in the kingdom.

46 That is, not everyone who is initially saved (regenerated) will ultimately be saved.

47 Martin Luther did not accept eternal security, since he maintained, like Augustine, that some of the regenerate were not elect (see Augustine, *CG*, XX.8).

48 Or “untrue believers.”

49 H. Orton Wiley notes, however, that “the assurance is the fruit, and not the essence, of faith” (*CT*, 375–76).

1 See under “Response to Objection Three” (below) for an explanation of God’s *ultimate* will and His *immediate* will.

2 John Gill, *The Cause of God and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980, new ed.), 1.87–88; cf. 2.77.

3 From Greek *kosmos*; for example, cf. 3:16–19; 6:33; 6:51; 8:12; 8:23–26; 12:46–47;

14:31; 16:8; etc.

4 Likewise, it was not Jesus but His unbelieving brothers who used *world* in an exaggerated sense when they said: “No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world” (John 7:4). Here, “show yourself to the world” is used as a figure of speech meaning to act in public and not in secret, to use the very words of the text.

5 Paul used *world* in Romans 1:8 in a generic (unlimited) sense and in Colossians 1:5–6 (cf. v. 23) in a specific (limited) sense. Even so, strong Calvinists don’t suggest that Paul does not use *world* generically of the *condemnation* of the whole human race in Romans 3:19; why, then, should they deny that *world* is used generically when in regard to *providing salvation* for the world in Romans 5:18–19? (see below).

6 The word *elect* is a regular part of New Testament vocabulary (cf. Matt. 24:24, 31; Luke 18:7; 1 Peter 1:2, 6), including Paul’s (cf. Rom. 8:33; Col. 3:12; 1 Tim. 5:21; Titus 1:1). The same is true of the words *some* and *few*, which Paul did not use in this case.

7 Only universalists say yes; see chapter 13.

8 See chapters 16–17.

9 From Greek *dikaioma*, *dikaiosis*.

10 See chapter 13.

11 See chapter 9, under “Justification.”

12 Op. cit.

13 It does not follow from this, as some Arminians infer, that everything in the opposing column (under “Adam”) is *also* only potential for all persons until they actualize it by their own sins: (1) Again, the phrase “not like” (vv. 15–16) differentiates the two sides of the comparison; (2) Paul says that some of the consequences of Adam’s sins (such as physical death) are automatic, without any choice on our part (vv. 12–14); and (3) no such qualifying terms like *receive* (v. 17) are used of the consequences of Adam’s sin (as they are of appropriating the *gift* of salvation that Christ provided for all).

14 From “A Critical Text—C. H. Spurgeon on 1 Timothy 2:3–4” as cited in Iain Murray, *Spurgeon v. Hyper-Calvinism: The Battle for Gospel Preaching*, 150, 154.

15 “Even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” The doubts regard the question as to whether *many* means “all” or “few.”

16 See above, under “John 1:29” and “John 12:47.”

17 Greek *anthropon*, from *anthropos*, meaning “human being, individual, person.”

18 See chapters 16–17, below.

19 See chapter 11.

20 They are called “false prophets,” “false teachers,” those “denying the Lord” (v. 1 KJV), those who bring on themselves “destruction” (v. 1) and “judgment” (v. 4), those compared to fallen and unredeemable angels cast into “hell” (v. 4), the “wicked” (v. 7 NKJV), the “unjust” (v. 9 NKJV), “natural brute beasts” (v. 12 KJV), “dog[s]” (v. 22), and “slaves of corruption” (v. 19 NKJV).

21 The Greek word *kurios* (*Lord*) is also sometimes used of humans.

22 For instance, Luke 2:29; Acts 4:24; 2 Timothy 2:21; Jude 4; Revelation 6:10.

23 Jude likewise establishes soteriological context by writing of “salvation” and God’s “grace” (vv. 3–4).

24 “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of *the church of God, which he bought with his own blood*.”

25 See Volume 2, chapter 12 and appendix 1; and Volume 1, chapters 15–16, 26.

26 See Volume 1, chapter 9, on the linguistic precondition for systematic theology.

27 See R. C. Sproul, *Chosen by God*, 197. R. K. McGregor offers the same reasoning in *No Place of Sovereignty*, 169.

28 We have noted that extreme Calvinists unsuccessfully attempt to avoid this conclusion by pointing to the geographical instances of words like *world*, such as *all* in Romans 1:8 or *every nation* in Acts 2:5. This, again, is a diversion from the issue. Demonstrating that geographical usage is limited has no bearing on the universality of generic and *salvific* usage (e.g., Rom. 3:19, 23; 5:12).

29 Leaving the doctrine’s adherents in the aforementioned situation where either (a) Christ didn’t die for everyone or (b) universalism is valid.

30 See also chapter 9, under “Objection Two.”

31 Paul had this passionate love for them *even though* he knew only a remnant would be rescued (Rom. 11:1–5).

32 “For everyone” as opposed to “for only the elect.”

33 Supplementing Ephesians 5, other verses likewise reveal a unique love of Christ for His church, which is the belief of all Calvinists (in distinction from Arminians). What separates moderate Calvinists from extreme Calvinists is that the former affirm and the latter deny that Christ also died for the non-elect and desires that they too experience this unparalleled love (of which marriage is an illustration).

34 Again, it is the *application* of the Atonement that is limited, and that by the will of rebellious humankind.

35 We have observed that many other New Testament passages also teach substitutionary atonement (e.g., 1 Cor. 15:3; 2 Cor. 5:20; 1 Peter 2:22; 3:18).

36 Cf. Matt. 25:40–41; 2 Thess. 1:7–9; Rev. 20:10–15.

37 See chapters 16–17.

38 See chapter 7, under “Objection Three.”

39 For example, see R. C. Sproul, *Chosen by God*, 148–50. On double-predestination, see appendix 3, below.

40 As mentioned in chapter 7, *hate* (Gk: *emisesa*, from *miseo*), more accurately means “to love less” or “to regard with less affection,” rather than “not to love at all” or “not to will the good of the person.”

41 “The former [*loved*] implies strong positive attachment and the latter [*hated*], not positive hatred, but merely less love” (Roger T. Forster and V. Paul Marston, *God’s Strategy in Human History*, 60).

42 Inversely stated, “If anyone loves me less or regards me with less affection than his father and mother, he cannot be my disciple.”

43 See chapters 3 and 13.

44 We have already established that this is the pattern when *all* is used generically or in the context of salvation in the New Testament.

45 Indeed, the entire *chapter* is about physical resurrection.

46 John McLeod Campbell, however, rejected limited atonement.

47 See note under “Romans 8:16” in chapter 2.

48 For an excellent treatment of this whole matter, see Robert Lightner, *The Death Christ Died: A Biblical Case for Unlimited Atonement*.

49 See appendix 3.

50 See Volume 2, chapter 15.

51 Again, the essential grounds for God’s omnibenevolence were stated in Volume 2, chapter 15, but several are germane to this discussion.

52 ibid., chapter 5.

53 ibid., chapter 2.

54 ibid., chapter 3.

55 The basic objections to God's omnibenevolence were also answered in Volume 2, chapter 15, but they are sufficiently significant as to require restatement.

56 ibid., chapter 7.

57 ibid., chapter 22.

58 See chapter 16.

59 See chapter 13.

60 See note under "Response to Alternative One" in chapter 6.

61 See part 1.

62 See Volume 2, chapter 4.

63 ibid., chapter 2.

64 ibid., chapter 14.

65 ibid., chapter 2.

66 The contrast, again, being between voluntarism, which holds that something is right because God (voluntarily) wills it, and essentialism, which maintains that God wills something because it is (essentially) right.

67 This poses an interesting conundrum between extreme Calvinism and open theism. If God's attributes are *not* essential, then He could change them—for instance, He could voluntarily decide not to know future free acts. But strong Calvinists, arguing against open theism, insist that God *cannot* do this. Can they have it both ways? It would seem that if God can voluntaristically limit one of His attributes (e.g., love), then He could also choose to limit other attributes (e.g., knowledge). If so, strong Calvinists must either give up their argument against open theism or give up their belief in limited atonement.

68 Both of which are entirely unacceptable. See Volume 2, chapter 15, and chapter 13, below.

69 See chapter 3.

70 Note, however, that this option is not available to the extreme Calvinist, for while it would affirm God's omnibenevolence, it would invalidate his view of God's omnipotence.

71 Op. cit.

72 See below, under “Later Augustine.”

73 The best refutation of Augustine is Augustine. Earlier he wrote: “*Sin is so much a voluntary evil that it is not sin at all unless it is voluntary*” (*OTR*, 14, emphasis added). “Sin is indeed nowhere but in the will, since this consideration also would have helped me, that justice holds guilty those sinning by evil will alone, although they may have been unable to accomplish what they willed” (*TSAM*, 10.12). “Either, then, *will is itself the first cause of sin*, or the first cause is without sin” (*OFW*, 3.49, emphasis added). “*Free will*, naturally assigned by the Creator to our rational soul, *is such a neutral power*, as can either incline toward faith, or turn toward unbelief” (*OSL*, 58, emphasis added). “*Whoever has done anything evil by means of one unconscious or unable to resist, the latter can by no means be justly condemned*” (*TSAM*, 10.12, emphasis added).

74

John Calvin, noting the difference between Augustine’s initial and subsequent views, observed that earlier Augustine explained God “hardening” unbeliever’s hearts as His foreseeing their act of will, while later Augustine held that God was actively hardening their hearts (*ICR*, II.IV.3): “Even Augustine was not always free from this superstition, as when he says, that *blinding and hardening have respect not to the operation of God*, but to prescience (*Lib. De Predestina. Et Gratia*). But this subtlety is repudiated by *many passages of Scripture, which clearly show that the divine interference amounts to something more than prescience*” (emphasis added).

Calvin continued, “Augustine himself, in his book against Julian, contends at length that sins are manifestations not merely of divine permission or patience, but also of divine power, that thus former sins may be punished. In like manner, what is said of permission is too weak to stand. God is very often said to blind and harden the reprobate, to turn their hearts, to incline and impel them, as I have elsewhere fully explained” (*ICR*, II.IV.3).

75 Emphasis added in the following quotations.

76

Calvin went on to say, “John’s purpose was only to make this blessing common to the whole Church. Therefore, under the word *all* he does not include the reprobate, but refers to all who would believe and those who were scattered through various regions of the earth” (*CC*, on 1 John 2:2).

By this Calvin clearly denies universalism *and* affirms the sufficiency of Christ’s death for the whole world, even though it is “common to” (i.e., shared by) “the whole Church,” since they alone have actually received the gift of salvation.

77 Calvin seems to have verbally overstated his point here in the heat of the battle against the heretical claim made by Tilemann Heshusius (1527–1588) that even the wicked can receive benefit from communion “by the mouth bodily without faith.” In context Calvin’s intention is clear, namely, to say that only those who believe actually

enter into the benefits of Christ's death.

[1] A close cousin to universalism—see Volume 4, chapter 13.

[2] Put out of existence.

3 The teachings of Origen were the object of this condemnation. Some believe that the "eleventh anathema," which condemned Origen, was a later interpolation (see F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2nd ed., 340).

[4] And Christ repeated—see Matthew 22:44.

[5] See Volume 4, chapter 15.

[6] See also comments on Ephesians 1:10.

[7] See also comments on Rom. 11:26.

[8] See Volume 4, chapters 14 and 16.

[9] See chapter 16.

[10] See chapter 9.

[11] It is possible that this is what makes children who die before the age of accountability savable, since Christ died for the judicial guilt imputed to them because of Adam's sin, and they have not yet actualized their own sinful rebellion against God (see chapter 15).

[12] See Volume 4, chapter 11.

[13] See Volume 1, chapter 27.

[14] In fact, He *cannot*, as it would violate His own nature. See Volume 2, chapters 7, 15, and 23, as well as chapters 3 and 12, above.

[15] See also "Theological Arguments Offered for Universalism," below.

[16] See Volume 4, chapter 11.

[17] See chapter 16.

[18] ibid.

[19] From the Greek *euaggelizo*, "to evangelize, to preach the Gospel to."

20 From the Greek *kerusso*, "to herald," "to proclaim."

21 As the NIV upholds.

22 See “Theological Arguments Offered for Universalism” and “An Evaluation of Universalism,” below.

23 See Volume 4, chapter 10.

24 See C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*.

25 See Volume 2, chapter 8.

26 See Volume 4, chapter 10.

27 See Volume 2, part 1.

28 See chapter 9.

29 See Volume 2, chapter 9.

30 Cf. Gen. 1:27; see Volume 2, chapter 19.

31 See Volume 2, chapter 15.

32 ibid., chapter 13.

33 ibid., chapter 16.

34 Cf. Matt. 5, 10, 25; see also Volume 4, chapter 10.

35 Which has rejected other fundamental teachings as well.

1 Pluralism, relativism, inclusivism, and exclusivism are here defined as applied to *the discussion of religious truth*.

2 Meaning: truth that exists independently from (and regardless of) our understanding or acceptance of it.

3 That is, while one worldview clearly and unambiguously presents truth, others possess the same truth, even though it is undeveloped, underlying, and perhaps even unexpressed.

4 See Volume 1, chapter 8, for more background on exclusivism as the oppositional precondition for systematic theology.

5 See chapters 16–17.

6 Citing Joel 2:32.

[7] Both the text in Jonah and the words of Jesus imply that their salvation was from more than mere temporal judgment, that it was deliverance from eternal condemnation (cf. Jonah 3:10; 4:2; Matt. 12:41).

[8] For further discussion of salvific requirement, see the more extensive treatment of condition (chapter 16) and content (chapter 17) below.

9 As referenced by the above verses.

[10] See Volume 1, chapter 4, on general and special revelation.

[11] As spelled out in 1 Cor. 15:1–6.

[12] See chapter 15.

[13] Among the myriad means at His disposal to accomplish this are missionaries, literature, angels, visions, and dreams. See chapter 15.

14 The following material is excerpted from Volume 1, chapter 8.

15 The alleged moral and spiritual equality of all religions.

[16] As did Paul in his teaching regarding the supernatural fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23), and as did John regarding God's love (1 John 4:7).

[17] See Volume 1, chapters 4 and 9.

[18] See also Clark Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy*, 61.

[19] As we saw in Volume 2 (and in chapter 2, above), begging the question (Lat: *petito principii*) is the logical fallacy committed when one assumes, as a premise, the same conclusion he aims to prove with his argument.

[20] It may show that there is good in the lives of Mormons, but it says nothing about the truth claims of their faith.

[21] See Gerald and Sandra Tanner, *The Changing World of Mormonism*, chapter 14.

[22] See Volume 1, chapter 7 on truth as the epistemological precondition for systematic theology.

[23] Or, even "better" lives than adherents of other religions.

[24] Cf. John 8:46; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 1 John 3:3.

[25] See Volume 1, chapter 3, and Volume 2, appendix 1.

26 *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (Houghton-Mifflin

Electronic Publishing, 2000, 4th ed.) denotes *tautology* as "an empty or vacuous statement composed of simpler statements in a fashion that makes it logically true whether the simpler statements are factually true or false; for example, the statement 'Either it will rain tomorrow or it will not rain tomorrow.' "

27 See Volume 1, chapter 3, regarding the alleged incredibility of miracles.

28 See ibid., chapter 2, and Volume 2, chapters 18 and 24.

29 See Volume 1, chapters 5 and 10.

30 ibid., chapter 2.

31 ibid., chapter 26.

32 ibid.

33 See his *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976).

34 See Volume 2, chapter 12.

35 "He could not do any miracles [in Nazareth], except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them."

36 See Volume 2, chapter 12, under "Heresies Regarding God and Christ."

37 See Volume 2, chapter 12 and appendix 1.

38 The fact that truth is exclusive, however, gives no one license to apply it unlovingly (e.g., Luke 11:42; 1 Cor. 13:3)—the truth is true on its *own* merit, and while someone who possesses truth *discovered* it, he didn't *create* it.

39 See Volume 1, chapter 5.

40 See Volume 1, chapter 7.

41 For instance, certain finite godists—ibid., chapter 2.

42 ibid., chapters 1 and 3.

43 See Volume 2, chapter 18.

44 See Volume 1, chapters 3 and 26, and Volume 2, chapter 12.

45 These issues are addressed more thoroughly in Volume 1. See chapter 6 on semantics (and on realism as opposed to essentialism or conventionalism) and chapter 7 on truth and epistemology.

46 See Norman L. Geisler, “Agnosticism” and “Truth, Nature of” in *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999).

47 The idea that there is nothing in the Real (or “the Ultimate”) that correlates with our ideas or conceptualizations of It.

48 *Void* or *emptiness*, often as applied to the self.

49 See Volume 1, chapters 5 and 10.

50 See Volume 1, chapter 7.

51 See Volume 1, chapters 5 and 8.

52 See Norman Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam: The Crescent in the Light of the Cross*, part 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993).

53 See Volume 1, chapter 2, and Volume 2, chapters 18 and 24.

54 See Volume 1, chapter 26.

1 See chapters 8–9.

2 See chapter 10.

3 See Volume 4.

4 See chapter 13.

5 Commenting on “things the angels desire to look into”—the curious phrase in 1 Peter 1:12 (KJV)—Charles John Ellicott (1819–1905) wrote: “Here then, the intention is to show that we are in a better position to understand the mysteries of redemption … than angels; and they covet to [move] from their own point of view to ours. And why so? Not because of the inherent mysteriousness … but because they are incapable of fully understanding human nature, flesh and blood, with its temptations and pains, its need of a Saviour. In [Francesco] Francia’s great picture, the two angels kneel by weeping Mary and dead Christ without a trace of grief on their countenances” (*Ellicott’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Vol. 7, 393–94).

6 See Volume 1, chapter 4, on general and special revelation, and below, under “The Results of Salvation on the Heathen.”

7 See Volume 4, chapter 11.

8 See chapter 16.

9 See Volume 2, chapters 15–16, and chapter 12, above, under “The Theological Basis for an Unlimited Atonement.”

10 See Volume 2, chapter 20, and chapter 6, above.

11 See Volume 4, chapter 9.

12 *Limbo* comes from the Latin *limbus*, literally meaning “border” or “edge.” The doctrine of limbo is discussed below.

13 That is, he was certain they were not in hell, but he was not certain they were in heaven.

14 The Anabaptists, historically, rejected infant baptism and “re-baptized” (Gk: *ana* and *baptizo*) adult believers. (Anabaptists also rejected certain other Catholic and Lutheran doctrines.) Contemporarily, the term broadly applies to Christian denominations that baptize believers *after* their decision to follow Christ.

15 See, for example, John 3:16, 36; 5:24; 6:35, 40; 11:25–26; Acts 16:31; Rom. 1:17; 4:5.

16 See chapter 16.

17 See Volume 2, chapters 15–16.

18 See below, under “The All-Infant Views.”

19 Generally speaking, Protestants are those who maintain the basic salvation teachings of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation. Catholics, for instance, believe also in purgatory, a doctrine derived in part from the apocryphal book of 2 Maccabees (cf. 12:43–46).

20 That is, through special revelation.

21 This verse depicts Jesus taking little children into His arms and blessing them.

22 The doctrinal statements of the Synod of Dort (or “Dordrecht,” 1618–1619), officially titled “The Decision of the Synod of Dort on the Five Main Points of Doctrine in Dispute in the Netherlands.” The decrees were issued in response to the growing prominence of Arminianism.

23 For example, see Ronald Nash, *When a Baby Dies* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999).

24 See chapter 12.

25 See chapter 5, under “The Judicial (Legal) Effects of Adam’s Sin,” and chapter 12 on salvation’s extent.

26 See below, under “The Results of Salvation on the Heathen.”

27 See chapter 5.

28 Cf. Rom. 2:6; 1 Cor. 6:9–19; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 20:11–12.

29 *Implicit* faith, necessarily, would sooner or later (in heaven) have to become explicit and conscious, otherwise an infant would be in eternal limbo.

30 *That*, in the phrase "that not of yourself," is *neuter* in form (gender), but *faith* (Gk: *pisteos*) is *feminine* in form. *Faith*, then, cannot be the gift from God. For further explanation, see the quote from A. T. Robertson (and subsequent note) under comments on Eph. 2:8–9 in chapter 16.

31 See chapter 16.

32 In not endeavoring to save all He possibly can.

33 Op. cit.

34 The argument that the only infants saved are those who believe when given the opportunity to do so after death (see below).

35 See below, under "The Bible Speaks of Children Too Young to Know Good or Evil."

36 As a modified form of the foreknown-infant view; see *Fourth* under "Critique of the Foreknown-infant View."

37 Assuming, as we do, that third alternatives like annihilation (see Volume 4, chapter 12) and limbo (see below) are unacceptable.

38 "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart."

39 "He will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth."

40 See chapters 16–17.

41 That is, have reached the age of accountability—see below, under "The Bible Speaks of Children Too Young to Know Good or Evil."

42 For instance, that holding to faith as necessary for salvation precludes the possibility of belief after death.

43 See chapter 16.

44 See chapter 3.

45 See chapter 12, under "Objections to Divine Essentialism."

46 His conclusion, cited above, is that only a Calvinist can consistently maintain the salvation of all who die before the age of accountability.

47 Op. cit.

48 See his *Safe in the Arms of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2000).

49 From Gk: *paidion*, in Mark 10:14 and Luke 18:16–17.

50 From Gk: *brephos* in 18:15.

51 That is, have not developed to the point of having moral awareness (conscientiousness).

52 Logically, this includes infants.

53 See chapters 5 and 12.

54 See chapter 13.

55 See chapter 9 for further discussion.

56 Regardless of whether or not it was overturned by the sacrifice of Christ.

57 In fact, universalists do put forth this same phrase ("made righteous," in Rom. 5) to support their position.

58 See chapter 16.

59 See chapter 16.

60 This parallels the modified foreknown-infant view.

61 In biblical terms, we are morally accountable when we are aware of the law written upon our hearts (Rom. 2:15); that is, when we know that what we do is either in keeping with or against God's standard (cf. Isa. 7:15).

62 Again, at this point, the position merges with both the foreknown-infant view (see above) and the evangelized-after-death-infant view (see below).

63 Meaning that for Roman Catholics, specifically, the deceased infants who eventuate in limbo are placed there *because* they were not baptized and, therefore, could not be granted (heavenly) salvation.

64 If not fully or officially *neutral*, then, at the very least, *painless*.

65 See below, under "The Results of Salvation on the Heathen."

66 See Volume 4, chapter 13.

67 For example, see Ladislaus Boros, *The Mystery of Death*, 109–11.

68 See Volume 2, chapter 12.

69 Such as those with severe mental deficiency.

70 See chapter 17.

71 See chapter 12.

72 See chapter 14.

73 See Volume 1, chapter 4.

74 See chapter 17.

75 *The Witness of the Stars*.

76 See Kenneth C. Fleming, *God's Voice in the Stars*.

77 Confirming Psa. 62:12 and Prov. 24:12.

78 See chapter 17.

79 See chapter 16.

80 See chapter 16.

81 ibid.

82 See chapter 14.

83 See B. B. Warfield, *Studies in Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, reprint 1988).

84 For the view that infants who die before the age of accountability are given the opportunity to believe after they die, see the discussion above.

85 For instance, Prov. 29:1; Heb. 3:7–8; John 8:24; 2 Peter 3:9.

1 See also chapter 10.

2 That is, evangelical on issues not directly related to soteriology.

3 Or "perseverance of the saints."

4 See chapter 11.

5 See chapter 5.

6 Op. cit.

7 That is, Catholicism does not teach that there is something *inherently* meritorious in good works.

8 That is, while we supposedly "earn" *progressive justification* (sanctification) through our efforts, we obtain *initial justification* solely by God's grace.

9 Except the disputes over baptismal regeneration without faith and the need for an adult to do penance (i.e., works) before baptism.

10 *Progressive justification*, for Catholics.

11 See chapter 10.

12 Again, this is because saving faith naturally produces good works.

13 In regard to both justification and sanctification.

14 Catholic dogma states that "except for Baptism and Matrimony, a special priestly or episcopal power, conferred by Holy Orders, is necessary for the valid ministration of the Sacraments" (Ott, *FCD*, 341).

15 Either justification, sanctification, or glorification.

16 See chapter 5.

17 See chapter 7.

18 See chapter 12.

19 See chapter 10.

20 See chapter 11.

21 Neither can be *actually* prior to the other, or else someone could have saving faith but not be saved or be saved without having saving faith.

22 Numerous volumes have been written in support of extreme Calvinism, including *The Five Points of Calvinism* by Edwin H. Palmer, another of the same title by David N. Steele and Curtis C. Thomas, as well as *Tulip: The Five Points of Calvinism in the Light of Scripture* by D. Edward Spencer. Some current books critiquing five-point Calvinism include George Bryson's *The Five Points of Calvinism: Weighed and Found Wanting*; Robert Lightner's *The Death Christ Died: A Biblical Case for Unlimited Atonement*; Roger T. Forster and V. Paul Marston's *God's Strategy in Human History*; and Norman L. Geisler's *Chosen But Free*.

23 Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale, 1994.

24 Plainly, their unwillingness to believe was the reason they did not receive salvation.

25 See chapter 12.

26 The conservative A. T. (Archibald Thomas) Robertson is not to be confused with the liberal John A. T. (Arthur Thomas) Robinson (1919–1981).

27 Meaning, Paul's phrase "and that" (*kai touto*) doesn't agree in gender with either "faith" (*pisteos*, which is ours) or "grace" (*chariti*, which is God's) but instead is tied to the act of being saved (*este sesosmenoi*, lit. "you all are having been saved"). See *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Broadman, 1930), 4:525.

28 Paul did not.

29 See Gregory Sapaugh, "Is faith a gift?" A study of Ephesins 2:8, *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 7, no. 12 (Spring 1994):39–40.

30 See Charles John Ellicott, *Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 8.397.

31 That is, as referring to our personal faith in Christ.

32

Conversely, R. C. Sproul succinctly describes extreme Calvinism: "To receive the gift of faith, according to Calvinism, the sinner also must stretch out his hand. But he does so only because God has so changed the disposition of his heart that he will most certainly stretch out his hand. By the irresistible work of grace, he will do nothing else except stretch out his hand" (*Willing to Believe*, 133–34).

As we have seen, *irresistible* means this condition is forced upon the sinner, and there is no plausible explanation for the idea of forced freedom.

33 See chapter 12.

34 Literally, "*You are not willing* to come to Me that you may have life" (NKJV).

35 Even John Calvin, commenting on this text, said, "Luke is speaking of their 'desperate inflexibility' when 'they are said to be resisting the Spirit.' " See *Calvin's Commentaries*, David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, eds. 6.213.

36 Some have suggested, on the basis of the phrase "toward us" (v. 9 NKJV), that Peter is speaking here not about unbelievers but about believers repenting of their sins (in view of Christ's coming). This is unlikely because (1) in verse 3, the same context, he is speaking of unbelieving scoffers; (2) verse 7 speaks of those who have not repented as "ungodly men"; (3) their destiny is said to be "perdition," not an appropriate description of the destiny of the saved; (4) the use of *any* (in God's stated desire that no one perish) indicates a broader group than believers; and (5) the critical Greek text reads "to you," which separates the class of unbelievers (who need to repent) from the author and other believers (who do not).

[37] For example, Matthew 7:21; 12:50; John 7:17; 1 Thessalonians 4:3; 1 John 2:17.

[38] Astoundingly, one extreme Calvinist says of this passage: “The text says nothing about who will believe or who can believe” (see Sproul, *WB*, 99). In spite of the fact that Sproul’s next sentence modifies this statement by acknowledging that though “it may imply that *some* can or will believe” (emphasis added), this is still contrary to the inspired affirmation, the very words of Jesus Himself, that *whoever* (i.e, *anyone*) can and should believe (cf. John 3:18; 5:40).

[39] “Historical and Theological Introduction” in Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. Packer and Johnston, 59.

[40] As posited by classical Arminians and moderate Calvinists.

[41] See chapter 5.

[42] Cf. John 15:5; 1 Cor. 15:10; 2 Cor. 3:5; 1 Chron. 28:14.

[43] That is, divine grace influencing our will before we seek after God.

[44] The Churches of Christ are connected with the Disciples of Christ (also known as the Christian Church) and the Independent Christian Churches. The COC came about through a “movement of restoration” that sought to restore the church in America to its interpretation of what they believed was the New Testament gospel.

[45] See Bibliography.

[46] Meaning, as two elements of the same action.

[47] As mentioned above, while the Church of Christ holds that faith, repentance, confession, and baptism are all conditions for salvation, faith goes beyond the status of stipulation to become the method or conduit of eternal life.

[48] Cf. John 20:28; Acts 2:36; 10:36; Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 12:3; 2 Cor. 4:5; Phil. 2:11.

[49] *Confess* (Gk: *homologeses*) and *believe* (Gk: *pisteuses*).

[50] Aorist in tense, active in form, subjunctive in mood, and second singular (you) in person.

[51] Even granting that some in the Reformed tradition believe in baptismal regeneration (which is inconsistent with “faith alone”), it is still significantly different from the Church of Christ, which also demands both confession and baptism by immersion as a condition of an adult being justified.

[52] See below, under “The Relationship Between Faith (Belief) and Repentance.”

[53] So that those in a Greek culture would understand that in the Hebrew (Old Testament) culture, the “mind” is included in the “heart” (cf. Deut. 6:5).

54 For example, again, Jesus said you should love God with “all your [1] heart, with all your [2] soul, and with all your [3] mind” (Matt. 22:37) without implying that these are three separate steps.

55 “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

56 Nor does he say this elsewhere.

57 John Walvoord, et al., eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 2.481.

58 Cited above, under both “The Roman Catholic View on the Condition(s) for Salvation” and “The Church of Christ View on the Condition(s) for Salvation.”

59 As in 1 Cor. 3:11–15, where Paul says, “No one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work. If what he has built survives, he will receive *his reward*. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; *he himself will be saved*, but only as one escaping through the flames.”

60 See below, under “The Meaning of *Repentance*.”

61 See below, under “*Fourth*.”

62 See, for instance, Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, and Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*.

63 That is, even if *εἰς*, in this case, is correctly translated “with a view to” or “in order for.”

64 These are listed above under “Baptism Is Not a Condition for Salvation.”

65 See Volume 1, chapter 27.

66 One of which, again, is baptism (cf. Matt. 3:15).

67 For example, see Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, and Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament;* William D. Mounce, *The Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament;* Harold K. Moulton, *The Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised*.

68 That is, “unto Moses,” meaning into a relationship with Moses as their spiritual leader.

69 “If we have been united with him *like* this”—Gk: *homoiomati*, from *homoioma*, “likeness” or “similitude.”

70 “We were therefore *buried with* him through baptism into death” (Gk: *sunetaphemen*).

71 See also Volume 4, chapter 4.

72 By contrast, the free-grace view (see below, under “The Free-Grace View on the Condition[s] for Salvation”) claims that salvation (justification) does not require one’s acknowledgment of Jesus Christ as Lord but simply acceptance of Him as Savior. Of course, to be given eternal life you must “confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord’ ” (Rom. 10:9) in the sense of proclaiming that Jesus is Deity (meaning, that He is God—see Volume 2, chapter 12 and appendix 1, as well as chapter 17, below), but this is a different matter. The question here is whether one must enthrone Christ as Master of (i.e., *over*) his life in order to become saved.

73 See *The Gospel According to Jesus*, 33–34. The quotation is from Livingston Blauvelt Jr., “Does the Bible Teach Lordship Salvation?” in *Bibliotheca Sacra* (Jan—Mar 1986), 37.

74 See Bibliography.

75 Later in this chapter (see below, under “What Is the Relationship Between Saving Faith and Repentance?”), two forms of the free grace model are noted—extreme (championed by Hodges) and moderate (championed by Charles Ryrie).

76 Referring to the so-called faith of those alleged to never have truly believed.

77 See below, under “The Free-Grace Position on Obedience and Works.”

78 That is, the issue isn’t justification but sanctification; James, supposedly, is talking about a lack of growth within the life of one who is already a believer, not about the dark destiny of one who has some kind of “false faith.”

79 These differences flow from the nature and object of the faith in question.

80 See chapter 10.

81 Some of these believe repentance is part of faith, while some believe repentance is an additional step.

82 See *So Great Salvation* (Chicago: Moody, 1997).

83 See chapter 10.

84 *Metanoeo* comes from *meta* (“after”) and *noeo* (“think,” “consider” “perceive,” “understand,” “comprehend” [see Strong, *NSECB*]).

85 As well as conscience. See chapter 2, under “Various Elements of Human Personhood,” and also Volume 2, chapter 12, under “Objection Four—Based on the Traditional Definition of Personhood.”

86 This is the evident meaning of some of the following passages.

87 See above, under “Baptism Is Not a Condition for Salvation.”

88 “What is the relationship between repentance and faith?”

89 This is somewhat oversimplified, but nevertheless contains significant truth.

90 “To the man who does not work but *trusts* [has faith in] God who justifies the wicked, *his faith* is credited as righteousness.”

91 Or, “believe *with a view to*” Christ (Gk: *eis*); cf. John 3:16; Acts 10:43.

92 Or, “believe *upon*” Christ (Gk: *epi*); cf. Acts 16:31; 1 Tim. 1:16.

93 See also chapter 10.

94 The first three views presented in this chapter—Roman Catholic, extreme Calvinist, and Church of Christ—were demonstrated above to be untenable.

95 Even though he or she must acknowledge sinfulness.

96 See chapter 10.

1 See chapter 16.

2 An intrinsic differentiation is being made in this case between (1) the heir having been given the *opportunity to receive* the money (he wasn’t simply handed the cash—he was given the choice either to disregard the voucher or to benefit from it) and (2) the heir *actually having received* the money by cashing the check. Analogously, we have been granted the unconditional opportunity to receive salvation, but we actually receive eternal life through the appropriation of our faith in God’s grace.

3 These specific details about my faith in the chair (which is the *object* of my faith) would be the *content* of my faith; again, the *basis* for my faith would be the laws of physics.

4 Or, stated a different way, the absolute minimal belief (faith) needed for salvation.

5 See chapters 12 and 16.

6 As with, for instance, the people of Nineveh (cf. Jonah 3), Rahab the harlot (cf. Heb. 11:31), or Ruth the Moabite (cf. Ruth 1).

7 This, of course, is separate from the question of what God’s normative grounds for salvific belief are in *this* era (since the time of the apostles). As indicated earlier (see chapter 14), the answer is belief (faith) in the contents of the gospel as spelled out in 1 Corinthians 15:1–6, which include the death, resurrection, and deity of Christ (for more specifics, see below, under “The Content of Theological Belief Necessary for Salvation”).

[8] A conclusion we reject on biblical grounds; see chapter 11.

[9] That is, the fact of Christ's work would stand even if someone didn't know (and, thus, didn't have faith or belief) that He had done it.

[10] We answer yes; see chapters 9, 14–15.

[11] We answer no—see below, under "Doctrines Normatively Necessary (Explicitly or Implicitly) for Salvation in This Age."

[12] See under "Biblical Teachings on the Necessary Content of Belief for Salvation."

[13] Including, for example, God's existence, God's necessary grace, the necessity of faith, human sinfulness, Christ's virgin birth, Christ's deity, Christ's humanity, Christ's sinlessness, Christ's atoning death, Christ's physical resurrection, Christ's bodily ascension, and even Christ's physical return.

[14] *Comprehensive* meaning justification, sanctification, and glorification. See chapter 15, and "Doctrines Absolutely Necessary for Salvation in the Broad Sense," below.

[15] See also chapter 11 on eternal security (or *perseverance of the saints*). Below, under "Doctrines That Must Be Explicitly and Normatively Believed for Salvation," we discuss which beliefs are required.

[16] See below, under "Doctrines Absolutely Necessary for Salvation in the Broad Sense."

[17] For instance, by having faith in the death and resurrection of Christ, while denying the Virgin Birth.

[18] For instance, by holding that all orthodox teachings on salvation are true, but never exercising salvific faith in Christ.

[19] We address this below in various sections under "The Content of Theological Belief Necessary for Salvation."

[20] (Lat.) Literally, "without which not."

[21] See chapter 6, on dispensations.

[22] See below, under "Two Important Texts."

[23] See above, under "The Difference Between the Object of Faith and the Basis of Faith."

[24] See Volume 1, chapter 4, and chapter 15, above.

[25] We address this below, under "Doctrines Normatively Necessary (Explicitly or Implicitly) for Salvation in This Age."

26 Popularly known as the *plan of salvation*.

27 That is, relating to justification, sanctification, and glorification.

28 See part 1 (especially chapter 5).

29 See Volume 1, chapter 29, and Volume 2, appendix 1.

30 See Volume 2, chapter 14 and appendix 1, as well as chapters 9 and 12, above.

31 See Volume 2, chapter 12 and appendix 1.

32 See Volume 1, chapter 16, and Volume 2, appendix 1.

33 See Volume 1, chapter 25, and Volume 2, chapter 12.

34 See Volume 2, chapter 12.

35 See Volume 2, chapters 15–16, and also chapters 6–7, above.

36 See chapters 12 and 16.

37 See chapter 12.

38 See Volume 1, chapters 3, 26, and 29, as well as Volume 2, appendix 1.

39 See Volume 2, appendix 1, and chapters 6 and 11, above.

40 ibid.

41 See chapter 6 as well as Volume 4, chapters 16–17.

42 See chapter 6.

43 See chapter 9.

44 Ontology is the study of being or existence.

45 Epistemology is the theory or method of knowledge.

46 See Volume 1, chapter 27; cf. Volume 1, chapters 13–14, 22, and 29.

47 That is, while it would be inconsistent for a person to believe unto salvation and then reject other essential teachings, what we are dealing with here is how a person becomes saved, not how he builds a consistent theology.

48 For them to be absolutely necessary, God would have to have had no other option (s) to initiate our redemption.

49 Roman Catholic dogma holds that *Mary* was immaculately conceived. While there is no evidence that this is actually true of her, nonetheless, it is logically possible for God to have done this.

50 There is substantial debate as to how the Virgin Birth itself helped Christ to evade inheriting Adam's sin nature, since He was genetically connected to His mother (see appendix 4), and she (contrary to Catholic teaching) was sinful, in need of a Savior (cf. Luke 1:46; Rom. 3:23). Some have suggested that God may have created Christ afresh in Mary's womb, thus avoiding His being genetically connected with her and, thereby, with Adam, but this appears to involve a denial of Christ's true human nature as a member of Adam's race and would thereby disqualify Him as the Redeemer of that very race (see appendix 4).

51 Of course, it is implicit in the belief in Christ's sinlessness.

52 In other words, our desire for theological consistency does not give us clearance to mandate standards for salvation that God has not established.

53 Doctrines 7, 2–4, and 10–14, above. At any rate, it would seem that they did not believe in these explicitly.

54 ibid.

55 Doctrines 6, 1, and 9, above.

56 Though these were not explicitly present in all cases—see above, under "The Difference Between the Object of Faith and the Basis of Faith."

57 Recorded in the book of Acts (cf. 19:1ff.).

58 Doctrines 1, 6, and 9, above.

59 Doctrines 4, 10, and 11, above.

60 Doctrine 7, above.

61 A multiplicity of persons within a unity of essence (see Volume 2, chapter 12).

62 Again, all of this suggests that doctrines 2, 3, 12, 13, and 14–Christ's virgin birth, sinlessness, bodily ascension, present session, and second coming—are not *soteriologically required* but still are *ontologically necessary* for salvation in the broad sense.

63 As already stated, it is, of course, absolutely necessary *ontologically* for Christ to have died and been resurrected to make salvation possible.

64 Some deny that explicit belief in Christ's death and resurrection is necessary for salvation today. Even so, they admit that it is necessary for these to be true for our salvation to be possible. Our reasons for rejecting this view in the intramural debate

among evangelicals are stated in chapter 15.

65 See also chapter 12, under comments on 2 Peter 2:1.

66 As some cults maintain.

67 Occasionally the New Testament, in other contexts, uses *kurios* of creatures, which in such instances means “master” or “sir.” For example, 1 Peter 3:6 records that Sarah called Abraham *kurios*, but the context reveals the difference, not having any of the other attributions like *God*, *worship*, or *prayer to*, as is the case with Jesus (cf. Matt. 3:3; John 19:37).

68 This is not the same as the lordship-salvation debate (see chapter 16), where the question is whether one must enthrone Christ as the Master of his life in order to receive salvation.

69 A *yes* also means it is absolutely necessary for all persons to believe today in order to be saved.

70 A *yes* likewise means that this belief is normatively necessary for salvation for persons in the present, not the past.

71 Again, doctrines 12–14 (Christ’s bodily ascension, present session, and second coming) must necessarily be true in order for us to be sanctified/glorified, but not in order for us to be justified. Also, they are necessary beliefs in order for us to be *orthodox*, but not in order for us to be *saved*.

72 These doctrines are part of *fidei implicitus* (implicit faith).

73 Internal heresies.

74 External rejections of Christianity.

75 For example, see above, under “The Difference Between the Object of Faith and the Basis of Faith.”

76 As we have repeatedly seen, Jesus said, “If you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins” (John 8:24; cf. 5:28).

77 However, in the absence of clear teaching to the contrary, we can *speculate* as to whether someone who denies Christ’s deity because of improper teaching can be saved. Nothing hinders one from supposing that a gracious God who sees a heart and observes an implicit faith there (that is, a faith that would come to fruition in an affirmation of Christ’s deity, should he or she be more excellently instructed in the way of the Lord) is free to save such a person if He so desires. But, of course, this is mere speculation.

1 Subcommittee on Separation of Powers, report to Senate Judiciary Committee S-158, Ninety-Seventh Congress, first session.

2 Whom fetologists call their second “patient.”

3 See Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. Israel Abrahams, 275.

4 Otherwise, human life would have a discontinuity between conception and birth (or whenever it would begin again).

5 See chapter 1, under “The Creation View: The Soul Is Created Directly by God.”

1 Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

2 An abortifacient is a drug or other substance that facilitates (induces) abortion.

3 See chapter 1.

4 The first fourteen days, or two weeks, after conception.

5 Born in 1927, an Oxford scholar widely acclaimed for her work in biology and genetics. Recently she has served as a member of the U.K. Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority and as chair of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Group of the World Health Organization’s Human Reproduction Programme.

6 Except by death.

7 See chapter 1.

8 Over which there is no legitimate debate—see appendix 1.

9 See also chapter 1.

10 See *Life in the Balance: Exploring the Abortion Controversy*, 71.

11 See chapter 1.

1 *Enchiridion* in Philip Schaff, ed. *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3, 1st series, 100.

2 *Chosen by God*, 141.

3 *Hyper-Calvinism* is a term that encompasses much more than this. In its English manifestation in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, hyper-Calvinism involved those such as James Wells (1803–1872) and Charles Waters Banks (1806–1886); earlier it was revealed in the works of Joseph Hussey (1659–1726) (see *God’s Operations of Grace*) and John Gill (1697–1771) (see *The Cause of God and Truth*). Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892) identified and opposed four characteristics of the hyper-Calvinist movement (see Iain H. Murray, *Spurgeon v. Hyper-Calvinism: A Battle for Gospel Preaching*. (1) A denial that God’s offer of salvation is universal; (2) A

denial that the warrant for humans to salvifically believe lies in the command and promise of Scripture; (3) A denial that sinners are responsible to trust Christ; and (4) A denial that God desires the salvation of the non-elect. See Peter Toon, *The Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism in English Non-Conformity, 1689–1765*.

4 This chart is similar to one by R. C. Sproul in *Chosen by God*, 143.

5 That is, they are either equally or unequally ultimate decisions of God.

6 Or “extreme” Calvinists.

7 See chapters 4–5, 12.

8 As cited in S. J. Neuner and J. Dupuis, *The Christian Faith: Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, sec. 1992.

9 Cited by Iain Murray, *Spurgeon v. Hyper-Calvinism*, 98.

10 In Murray, ibid., 150.

11 See also chapter 12.

12 Cf. Habakkuk 1:13; James 1:13. See also chapter 6.

13 *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, 115.

14 *The Marrow of Theology*, 154.

15 ibid., 156, final emphasis added.

16 In Murray, *Spurgeon v. Hyper-Calvinism*, 155–56.

1 See Henry Morris, “Creation and the Virgin Birth” in *Impact* (30: Dec. 1975).

2 See chapter 2.

1 1968 reprint.

2 See chapter 11.

3 Although Wesley never used the word *eradication*, he did use terms that have been taken as the equivalent, such as *destroyed* (from Rom. 6:6).

4 See Grider’s *Entire Sanctification: The Distinctive Doctrine of Wesleyanism*.

5 *Putting Away Childish Things: Reaching for Spiritual and Emotional Maturity in Christ*, 10, 13, 17, 49.

[6] *Perfectionism*.

[7] See Hanegraaff, *Counterfeit Revival*.

[8] The Second Council of Orange (529), which condemned semi-Pelagianism, was a local (not universal) council. The later Catholic Council of Trent did allow the semi-Pelagian view.

[9] See chapter 5.

[10] ibid.

[11] See chapters 10 and 16.

[12] See chapter 16–17

n Remember that Augustine's occasionalism (recollectionism or illuminationism) implies that the connection between matter and form is one-way; the lower (body) cannot directly impact the higher (soul). God allegedly illumines the mind (or soul) as to the body's experience.

n The only significant deviation from this, up to the Reformation, came from the later Augustine (354–430), whose views on human choice (formulated in response to the donatist controversy) were contrary to the standard of church history, both before and after him, up to the time of Martin Luther (1483–1546). Luther's systematic theologian, Philip Melanchthon (1497–1560), reversed his view, as have Lutherans since. This leaves the extreme Calvinist school, following Jonathan Edwards, isolated from mainstream orthodoxy on the nature of free will in fallen human beings (see chapter 5).

n *Hyper-Calvinism* is a term that encompasses much more than this. In its English manifestation in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, hyper-Calvinism involved those such as James Wells (1803–1872) and Charles Waters Banks (1806–1886); earlier it was revealed in the works of Joseph Hussey (1659–1726) (see *God's Operations of Grace*) and John Gill (1697–1771) (see *The Cause of God and Truth*). Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892) identified and opposed four characteristics of the hyper-Calvinist movement (see Iain H. Murray, *Spurgeon v. Hyper-Calvinism: A Battle for Gospel Preaching*. (1) A denial that God's offer of salvation is universal; (2) A denial that the warrant for humans to salvifically believe lies in the command and promise of Scripture; (3) A denial that sinners are responsible to trust Christ; and (4) A denial that God desires the salvation of the non-elect. See Peter Toon, *The Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism in English Non-Conformity, 1689–1765*.

n

John Calvin (1509–1564) consciously pitted himself against Chrysostom and the rest of the Fathers in saying,

"*We must, therefore, repudiate the oft-repeated sentiment of Chrysostom, 'Whom he draws, he draws willingly'; insinuating that the Lord only stretches out his hand, and waits to see whether we will be pleased to take his aid*. We grant that, *as man was originally constituted, he could incline to either side*, but since he has taught us

by his example how miserable a thing free will is if God works not in us to will and to do, of what use to us were grace imparted in such scanty measure?" (*ICR*, 1.2.3.10, 260–61, emphasis added).

n

John Calvin, noting the difference between Augustine's initial and subsequent views, observed that earlier Augustine explained God "hardening" unbeliever's hearts as His foreseeing their act of will, while later Augustine held that God was actively hardening their hearts (*ICR*, II.IV.3): "Even Augustine was not always free from this superstition, as when he says, that *blinding and hardening have respect not to the operation of God*, but to prescience (*Lib. De Predestina. Et Gratia*). But this subtlety is repudiated by *many passages of Scripture, which clearly show that the divine interference amounts to something more than prescience*" (emphasis added).

Calvin continued, "Augustine himself, in his book against Julian, contends at length that sins are manifestations not merely of divine permission or patience, but also of divine power, that thus former sins may be punished. In like manner, what is said of permission is too weak to stand. God is very often said to blind and harden the reprobate, to turn their hearts, to incline and impel them, as I have elsewhere fully explained" (*ICR*, II.IV.3).

n The Catechism of the Catholic Church, in its teaching on sin (mortal and venial), says, "*Mortal sin* destroys charity in the heart of man by a grave violation of God's law; it turns man away from God, who is his ultimate end and his beatitude, by preferring an inferior good to him. *Venial sin* allows charity to subsist, even though it offends and wounds it."

n The Churches of Christ are connected with the Disciples of Christ (also known as the Christian Church) and the Independent Christian Churches. The COC came about through a "movement of restoration" that sought to restore the church in America to its interpretation of what they believed was the New Testament gospel.

n *Predestination* means that God has chosen some to be saved. *Double-predestination* means that God has both chosen some to be saved *and* some to be damned (see appendix 3).

n Commenting on "things the angels desire to look into"—the curious phrase in 1 Peter 1:12 (KJV)—Charles John Ellicott (1819–1905) wrote: "Here then, the intention is to show that we are in a better position to understand the mysteries of redemption … than angels; and they covet to [move] from their own point of view to ours. And why so? Not because of the inherent mysteriousness … but because they are incapable of fully understanding human nature, flesh and blood, with its temptations and pains, its need of a Saviour. In [Francesco] Francia's great picture, the two angels kneel by weeping Mary and dead Christ without a trace of grief on their countenances" (*Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Vol. 7, 393–94).

n Calvinists of various varieties interpret the "warning passages" differently. Some, following John Calvin, take them as hypothetical rather than actual (meaning that *falling* cannot truly happen, even though the concept is posed theoretically). Others, like this author, consider them to be actual (literally possible) but regarding the loss of our *rewards* (cf. 1 Cor. 3:15) not the forfeiture of our *salvation*. See Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant King*, for a treatment of "loss of rewards."

n See Norman L. Geisler, “Agnosticism” and “Truth, Nature of” in *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999).

n For instance, Zane Hodges writes: “The faith that receives so great a salvation has the utter directness of childlike *trust*” (*AF*, 60, emphasis added). Also, of Abraham’s act of saving faith, “this act of *trust* was put down to his account as righteousness” (ibid., 32, emphasis added).

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n Martin Luther did not accept eternal security, since he maintained, like Augustine, that some of the regenerate were not elect (see Augustine, *CG*, XX.8).

n Among the myriad means at His disposal to accomplish this are missionaries, literature, angels, visions, and dreams. See chapter 15.

n Some have argued that angels can marry, based on Genesis 6:1–2, where the “sons of God” (angels in Job 1:6, 2:1, and 38:7) married the “daughters of men.” The Greek Old Testament (Septuagint) translates this (Gen. 6:2) as “angels,” and the New Testament seems also to refer to these beings as angels (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 1:6–7). However, there are other possible interpretations of the Genesis 6 passages (such as “sons of God” being believers or great men on the earth). Further, even if this *is* a reference to angels, they may have been fallen angels who possessed human beings, who then intermarried. In any event, it seems best, in view of the unequivocal statements of Jesus that angels do not marry (Matt. 22:30; Luke 20:35–36), to reject the view that angels as such engaged in physical marriage with humans.

n

Conversely, R. C. Sproul succinctly describes extreme Calvinism: “To receive the gift of faith, according to Calvinism, the sinner also must stretch out his hand. But he does so only because God has so changed the disposition of his heart that he will most certainly stretch out his hand. By the irresistible work of grace, he will do nothing else except stretch out his hand” (*Willing to Believe*, 133–34).

As we have seen, *irresistible* means this condition is forced upon the sinner, and there is no plausible explanation for the idea of forced freedom.

n For example, see R. C. Sproul, *Chosen by God*, 148–50. On double-predestination, see appendix 3, below.

n *Hyper-Calvinism* is a term that encompasses much more than this. In its English manifestation in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, hyper-Calvinism involved those such as James Wells (1803–1872) and Charles Waters Banks (1806–1886); earlier it was revealed in the works of Joseph Hussey (1659–1726) (see *God’s Operations of Grace*) and John Gill (1697–1771) (see *The Cause of God and Truth*). Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892) identified and opposed four characteristics of the hyper-Calvinist movement (see Iain H. Murray, *Spurgeon v. Hyper-Calvinism: A Battle for Gospel Preaching*. (1) A denial that God’s offer of salvation is universal; (2) A denial that the warrant for humans to salvifically believe lies in the command and promise of Scripture; (3) A denial that sinners are responsible to trust Christ; and (4) A denial that God desires the salvation of the non-elect. See Peter Toon, *The Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism in English Non-Conformity, 1689–1765*.

DR. NORMAN

GEISLER

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

VOLUME TWO

GOD

CREATION

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

DR. NORMAN GEISLER

VOLUME FOUR

CHURCH

LAST THINGS

BETHANY HOUSE
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VOLUME FOUR

PART ONE: THE CHURCH (ECCLESIOLOGY)

PART TWO: LAST THINGS (ESCHATOLOGY)

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SYNOPSIS FOR VOLUME FOUR

In Volume One we discussed Introduction to Theology (*Prolegomena*, preconditions) and the Bible (***Bibliology***). These serve as the method and basis for doing systematic theology.

In Volume Two we focused on theology proper, that is, on the attributes and activities of God. In the first half attention was centered on God Himself—His attributes and His characteristics, both nonmoral (metaphysical) and moral. After we addressed who God ***is***, in the second half we discussed what God ***does*** (in relation to His creation) and then examined the doctrines of Christ (***Christology***) and the Holy Spirit (***pneumatology***).

In Volume Three we dealt with the doctrine of sin (***hamartiology***) and the discipline of humanity (***anthropology***), then turned to the doctrine of salvation (***soteriology***), including origin, theories, nature, evidence, assurance, extent, exclusivity, results, condition, and content.

PART ONE: THE CHURCH (ECCLESIOLOGY)

Volume Four also has two major sections. Part One deals with ecclesiology, the doctrine of the church. We will first discuss the church's origin (chapter 1), then the nature of the invisible (universal) church (chapter 2), followed by the nature of the visible (local) church (chapter 3). After this, we will treat the government

(chapter 4), ordinances (chapter 5), and ministry (chapter 6) of the visible church, followed by the relation of church and state (chapter 7).

PART TWO: LAST THINGS (ESCHATOLOGY)

Part Two deals with eschatology, the study of the last things, and has two subsections: personal eschatology (chapters 8–12) and general eschatology (chapters 13–17). We begin with the intermediate state and the resurrection (chapter 8), the final state of the saved (heaven—chapter 9), and the final state of the lost (hell—chapter 10). Following these are examinations of the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory (chapter 11) and the theories of annihilationism (chapter 12).

The final section opens with a study of the interpretation of prophecy (chapter 13), followed by a treatment of God's kingdom (chapter 14) and God's covenants (chapter 15). Finally, we will cover Christ's return (the Second Coming) and the Millennium (chapter 16), and then the Tribulation and the Rapture (chapter 17).

PART ONE

THE CHURCH

(ECCLESIOLOGY)

CHAPTER ONE

THE ORIGIN OF THE CHURCH

The root meaning of the term ***church*** (Gk: ***ekklesia***) is "those called out." In classical Greek, ***ekklesia*** referred to an assembly of any kind, religious or secular, lawful or unlawful. The Hebrew words ***qahal*** and ***edhah***, often translated as ***ekklesia*** in the Greek Old Testament,[1] meant a gathering or assembly such as Judaism eventually had in the synagogue. In the New Testament, ***ekklesia*** came to refer to an assembly of believers, namely, followers of Jesus.

The term ***church*** as used in this volume refers to the New Testament church founded by Jesus Christ; that is, an assembly of believers joined to Christ's spiritual body by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13) at the moment of regeneration (Titus 3:3–6), when they individually place their faith in the Lord Jesus as their Savior (Acts 16:31). If still on earth, they should be part of a local body of believers meeting regularly (Heb. 10:25) for edification (Eph. 4:12), worship (John 4:24), and participation in the ordinances.[2] To this group Paul addressed most of his epistles, such as, for example, "the church of God which is at Corinth" (1 Cor. 1:2 nkjv).

The Universal *Church* vs. Local *Churches*

We must distinguish between ***the universal church*** (which constitutes the invisible body of all believers[3]) and ***the local church*** (a visible manifestation of the universal church in a given locality.[4]) ***The invisible church*** is made up of believers already in heaven; ***the visible church*** is comprised of those yet on earth. Likewise, a distinction is often made between ***the church militant*** and ***the church at rest***; the former are living believers, and the latter are those who have died and gone to their reward.[5] The focus of the following chapters will be both the universal spiritual body (bride) of Christ[6] and the local manifestations of that body (e.g., cf. 1 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:2).

It is noteworthy that the New Testament never uses the word ***church*** of a physical structure. Indeed, the early Christians had no public buildings of their own in which to meet; they met at first in the Jerusalem temple (Acts 2:46) and in homes (cf. Philem. 1:2). The church is only called a "building" in a spiritual sense (1 Peter 2:4–8; cf. Eph. 2:20).

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH'S ORIGIN

As used of an assembly of believers after the time of Christ, the word ***ekklesia*** came to mean "the Christian church," either in its universal (invisible) or local (visible) sense.[7] Its non-ecclesiastical New Testament use includes references to a mob[8] and to the Old Testament assembly of Israelites.[9] In almost every other New Testament instance, ***ekklesia*** refers to a body of believers in Christ who worship and serve God (universal or local, invisible or visible).

The Ordination of the Church by God

Like every other work of God, the church is not an afterthought; He ordained the church from all eternity. Since God is eternal and immutable,[10] whatever He wills, He unchangeably wills from eternity: “He chose us in him [Christ] before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight” (Eph. 1:4; cf. 2 Cor. 5:17). God’s decrees are eternal and final (Rom. 11:29); He is the source and initiator of all salvation,[11] including of those in the New Testament church, for we are “elect according to the foreknowledge of God.”[12] He knew and ordained not only the church in general but also each person in particular who would be in it. His foreknowledge is infallible,[13] and His providence is specific and minute.[14]

The Old Testament Groundwork for the Church

Though the church began on earth after the time of Christ,[15] the Old Testament made preparation for it. The church, ordained by God from all eternity, also began as prescheduled. Thus, “when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons” (Gal. 4:4–5).

The Old Testament Predicts a Coming Time of Gentile Blessing

The church involves a mystery[16] that was not understood in the Old Testament (Eph. 3:1–5; cf. Col. 1:26), but God was then making preparations for the church regardless. All the plans to choose a nation through which God would bless the world (Gen. 12:1–3) were also plans for the church to be built on Christ: “In that day there shall be a root of Jesse, who shall stand as a banner of the people; for

the Gentiles shall seek Him, and His resting place shall be glorious" (Isa. 11:10 nkjv); "the nations shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory; and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name" (Isa. 62:2 kjv).

The Old Testament Foretells Abraham's Spiritual Seed

The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen. 12:1–3).

Some of these blessings through Abraham are the heritage of New Testament believers; we, the members of the church, are Abraham's spiritual seed.[17]

It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.... Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. (Rom. 4:13–16)

Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.… He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit. (Gal. 3:7–14)

The Old Testament Predicts the New Covenant

Furthermore, the Old Testament foretold the New Covenant, which is applied to the church in the New Testament:

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers.... This shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; after those days ... I will put my law in their inward parts, and will write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. (
Jer. 31:31–33
kjv
)

The writer of Hebrews, citing this text, adds, "In speaking of 'a new covenant,' he has made the first one obsolete. And what is obsolete and growing old will soon disappear" (8:13 tlb). The blessings of this covenant are experienced by the church through the indwelling Holy Spirit (2 Tim. 1:14) and the inner law written on the heart (2 Cor. 3–6). Isaiah saw this covenant connected with the coming of the Messiah (Isa. 42:6–7; cf. 49:28); Jesus the Messiah celebrated the New Covenant with His disciples at the Last Supper.[18]

Accordingly, all Old Testament preparations for Christ were also preparations for the church, laid on His foundation (1 Cor. 3:11; 1 Peter 2:6–8). He is the promised Redeemer of the Jews ***and*** of the Gentiles, as promised in general to Abraham (Gen. 12:3) and mentioned specifically by the prophets:

Indeed He [the Lord] says, "It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth" (
Isa. 49:6
nkjv
).

Again, "The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising" (Isa. 60:3 nkjv); "I, the Lord, have called You in righteousness, and will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles" (Isa. 42:6 nkjv; cf. v. 1).

In short, it was not a mystery in the Old Testament ***that*** Gentiles would be brought into the redemptive community of God;[19] it was a mystery ***how*** Jew and Gentile would be united as coheirs into one body, the "church" of Christ.[20]

The Establishment of the Church on the Day of Pentecost

Various views have been proposed as to when the church originated, including everything between Adam and the apostle Paul.[21] However, numerous lines of evidence (including those immediately below) support Christ's church beginning on the Day of Pentecost, several weeks after Christ died and rose again, not in the Old Testament with Adam, Abraham, Moses, or even during the earthly life of Jesus.

The Church Involved a Mystery Not Known in Old Testament Times

According to Paul, the church did not exist in the Old Testament, nor was it foreseen as such, because it was a "mystery" that Jew and Gentile would be united in one body, coheirs of God's blessings. This was not revealed until the New Testament "apostles and prophets":

> I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus in behalf of you Gentiles—if so be that ye have heard of the dispensation of that grace of God which was given me to you-ward; how that by revelation was made known unto me the mystery, as I wrote before in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye can perceive my understanding in *the mystery of Christ; which in other generations was not made known unto the sons of men*, as it hath now been revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; to wit, that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs, and fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. (
>
> Eph. 3:1–6
>
> asv
>)

Several facts make it clear that the church did not begin until after Christ

ascended.[22]
First, it involved a “mystery,” which means something once concealed and now revealed.
Second, it was not revealed until the time of the New Testament “apostles and prophets.”
Third, this time was after the Old Testament, since it was not in “other generations” before the time in which Paul wrote.
Fourth, grammatically, “apostles” and “prophets” are both prefaced by one article (“the”), indicating that they should be viewed as one class.
Fifth, the “apostles and [New Testament] prophets” were the church’s foundation, which shows that the church began with them.
Sixth, Christ is the “chief cornerstone” (Eph. 2:20), and the building cannot exist until the cornerstone is in place.
Seventh, and finally, Ephesians 3:4–5 (along with parallel passages) reveals that this “mystery” church did not exist before Christ’s time: The church is Christ’s mystery, not revealed in other generations “as it has now been revealed by the Holy Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets.”
The phrase “as it has now been revealed” plainly indicates that the mystery church was previously unknown.
For one thing, the contrast between then (before Christ) and “now” reveals that the church did not begin until the time of the apostles.
For another, other texts by Paul on the same topic do not use the word ***as***, which some have taken to mean that the revelation about the church is ***greater*** in the New Testament than in the Old.[23] This is untenable, since, for example, Paul did not use ***as*** in Colossians 1:26–27 but made the same point:

> The mystery … *has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints.* To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you [Gentiles], the hope of glory. (nkjv)

The church simply didn’t exist in the Old Testament. The Gentiles were not yet fellow heirs in God’s blessings but were “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel” (Eph. 2:12 nkjv); that the wall between the two was not broken down (v. 14) until the Cross is further supported by Romans 16:25–26:

[He] is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began but now made manifest. (
nkjv
)

The contrast is clear: the mystery of how Jew and Gentile would be joined into one body in Christ was not in the Old Testament, which revealed ***that*** Gentiles would receive the gospel's blessings; the New Testament made it known ***how*** this would be possible (Eph. 3:6). The church did not begin until after Jesus came, died, rose, and established it on apostolic foundations.[24]

Christ Predicted the Church to Be Future in His Time

Christ foretold His church in the New Testament. After Peter confessed, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," Jesus replied,

Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I *will* [in the future] build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. (
Matt. 16:17–18
)

Jesus had not yet built the church. Indeed, because His death and resurrection are the church's foundation, it ***could*** not have yet begun, since He hadn't yet died. Further, since all who are in Christ's body are baptized into it by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13), it follows that the church did not begin before the baptism of the Spirit occurred (Pentecost—Acts 1:5; 2:1–3).

Jesus Called It "My Church"

Jesus said, "On this rock I will build ***my church***" (Matt. 16:18); it wasn't

someone else's church to which He was merely making additions, but the church itself He was building and of which He is the foundation. Earl Radmacher (b. 1933) said,

> When Jesus established "my *ekklesia*" [assembly] it was as different from the Old Testament *ekklesia* as it was from the numerous "Greek *ekklesiai*," etc. The content of *ekklesia* is determined by its modifiers. (*NC*, 134)

The modifier "my" makes this ***ekklesia*** one that Christ built Himself.

The Foundation of the Church Was Finished After Christ's Time

The church was built on the foundation of Christ and His apostles. The apostles did not complete the foundation until the time of the early book of Acts, ***after*** Jesus died (cf. Acts 2 and 10). Hence, the church could not have begun until after His time, as Paul wrote:

> You [Gentiles] are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, *built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets*, [25] *with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone*. (Eph. 2:19–20)

Likewise, Peter confessed,

> As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.... "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and *precious cornerstone*, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame." Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. (1 Peter 2:4–7 , citing Isa. 28:16)

Paul added, “No one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 3:11). This foundation consists of His death and resurrection, for “He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification” (Rom. 4:25). Just prior to speaking of Christ as the church’s cornerstone, Paul testified:

> He himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. (Eph. 2:14–16)

So it was by His death that Jew and Gentile could be reconciled and joined. Thus, in the church, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).

References to Ekklesia in the Septuagint[26] *Are Not to the Church*

As noted earlier, the use of ***ekklesia*** is broader than only referring to the Christian church, even in the New Testament; it also references a mob (Acts 19), Israelites assembled before Mount Sinai (Acts 7:38), and an assembly singing praises to God (Heb. 2:12; cf. Ps. 22:22). None of these bears even a remote resemblance to the New Testament church, which is ***functionally*** distinct from Israel.[27]

The Church Began After Christ’s Death and Resurrection

In Acts 20:28, Paul exhorted the Ephesian elders: “Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (nkjv). As noted by Lewis Sperry Chafer (1871–1952):

> There could be no church in the world … until Christ’s death; for her relation to that

death is not a mere anticipation, but is based wholly on His finished work, and she must be purified by His precious blood. (*ST*, 4:45)

Likewise, there could have been no church until Christ's resurrection and ascension; Ephesians 4:8–11 declares that the church is dependent on the functioning gifts of her various members, which were given only after these events. Ephesians 1:22–23 teaches that Christ is the exalted Head over the church, which He could not be without these same accomplishments.

The Church Began at Pentecost

Paul affirms that the church consists of those who are baptized by the Holy Spirit into one body: "We were all baptized by one Spirit … and we were all given the one Spirit to drink" (1 Cor. 12:13). He added, "Each member belongs to all the others" (Rom. 12:5), which is, of course, by one Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 12:27). John informs us that this Spirit baptism did not begin until the Day of Pentecost: "This spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:39 kjv). Just before His ascension, Jesus also said the Spirit's baptism had not yet taken place: "John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now" (Acts 1:5 nkjv). The only Spirit-activated event that took place a few days later was the Day of Pentecost (2:1ff.).

Later References to Church Growth Imply Pentecost As Its Origin

The Jerusalem church's growth is mentioned in Acts 5:14 (nkjv): "Believers were increasingly added to the Lord." The only sense in which this was true is that they were added to His body, the church, which had just begun on the Day of Pentecost (cf. 4:11). Indeed, one textual tradition[28] references the word ***church*** (2:47) immediately thereafter, declaring that "the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (nkjv). In any event, the first references to the church being in existence[29] are early in Acts, just after

Pentecost.

Peter Points to Pentecost As the "Beginning" of the Church

Peter declared: "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon [Cornelius and the Gentiles at Caesarea] as upon us [Jews in Jerusalem] ***at the beginning***" (11:15 nkjv). Luke confirms that they spoke in tongues (10:46), just as the apostles did at Pentecost;[30] since that event was the baptism into Christ's body, this is further confirmation that the Day of Pentecost was the beginning of the church.

The Gifts to Operate the Church Were Not Given Until Pentecost

According to Ephesians 4:11–12, the gifts God gave to operate His church included "apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (kjv). Since the body cannot exist without the gifts by which it is sustained, it follows that the church could not exist until after these gifts were given. According to verse 8, these gifts were not given until after Christ's ascension, which would place the church's start no earlier than Pentecost, when the gift-giving Spirit came (1 Cor. 12:4ff.); these gifts were not given until He "ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men" (kjv; cf. Acts 1:5, 10–11).

ANSWERING OBJECTIONS TO THE CHURCH'S ORIGIN

Several objections have been leveled at this view that the church began at Pentecost. Some covenantalists claim it began in the Old Testament; others, called ultradispensationalists,[31] maintain the church did not begin until well after Pentecost.

Objection One: From Covenant Theology

Since some covenant theologians claim that the New Testament church replaces Old Testament Israel,[32] they deny that the church began at Pentecost and say that the church's roots are in the people of God, beginning in the Old Testament and later known as the children of Israel. The New Testament church, supposedly, is really only a "spiritual Israel."

Response to Objection One

This objection has already been answered: The church could not have been started at any time from Adam to Christ, since it involved a mystery not ***known*** in the Old Testament, not ***possible*** until Christ died and ascended, and not ***actual*** until believers were Spirit-baptized into His body, the church.[33]

Of course, there were people of God before there was a church, but not all members of God's family are members of the Christian church. Just as there were believers in God before there was a theocratic nation of Israel,[34] even so there were Israelites before there was a church of Christ. The kingdom of God is broader than Israel and broader than the church;[35] while all members of Christ's church are part of the broader kingdom of God, not all members of God's kingdom are members of the church (cf. Matt. 11:11).

God's family of ***all*** ages has many basics in common, such as one God, one Savior, one brotherhood as God's children, one great plan of God, and one ultimate purpose to glorify God. Nonetheless, this overall oneness no more obscures the legitimate differences between various members of God's family than humanness negates all national and geographical differences within the human race (cf. Acts 17:26).

Objection Two: From Ultradispensationalism[36]

Ultradispensationalists argue that the New Testament church, known as the mystery body of Christ, did not begin until ***after*** the Day of Pentecost. Some say no earlier than Acts 9; others say not until after Acts 28. The latter follow E. W. Bullinger (1837–1913); the former follow J. C.O'Hair (1877–1958).

The Bullingerites

According to the Bullingerites (extreme ultradispensationalists), the mystery body of Christ is entirely absent in the book of Acts (Bullinger, ***M***, 40); there was an early Jewish "bride" church, but the later "body" church was not revealed until after Acts 28. This revelation is believed to have come to Paul during his second imprisonment, revealed only in his later epistles, such as Ephesians and Colossians (ibid.). Allegedly, the earlier New Testament references to a "church" are to an early Jewish church, not to the mystery church composed of conjoined Jew and Gentile. Bullingerites reject both water baptism and the Lord's Supper, reasoning that Paul did not refer to either in his later epistles.[37]

The O'Hairites

The O'Hairites (less-extreme ultradispensationalists) maintain that the mystery body of Christ did not begin until after Acts 9 (see O'Hair, ***URC***, 136–40); some say at Acts 13:46, and others at Acts 18:6. This group is represented by Cornelius Stam (1909–2003) (see ***TTD***, chapters 2–3) and Charles F. Baker (1910–2002) (see ***DT***, chapters 66–68); their school, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, is called Grace Bible College; they are sometimes referred to as the Grace Movement. The O'Hairites observe the Lord's Supper but do not practice water baptism.

Response to Objection Two

The ultradispensationalist groups will be addressed together, although some arguments apply only to the more moderate O'Hairites. The following arguments support the New Testament church of today—the body of Christ that joins Jew and Gentile in one body—as beginning before Acts 28; some also show that it began before Acts 9–18.

The Church (Body of Christ) Began on the Day of Pentecost

As was shown above, there are many good reasons to believe the mystery church (Eph. 3:5–6) of this age[38] began on the Day of Pentecost. The heart of the argument is that the present church is the body of Christ (1:22–23); one is placed in this body only by the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13), which first took place in Acts 1 (cf. 2:1ff.). Hence, the mystery church of Paul's later epistles originated at Pentecost.

The Church Existed Before Acts 9

Luke affirms that "believers were increasingly added to the Lord" (Acts 5:14 nkjv), which must mean being added to the Lord's "body" (the church), since the Lord was in heaven. In fact, the majority text of Acts 2:47 reads, "The Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (nkjv). Likewise, 8:1 informs us that "a persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem" (nkjv); this is the same "church" baptized into Christ's body on Pentecost (1:5; cf. 1 Cor. 12:13), ***before Acts 9***, in contradiction to hyperdispensationalism.[39]

The Church Existed in Acts 9

In Acts 9:4, Jesus asked Paul, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute ***me***?" Yet Jesus, the Head of the church, was in heaven (Eph. 1:20–22); the only part of Him that was on earth was His "body," the church. Therefore, Christ's body, which Paul defines as the mystery church of this age, is already in existence in Acts 9,[40] including some of the same people (like Peter) baptized into Christ's body at

Pentecost.[41]
Further, Paul affirmed emphatically that he persecuted “the church” before he was saved (in Acts 9): “I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which were in Christ” (Gal. 1:22 nkjv; cf. 1 Cor. 15:9). “In Christ” refers to being in Christ’s body; thus, here too the church is referenced before Acts 9.

Gentiles Are Made Part of the Body of Christ in Acts 10

According to Ephesians (3:6) and Colossians (1:26–27), the mystery body of Christ joins both Jew and Gentile. Gentiles were baptized into this body in Acts 10, in the house of Cornelius: “Those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also” (v. 45 nkjv). As such, by this text, the church was in existence at least by the time of Acts 10.

Acts 11:15 Affirms That the Body of Christ Began at Pentecost

Referring to the Acts 10 event, Peter said in Acts 11:15 that “the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning” (nkjv). This makes two facts clear: (1) the Gentiles thereby became part of the same body; (2) this body of which Jew and Gentile are part had its “beginning” on the Day of Pentecost, when Peter and the rest were baptized by the Spirit (1:5; cf. 2:1).

Acts 2 Includes Gentiles in the Body of Christ

At Pentecost there were Gentiles present who became part of this experience and received “the gift of the Holy Spirit” (v. 38) just as the apostles did. Thus, there were both “Jews” (v. 5) ***and*** Gentile converts (“proselytes,” v. 10) present “from every nation under heaven” (v. 5); again, the church, the mystery body of Christ, began at Pentecost.

Objection Three: Based on Pentecost

This objection, regarding whether the church was foreseen in the Old Testament, claims that it must have been if it began at Pentecost, since that's when the Spirit's baptism occurred (1:5; cf. 1 Cor. 12:13). The Old Testament prophet Joel predicted Pentecost (Joel 2:28ff.), and Peter even quoted him as one who foresaw this event (Acts 2:16).

Response to Objection Three

While it appears to be true that the phenomenon of Pentecost (by which the Spirit was poured out) was predicted in Joel 2,[42] nonetheless, neither Joel nor any other Old Testament prophet foresaw this event as an act that would coequally unite Jew and Gentile into one body. Once again, they foresaw ***that*** there would be a time of the outpouring of God's Spirit and of Gentile blessing; they did not foresee ***how*** God would form one new body of Jews and Gentiles on the same spiritual footing in Christ (Eph. 3:3–5; Col. 1:26–27).[43]

Objection Four: From Romans 1:2

Here Paul says the "gospel" of Christ was "promised beforehand through his [God's] prophets in the Holy Scriptures." This gospel is the power of God by which people are saved (Rom. 1:16) and placed in the church by His Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13). It seems, then, that the Old Testament prophets foresaw the church.

Response to Objection Four

Romans 1:2 does not mean that the ***church*** was thereby envisioned; here Paul simply declares that the ***gospel*** he preached was predicted in the Old Testament,

as elsewhere he says that the same gospel he preached (Gal. 1:8) was preached to Abraham (Gal. 3:8). God's promise that "all nations" would be blessed through Abraham was not understood anywhere in the Old Testament as meaning that Gentiles would gain equal footing with Jews in the divine redemptive plan. Gentiles were accepted as proselytes, but there was still a "middle wall of partition" (Eph. 2:14 kjv) separating them from equality.

Objection Five: Based on 1 Peter 1:10–12

The prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.

This is taken to be a prediction of the church age and contrary evidence to the dispensational claim that the church age was unknown in the Old Testament.

Response to Objection Five

A careful examination of this text reveals the following:

(1) Old Testament prophets predicted Christ's suffering and subsequent glory (which included His death and resurrection).
(2) They knew those predictions were for another age, not their own.
(3) They didn't know to which time period their prophecies referred.
(4) Their predictions were about the salvation by grace (proclaimed in the New Testament) that Peter's audience had experienced.

Nowhere does this or any other New Testament text say that they foresaw, predicted, or understood ***the mystery of the church***, which Paul proclaimed was unknown in Old Testament times. Again, they did know ***that***; they did not know ***how***. In short, they prophesied about the church ***age***, but not about the ***church*** itself; that mystery, once concealed, was revealed in New Testament times.

Objection Six: Based on Acts 26:22

Paul declared to Agrippa: "Having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come" (nkjv). Some believe this means the church was not a mystery unknown to Old Testament prophets.

Response to Objection Six

This understanding is incorrect, for the very next statement indicates the context in which Paul is speaking: "That the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the [Jewish] people and to the Gentiles" (nkjv). So the prediction of Christ's death and resurrection would be preached to the nations; again, this reveals that Old Testament prophets knew about salvation that would come to the Gentiles in a future age, but they did not know about the mystery of the church.

Objection Seven: Based on Romans 16:25–27

Some argue that, according to this passage, the Old Testament prophets foresaw the "mystery" of the church itself, not just a time of Gentile salvation:

> Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began but now has been made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures has been

made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith—to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen. (
nkjv
)

Response to Objection Seven

Two things are clear from this text: (1) Paul is speaking about "the mystery" of the church; (2) he is not speaking about Old, but New Testament prophets.
First of all, he speaks of "the mystery," "my gospel" (glad tidings), and what was not known in other ages. All these point to the same mystery of which he spoke elsewhere (cf. Eph. 3:3–5; Col. 1:26–27).
In addition, as in other texts where he speaks of "prophets" in connection with this mystery, he clearly denotes them as New Testament prophets. This is evident both here—"***the*** mystery kept secret since the world began" (nkjv)—and in a parallel text about the "mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past" but which "has ***now*** been revealed by the Spirit ***to God's holy apostles and prophets***." Comparing Romans 16:25–26 with Colossians 1:26–27 (see nkjv) reveals that what has now been unveiled (cf. Eph. 2:20) is the mystery of the church, not known in the Old Testament.

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH'S ORIGIN

The origin of the church, like all other doctrines, is rooted in God's nature and several of God's attributes.

God's Eternality As the Basis for the Church's Origin

Since the church was predetermined from all eternity, being chosen "before the

foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4 nkjv), God's eternality is an anchor of this doctrine. Having created time, God is beyond time; hence, all His decisions, including the one to build a church, are eternal.[44] This being the case, it's no wonder the church finds its origin in the council chambers of eternity. Christ, the foundation of the church, was "the lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8 nkjv); indeed, we are eternally the "elect according to the foreknowledge of God" (1 Peter 1:2 nkjv):

> We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. (
>
> Rom. 8:28–29
>
>)

Hence, "In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will" (Eph. 1:11).

God's Immutability As the Basis for the Church's Origin

The church's origin is also rooted in God's immutability,[45] for if He could change His mind, there would be no assurance that the church He chose before time wouldn't later be discarded. The Scriptures are definitive: "He cannot deny Himself" (2 Tim. 2:13 nkjv); "God's gifts and his call are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:29).

God's eternal will is also His immutable will:

> When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, saying, "I will surely bless you and give you many descendants." And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised.
> ...
>
> Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take

hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. (
Heb. 6:13–15
;
17–18
)
[46]

Not only does God not change, it is ***impossible*** for Him to change. There are things He ***cannot*** do, namely, whatever is contrary to His immutable nature. God's will to found the church is eternal and unchangeable.

God's Omniscience As the Basis for the Church's Origin

Of course, in order for God to be sure that what He willed would come to pass (in choosing the elect to be members of His church), He had to have infallible foreknowledge of all future free acts,[47] including the free acts of those who would later choose (in accordance with His foreknowledge) to be part of the body of Christ. Scripture assures that God has exactly this; ***His knowledge is infinite***.[48] Thus, God knew who would be saved before the world began (Eph. 1:11; cf. Rom. 8:29); "The Lord … does these things that have been known for ages."[49] With unlimited, infallible foreknowledge, God was able to predetermine the nature and constituents of His church before the world's foundation.

God's Omnibenevolence As the Basis for the Church's Origin

At the root of the church's existence is God's love,[50] by which we were chosen in Christ before the world began, that we should "be holy and blameless before him in love."[51] Without this love that moved God to send His Son to sacrifice His life for the church, there would be no church.

God's Omnisapience As the Basis for the Church's Origin

By His omniscience God knows the end of all things; by His omnisapience He knows the best means to this end.[52] The church, one of God's great mysteries, is dependent on God's infinite wisdom; without it, the great mystery once concealed and now revealed[53] would not have been possible. Indeed, this mystery is so great that even the angels are amazed at the plan:

> His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Eph. 3:10–11; cf. 1 Peter 1:12)

God's infinite wisdom is so great that the devil was trapped by it: "None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. 2:8). As we saw in Volume 3, Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–c. 395) explained the plot of redemption this way: "The Deity [of Christ] was hidden under the veil of our nature, so that, as with ravenous fish, the hook of the Deity might be gulped down along with the bait of flesh" (***C***, 22). That is, the omnisapient God[54] conceived a plan in which Satan bit on the bait of Christ's humanity and got caught on the hook of His deity; the serpent struck the heel of the woman's Seed, who used that very heel to crush the serpent's head (Gen. 3:15). "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil" (Heb. 2:14).

> [Christ,] having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. (

Col. 2:14–15

)

Further, divine omnisapience was manifest in God's redemptive plan by which He, without breaking His unconditional promises to Israel, was able to permit blindness to Israel that the light of the gospel might shine to the Gentiles. Paul wrote, "Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in" (Rom. 11:25).[55]

[Israel was] broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith.... If God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you [Gentiles] either. Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree! (vv.

20–24

).

Israel, who rejected her Messiah at His first coming (John 1:10–11), will accept Him at His second, when "every eye will see him, even those who pierced him" (Rev. 1:7) and a nation will be born in a day (Isa. 66:8). Israel will not come into God's kingdom empty-handed, for "the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth" (Rev. 14:7 nkjv) from every "tribe" of Israel will win "a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the … Lamb" (7:9 nkjv). Thus, in the mystery, the fall of Israel became the salvation of the Gentiles, and the rise of Israel will bring salvation to countless souls: "If their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?" (Rom. 11:15; cf. Col. 1:26–27).

God's Sovereignty As the Basis for the Church's Origin

As God's omnisapience ***planned*** the great mystery of the church in accordance

with His eternal and immutable will, His sovereignty and providence are able to ***accomplish*** it.[56] Sovereignty is God's universal rule, and providence is the means by which He carries it out. The Westminster Confession of Faith states: "God, from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatever comes to pass" (III). Job confessed to God, "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted."[57]

The Lord Almighty has sworn, "Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will stand." … For the Lord Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him? … "So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but [it] will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (

Isa. 14:24

,

27

;

55:11

; cf.

Matt. 16:18

).

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH'S ORIGIN

Early Church Fathers

The early Church Fathers, though then engaged with other pressing doctrinal issues, did speak to the church's origin, and there is broad consensus (supported by ample citations) that it began with Christ and His apostles.

Ignatius (d. c. 110)

"The disciples were called Christians at Antioch, when Paul and Peter were

laying the foundations of the Church" (***EIM***, 10).

> The Lord Jesus Christ … according to His own will, has firmly established His Church upon a rock, by a spiritual building, not made with hands, against which the winds and the floods have beaten, yet have not been able to overthrow.… There is but … one Church which the holy apostles established from one end of the earth to the other by the blood of Christ, and by their own sweat and toil. (*EIP*, 1, 5)

Justin Martyr (c. 100–c. 165)

> Therefore these words testify explicitly that He is witnessed to by Him who established these things, as deserving to be worshiped, as God and as Christ.… It thus addresses the church which has sprung from His name and partakes of His name (for we are all called Christians). (*DJ*, 63)

Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)

"The Church, though dispersed throughout the whole world, even to the ends of the earth, has received from the apostles and their disciples this faith" (***AH***, 1.10.1).
"The Universal Church … through the whole world has received this tradition from the apostles" (ibid., 2.9.1).
"Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome, and laying the foundations of the Church" (ibid., 3.1.1).
"[The Church] is the synagogue of God, which God—that is, the Son Himself—has gathered by Himself" (ibid., 3.6.1).
"The Church throughout all the world, having its origin firm from the apostles, perseveres in one and the same opinion with regard to God and His Son" (ibid., 3.12.7).
"Christ was also, in a strange country, to generate the twelve-pillared foundation of the Church" (ibid., 4.21.3).

Tertullian (c. 155–c. 225)

"Therefore the churches, although they are so many and so great, comprise but

the one primitive church, (founded) by the apostles, from which they all (spring)" (***PAH***, 20).
"His Holy Spirit … builds the church, which is indeed the temple, and household and city of God" (***FBAM***, 3.23).
"[Jesus] was born the God-man who was to build the church according to the Father's will" (ibid., 4.13).

Origen (c. 185–c. 254)

Paul [is] the founder, after Jesus, of the Churches that are in Christ.... We assert that the whole habitable world contains evidence of the works of Jesus, in the existence of those Churches of God which have been founded through Him by those who have been converted from the practice of innumerable sins. (*AC*, 1.63, 67)

John Chrysostom (347–407)

"[Christ's words] 'Thou art Peter, and upon this rock will I build my Church,' [meaning] 'on the faith of his confession' " (***HSJCM***, 54.3).
"As the cloud designated the camp of the Hebrews, so the Spirit distinguished the Church" (***HSJCFT***, 5.870).

Early Liturgies

"[Gather] us together within Thy holy Church, which Thou hast purchased by the precious blood of Thy only-begotten Son, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (cited in Walvoord, ***ELDLJ***, 4).

The Medieval Fathers

Following the early fathers, the great theologians of the Middle Ages placed the origin of the Christian church with Christ and the apostles.

Augustine (354–430)

"Christ ascended into heaven, and the Church was established under her King" (***CG***, 18.32).
"The Church … was to be built by Christ" (ibid., 18.48).

Ambrose (339–397)

"So the Lord saith through Isaiah: 'Behold, I lay a stone for a foundation in Zion.' This means Christ is the foundation of the Church" (***ODC***, 1.29.142).

Jerome (c. 340–420)

"The Acts of the Apostles seem to relate a mere unvarnished narrative descriptive of the infancy of the newly born church" (***LSJ***, 53.9).

I have purposed … to write a history of the church of Christ from the advent of our Savior up to our own age, that is, from the apostles to the dregs of time in which we live, and to show by what means and through what agents it received its birth. (*TLMCM*, 1)

If ever you hear of any that are called Christians taking their name not from the Lord Jesus Christ, but from some other, for instance, Marcionites, Valentinians, Men of the mountain or the plain, you may be sure that you have there not the Church of Christ, but the synagogue of Antichrist. For the fact that they took their rise after the foundation of the Church is proof that they are those whose coming the Apostle foretold. (***TDAL***, 28)
The Church was founded upon Peter: although elsewhere the same is attributed to all the Apostles, and they all received the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and the strength of the Church depends upon them all alike. (***TAJ***, 1.26)

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)

"The Church takes her origin from Christ" (***ST***, 1a.92.2).
"From the side of Christ sleeping on the Cross the Sacraments flowed—namely,

blood and water—on which the Church was established" (ibid., 1a.92.3). "Our faith rests upon the revelation made to the apostles and prophets who wrote the canonical books, and not on the revelations (if any such there are) made to other doctors" (ibid., 1a.1.9).

Reformation Leaders

The Reformers carried on the established teaching of the church's origin.

Martin Luther (1483–1546)

"Where Christ is not preached, there is no Holy Ghost who creates, calls, and gathers the Christian Church, without which no one can come to Christ the Lord" (***LC***, 2.3.63).

John Calvin (1509–1564)

While Calvin saw a foundation for the church in the Old Testament prophets, he nevertheless recognized that the apostles' doctrine was necessary for the church's establishment:

> Paul testifies that the Church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets." If the doctrine of the apostles and prophets is the foundation of the Church, the former must have had its certainty before the latter began to exist.... If the Christian Church was founded at first on the writings of the prophets, and the preaching of the apostles, that doctrine, wheresoever it may be found, was certainly ascertained and sanctioned antecedently to the Church, since, but for this, the Church herself never could have existed. (*ICR*, 1.7.2)

Post-Reformation Theologians

After the Reformation, there was likewise an emphasis on the foundational role

of Christ and the apostles in establishing the church. However, moving into modern times, insights into ecclesiology were deepened, an attention due in part to the conflict between Roman Catholic and Protestant views.

Jacob Arminius (1560–1609)

The Roman Pontiff is not Christ. Therefore, neither is he the foundation of the church. But the metonymy,
58
by which the Prophets and Apostles are called “the foundations of the church,” and by which the saints are said to be “built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets,” attributes nothing more to them than their being “laborers together with God” in laying down Christ as this foundation, and in building up the whole house on Him....

St. Peter was also among these; yet he excelled none of the other Apostles in any prerogative, but was inferior to St. Paul, not indeed in power, but in [Paul’s] “more abundant labor” in building up the church. (*D*, 21.4)

The Church Universal is “built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets,” and the Apostles are called “the foundations of the celestial Jerusalem,” which is the mother of us all. The Apostles have declared all things ... necessary for the whole church to the final consummation. (ibid., 2.17.6)

John Wesley (1703–1791)

As I speak chiefly to those who believe the Scriptures, the method I propose is this: First, to observe what account is given therein of the Jews, the ancient Church of God, inasmuch as all these things were written for our instruction, who say, We are now the visible Church of the God of Israel: Secondly, to appeal to all who profess to be members thereof, to everyone who is called a Christian, how far, in each instance, the parallel holds; and how much we are better than they. (*FAMRR*, 2.1.2)

The Dordrecht Confession of Faith (1632)

These we confess to be the chosen generation, the royal priesthood, the holy nation, who are declared to be the bride and wife of Christ, yea, children and heirs of everlasting life, a tent, tabernacle, and habitation of God in the Spirit, built upon the

foundation of the apostles and prophets, of which Jesus Christ Himself is declared to be the cornerstone (upon which His church is built). (VIII)

John Nelson Darby (1800–1882)

This discussion took on new emphasis following 1830, when dispensationalists,[59] led by John Nelson Darby, rediscovered the long neglected truth of the church's origin and nature. These insights were later furthered considerably by the ***Scofield Reference Bible***,[60] the establishment of Dallas Theological Seminary under Lewis Sperry Chafer, and many Bible schools around the United States.

Lewis Sperry Chafer (1871–1952)

In Ephesians 3 the church is said to involve a mystery (v. 3) that is a sacred secret, hitherto unrevealed truth, in which the Gentiles are "heirs together" with believing Israelites (vv. 1–6). A mystery is a truth not revealed in the Old Testament but revealed in the New.... The fact that the church is distinct from believers in the Old Testament makes unscriptural the point of view that Old Testament saints constituted a church. (*ST*, 2.261)

Charles Ryrie (b. 1925)

The inclusion of Jews and Gentiles in the same body is a mystery, the content of which is "that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs, and fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promises in Christ through the gospel" (Eph. 3:6). This is a mystery "which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit" (Eph. 3:5). (*DT*, 133)

[John Walvoord
[61]
] also calls attention to the rather amazing omission by [covenantalist Oswald] Allis of any discussion of the similar passage in
Colossians 1:26
, where the mystery is stated in no uncertain terms as completely hidden to previous generations. (ibid., 134)

CONCLUSION

The origin of the New Testament church was planned and ordained by God's infinite wisdom from all eternity. The mystery of how Jew and Gentile would be united as coheirs in the one spiritual body of Christ was kept secret in times past but was revealed to His New Testament "apostles and prophets" (Eph. 3:3–5; cf. Col. 1:26–27). The Old Testament ***did*** refer to a time of Gentile blessing, and many Old Testament passages about salvation are appropriately applied in the New Testament to believers in this age, since Christ died for all persons.[62] This mystery of how God could provide for Gentile blessings promised though Abraham (Gen. 12:3)—***without*** breaking His land and throne promises to Israel[63]—was made possible by Christ and revealed in the New Testament age. Paul reminded Gentile believers:

At that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. (
Eph. 2:12–16
)

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CHAPTER TWO

THE NATURE OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

The New Testament Greek word for "church," ***ekklesia***, from which we get the word ***ecclesiastical***, means "an assembly of persons."[1] There are some one hundred fifteen New Testament occurrences of this term, and except for a handful of texts,[2] they indicate either the universal church (Christ's spiritual body of believers) or a local church or churches.[3] While the vast majority refer to local churches, many refer to the universal church, and some seem to include both aspects.[4]

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR THE NATURE OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

Most of the texts that deal with the universal church[5] are found in Paul's

writings, particularly the later prison epistles;[6] some are found in the Gospels (e.g., Matt. 16:16–18), Acts (e.g., 20:28), and Paul's earlier writings (e.g., 1 Cor. 12:13), and, again, some pertain to both the universal and local church (e.g., 1 Cor. 1:2).

Biblical References to the Universal Church

Matthew 16:18

"On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." Clearly Jesus was not referring only to a local church in Jerusalem—hell did prevail against that when it was destroyed. Further, "***my*** church" indicates something broader than a local church, otherwise churches in other cities could not properly be called by Christ's name.[7] Also, the "keys" to the kingdom (v. 19) were used first to open the door to the universal church at Pentecost, when believers were Spirit-baptized (Acts 1:5) into one body (1 Cor. 12:13), Christ's universal church. Later Peter used the keys to welcome Gentiles who had not converted to Judaism (Acts 10).

Acts 2:47

Luke says, "The Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (nkjv); likewise, in Acts 5:11 he affirms, "Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events." In context, this obviously refers to the visible church (the local assembly), but at this point "the church" included both the visible manifestation at Jerusalem, where thousands were being added (2:14, 41; 4:4), and the invisible church. In any event, the local church was initially coterminus with the universal church, since all who were Spirit-baptized into Christ's body were still alive on earth (see Radmacher, ***NC***, 321–22).

Acts 8:3

"Saul began to destroy ***the church***. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison"; however, when Saul was arrested by Jesus on the road to Damascus, "he fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute ***me***?' " (9:4). Plainly, Paul was persecuting the spiritual body of Christ; given this, it appears that the local church was immediately considered a visible manifestation of the invisible universal church. Indeed, in 1 Corinthians 15:9, Paul says he was persecuting "the church of God" (cf. Gal. 1:22).

Acts 20:28

"Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood."[8] While Paul is talking both to and about the visible church of which his audience were "elders" (v. 17), nonetheless, the phrase "bought with his own blood" is more inclusive than the local church: It includes all members of the universal and invisible church as well (cf. Eph. 5:25).[9]

Romans 16:16

Paul signed off his epistle to the Romans with these words (among others): "Greet one another with a holy kiss. ***All the churches of Christ*** send greetings." In referring also to other passages with a universal implication to their local manifestation,[10] the comment of Frédéric Godet (1812–1900) is to the point: Paul "associates them with a larger whole, of which they are only one of the members" (***CFESPC***, 1.45). In brief, the local church is a miniature pattern of the universal church (Radmacher, ***NC***, 327).

1 Corinthians 1:2

Paul wrote "to the church of God [universal aspect] in Corinth [local manifestation], to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together

with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours." This greeting too seems to combine both aspects, a visible (local) manifestation of the invisible (universal) church.

2 Corinthians 1:1

"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the church of God in Corinth, together with all the saints throughout Achaia." Same pattern, with both universal and local aspects.

1 Corinthians 10:32

"Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God." This may be a generic reference to all local churches, since members of Christ's spiritual (universal) body as such cannot be offended. Or it could refer to visible manifestations of the invisible church.

1 Corinthians 12:13, 27

In one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free, and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.... Now *you are the body of Christ*, and members individually. (
nkjv
)

Here once more is the universal church in miniature, a visible manifestation of the invisible. The local body should operate with the unity possessed by the universal church, each part fitting in with the whole.

1 Corinthians 12:28

In the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers,

then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.

Again, with his reference to the body of Christ (v. 27), Paul seems to include the universal aspect of the church; obviously, he doesn't intend to imply that he was baptized into the church at Corinth and left his membership there, since he identified with the church at Antioch (Acts 13:1–7).

Ephesians 1:22–23

"God placed all things under his [Christ's] feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way." That this is a clear reference to the universal church is indicated by: (1) the definite article ("the") used with "church"; (2) the overall context in which (a) "all things [are] under his feet," which could not be true of a local church or even all local churches; (b) Christ is "far above principalities and power" (v. 21 nkjv), which is the spiritual domain; (c) Christ "fills all in all" (nkjv), a phrase not applicable to the local church.

Ephesians 3:10

"His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms." Again, Paul refers to ***the*** church, not just ***a*** church. Also, the involvement of the angelic world depicts more than a local church or churches.

Ephesians 3:21

"To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen." The visible local church will not exist forever, but God will be glorified through the invisible universal church forever.

Ephesians 5:23–30, 32

The husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.… He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body. … This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.

While referencing how believers should act on earth, that this passage too goes beyond the visible church is evident from (1) the use of "***the*** church" and (2) Christ's death for all believers, not just those in the local church at Ephesus or even in all existing local churches at that time.

Colossians 1:18

"He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy." Christ as ***the*** Head of ***the*** body cannot be confined within local boundaries; that the cosmic context of Colossians 1 reaches far beyond a local church is seen in words like ***all things*** (three times in vv. 18–19).

Colossians 1:24

"Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church." Again, Christ did not just suffer for the church at Colossae, and "his body" is more than a local body or the sum total of all local churches at that time. He died for all believers and all unbelievers.[11]

Hebrews 12:22–24

> You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Clearly Jesus' blood was shed for—and He is the Mediator for—more than the local (visible) church; the names written in heaven also include the elect of all ages.[12] Further, since the local (professing) church can and often does have unsaved members, the local church cannot be said to have all its members' names written in heaven, as does this church in Hebrews 12.

Other Terms for the Church

The universal church is also called by many other names; one book, ***Images of the Church in the New Testament*** by Paul Minear (b. 1906), lists ninety-six different figures of speech, each revealing a different dimension of Christ's relationship to the church. Among these the following are noted.

The Body of Christ

The New Testament uses the term ***body*** (Gk: ***soma***) numerous times of the church.[13] Christ is the Head, the church's source and sustenance.
Soma is used of the church both visible and invisible; many references are to the universal body, some are of the local body, and others include both.[14] In First Corinthians 12:12–27, Paul describes at least six features of the church as Christ's body.[15] It has:

(1) an organic unity as “one body” (vv. 12–13);
(2) a diversity of “many members” (14–20);
(3) a universality because “all” believers are in it (13);
(4) a mutuality because the members mutually edify one another (21–27);
(5) a visibility through its visible members who shine as lights in the world (cf. Phil. 2:14–16; 2 Cor. 10:4–5); and
(6) are spiritually animated by the Holy Spirit, who gifts its members.

The Bride of Christ

Christ is also depicted as the Bridegroom who wooed and loved His ***bride***, the church (cf. Rev. 21:9). John wrote, “I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband” (v. 2; cf. 19:7; 22:1). Paul said elsewhere, “I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him” (2 Cor. 11:2).

The Wife of Christ

In the same vein, the church is called the ***wife*** of Christ (Eph. 5:24–25; cf. Rev. 21:9). As Husband of the wife, Christ is depicted in intimate and loving relationship to His church.

The Firstborn of Christ

Again, Hebrews refers to “***the church of the firstborn***, whose names are written in heaven” (12:23). Here too the church is seen in a special relationship to Christ, “the mediator of the new covenant” (v. 24), who was firstborn from the dead (Col. 1:18), and by virtue of whom the church is also firstborn.

The Building of Christ

Christ is the foundation of the church—the chief Cornerstone (Eph. 2:20; cf. 1 Peter 2:7)—but the church consists of the superstructure of “living stones” built

on that foundation: "***You also***, like living stones, ***are being built*** into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (v. 5).

A Spiritual House

Though Scripture never uses the word ***church*** of a physical building made from brick and mortar, the church is described as a ***spiritual building*** (1 Peter 2:5). Christ is both the foundation and the Master Builder.

A Holy Priesthood

Peter used a series of powerful images to describe the church, one of which is ***holy priesthood***: "Let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood" (ibid. tlb). Not only does this demonstrate the priesthood of all believers,[16] it also points to our "great high priest" who ever lives to make intercession for us (Heb. 4:14).

A Royal Priesthood

The church as ***royal priesthood*** (1 Peter 2:9) emphasizes the regal nature of our relation to Christ, the King with whom we'll reign. John declared: "You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth" (Rev. 5:10). He is King of kings and Priest of priests; we will reign and minister under Him, drawing from Him both example and power.

A Chosen People

"You [the church] are ***a chosen people***, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9); "He chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight" (Eph. 1:4).

The People of God

The select nature of our relationship with God is manifest in this term variously rendered in 1 Peter 2:9 as “peculiar people” (kjv), “elect race” (asv), “a people for God’s own possession” (nasb), “God’s own people” (rsv), “a people of His own” (nab), “a people claimed by God” (neb), and “God’s very own” (tlb). However translated, Peter wrote: “Once you were not a people, but now you are ***the people of God***; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy” (1 Peter 2:10).

The Flock

God’s relationship to His people as one of Shepherd to His flock has a venerable history (cf. Ps. 23). Jesus spoke of Himself as the Good Shepherd and of believers as His sheep (John 10); He told Peter to “feed My sheep” (John 21:15–17). To the elders in Acts 20:28, Paul ordered, “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.” Peter said,

> To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ’s sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. (1 Peter 5:1–3)

All this because we serve the Great Shepherd, “and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away” (v. 4).

There are many more New Testament figures of speech depicting a vital, personal, intimate relationship between Christ and His church, including:

- Cornerstone/temple (Eph. 2:20–21);
- Beloved/virgin (2 Cor. 11:2);
- Ruler/city (Rev. 21:9–10);
- Owner/possession (Titus 2:14);

- Firstborn/household (Eph. 2:19);
- Creator/new creation (2 Cor. 5:21);
- Heir/inheritance (Eph. 1:18); and
- Vine/branches (John 15:1; cf. House, ***CCDT***, 117).

SOME CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

Using the above and other passages, the following is a brief summary of conclusions that can be drawn as to the nature of the universal church.

The Universal Church Was Chosen From Eternity

Christ is eternal, and the universal church was chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4); hence, in the mind of God, the church of God is eternal. Further, Christ is the elect of God (cf. Matt. 3:16–17), and we are elect in Him (op. cit.); not only is Christ the elect One, but in the New Testament those "in Christ," the church, the members of His body, were elect in Him before time began.[17]

The Universal Church Is Invisible

Christ's body is the "the joyful assembly," "the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven" (Heb. 12:22–23). The writer is speaking here of "Mount Zion," "the City of the Living God, the heavenly Jerusalem," i.e., ***heaven***; this refers to the invisible church, the heavenly body of believers. While all true believers of this age are members, only those who have gone on before us are actually there. The rest of us in the visible church await that day (1 John 3:2).

While it has a visible manifestation in the local church, the universal church as

such is not a ***visible organization*** (like the Roman Catholic Church); rather, it is an ***invisible organism***, a living body that grows daily.

The Universal Church Is Increasable

Luke records that "the Lord ***added*** to the church" (Acts 2:47 nkjv); the universal church grows both in number and in quality. Colossians 2:19 speaks of Christ "the Head, from whom the whole body … grows as God causes it to grow" (cf. Eph. 4:15–16). Christ both supports and sustains the growth of His body, providing the Spirit's gifts and power to fulfill His purpose for His church (4:11–12; 5:18).

Christ's headship over the universal church involves the preeminence of the Head over the body (Col. 1:15–17; see Radmacher, ***NC***, 237–45), the unity of the body with the Head (Eph. 1:22–23), and most of all the sustenance of the body from the Head:

> Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (
> Eph. 4:15–16
>)

Without the Head, the body cannot grow.

The Universal Church Is Indivisible

Unlike the church's local manifestations, which can undergo divisions and schisms,[18] the universal church has an unbreakable unity. It is the spiritual body of Christ and, as such, can no more be broken than Christ can be. Paul urged believers to "***keep*** the unity of the Spirit" (Eph. 4:3) in the church, but it is God who ***made*** this unity when by "one Spirit" we were baptized into "one

body” (v. 4; cf. 1 Cor. 12:13).

Several related terms are often confused in this regard. Merrill Tenney (1904–1985), commenting on Jesus’ prayer in John 17 that we all “may be one,” noted that “a clear distinction should be drawn between four closely allied concepts: Unanimity, uniformity, union, and unity.”

> *Unanimity* means absolute concord of opinion within a given group of people. *Uniformity* is complete similarity of organization or of ritual. *Union* implies political affiliation without necessarily including individual agreement. *Unity* requires oneness of inner heart and essential purpose, through the possession of a common interest or a common life.
>
> [Hence,] unanimity of belief does not necessarily mean uniformity of ritual; nor does uniformity of ritual presuppose organic union; nor does organic union involve unity of spirit.... Unity prevails wherever there is a deep and genuine experience of Christ; for the fellowship of the new birth transcends all historical denominational boundaries.... Such unity was what Jesus petitioned in His prayer, for He defined it as the unity which He obtained between Himself and the Father (John 17:21). Clearly, no earthly union, whether Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, or the World Council of Churches, is what is intended in this text. (*GJ*, 248–49)

The Universal Church Is Invincible

In the very first biblical reference to Christ’s church, Jesus promised Peter, who had just confessed “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,” that hell would not overcome His church (see Matt. 16:18). This or that local congregation may fold, but His universal fold will never fail; the visible church may not always be victorious, but the church triumphant will be successful. ***The universal church will accomplish the ultimate mission for which God called it*** (cf. Eph. 3:9–11).

The Universal Church Is Doxological

The purpose of all creation is to bring glory to God.[19] Specifically, about the

church, Paul wrote:

To the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves … in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.… To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. (

Eph. 1:6

,

12

;

3:21

; cf.

1 Tim. 1:17

)

In John’s vision, around God’s throne,

The living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever.… In a loud voice they sang: “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!” (

Rev. 4:9

;

5:12

).

Everything, including the church, is ordained for the glory of God.

The Universal Church Is Apostolic

Along with Christ, the Chief Cornerstone, the church was “built on the foundation of the apostles” (Eph. 2:20). At Pentecost, the apostles received one of the special “signs of an apostle” (2 Cor. 12:12 nkjv), the gift of tongues (Acts 2:1–5). Later, believers who were there from “every nation under heaven” (v. 5) repented and received “the gift of the Holy Spirit” (v. 38). Some time later, the same thing happened to the neighboring Samaritans by the hands of the apostles:

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. [Then] Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8:14–17)

Likewise, the baptism of the Holy Spirit occurred later, on the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius:

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. (10:44–46)

Even as late as Acts 19, there were some who had not heard about Pentecost, and even though they had repented, believed, and been baptized by John, they had not been Spirit-baptized into this new body of Christ:

[In Ephesus, Paul] found some disciples and asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?”

They answered, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.”

So Paul asked, “Then what baptism did you receive?”

“John’s baptism,” they replied.

Paul said, “John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.”

On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. (vv. 1–6)

Thus, after the Day of Pentecost, Spirit baptism was administered by God only

through the apostles; this was part of their role as the church's foundation.[20] From the transitional time period when their message had officially reached the whole earth (Col. 1:23), it appears that converts received Spirit baptism at the moment of conversion. At least by the time of Romans (a.d. 58), Paul wrote: "If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ" (8:9). This method of God's initially giving the Spirit only through an apostle's hands makes sense: If every believer all over the world had simultaneously received Spirit baptism, Christianity would have been a fragmented movement from its inception, and the foundation upon the "apostles and prophets" of this new dispensation—those who recorded the New Testament for the faith and practice of all future believers—would not have been established. Thus it was that the early church was established in apostolic doctrine (Acts 2:42), and in this way God pinpointed both the apostles' ***living*** authority and their ***written*** authority for the church in their writings, which would succeed them.[21]

The apostles also played an authoritative role in the government of the local churches,[22] and gradually they established self-governing local churches under the leadership of elders and deacons chosen by the congregation. They also left their written authority, the New Testament, to replace their living authority in matters of doctrine and practice. This was recognized by churches who read, collected, and passed these writings on to others, even during apostolic times.[23] Peter recognized and used a collection of Paul's letters as Scripture:

> Our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way *in all his letters*, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction. (
> 2 Peter 3:15–16
>)

The Universal Church Is Ethnically Neutral

The universal church, Christ's spiritual body, is ethnically and socially neutral.

The universal church, of which the local church should be a reflection, is composed of all who belong to Jesus Christ, for in Him ***all*** are one (Gal. 3:28). There are no racial, national, or political distinctions; Christ's body transcends all of these as a spiritual union of all believers since Pentecost.

The Universal Church Is Regenerate

Not only are all saved persons in the universal church, but ***only*** saved people are in it. Unlike the local church which, unfortunately, contains both wheat and tares (Matt. 13:24–30), the universal church has a totally and completely regenerate membership, made up only of sheep (see Matt. 25). The local church has "wolves" (Acts 20:28–29), "false brethren" (Gal. 2:4 nkjv), "unbelievers" (1 Cor. 14:23), and "certain men [who] crept in" from the outside (Jude 4 nkjv).

The Universal Church Is Spiritually Equal

Believers are spiritually equal in Christ, and again, the real mystery, given God's unconditional election of Israel as His chosen nation (Gen. 12:1–3; cf. Rom. 11:29), is how Gentiles could be brought into the redemptive community on the same ground (Col. 1:27). According to Judaism, Gentiles could convert as proselytes, but they were still second-class citizens in the kingdom; for instance, the temple had a "court of the Gentiles" and a middle wall of partition they couldn't pass. Now, "this mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 3:6; cf. 2:12–16).

The *Invisible* Church Is *Universal*

Other than the early post-Pentecost church in Jerusalem, there never has been and never will be a truly catholic[24] (universal) church on earth. Neither the

Roman nor the Greek branch of Christendom is truly catholic; the only truly catholic church today is the spiritual body of Christ, which is all true believers in whatever local church or denomination. Never does the Bible use the word ***church*** to denote one visible ecclesiastical union that is the sole organization representing Christ on earth; the repeated use of the word ***churches***[25] reveals that only in a general, collective sense can we speak of the many self-governing, independent churches that are based on New Testament teaching as the "church" on earth. Only the invisible church is truly universal.

The Universal Church Is Original

As we'll later discuss in detail,[26] the body of Christ is ***not*** a spiritual Israel. The church is brand-new: In His day, Christ said it was yet future and called it "my church."[27] Again, the church, founded on Christ and by His apostles (Eph. 2:20), was a mystery not revealed in the Old Testament.[28]
Here is a summary of the reasons why the church (the body of Christ) did not originate until the New Testament age:

(1) The church was a mystery not known in Old Testament times (Eph. 3:3–6).
(2) Christ declared that the church was yet future (Matt. 16:16–18).
(3) His phrase "my church" (ibid.) indicates it did not begin before His time.
(4) The church's foundation was not completed until after Christ's time (Eph. 2:20).
(5) The use of ***ekklésia*** of Israel in the Old Testament[29] does not identify it with the New Testament church.
(6) The church did not begin until after Christ died and rose (Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:8–11).
(7) The church (the body of Christ) began at Pentecost by the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13; cf. Acts 1:5).

(8) Peter pointed to Pentecost as the "beginning" of the church (Acts 11:15).
(9) The gifts needed to operate the church were not given until after Christ ascended (Eph. 4:11–12; cf. 1 Cor. 12:4ff.).

As an original work of God, the church is not a continuation of Israel in some spiritual sense; even in the New Testament "Israel" and its future are clearly distinguished from the church (Rom. 9–11). Jesus never denied there would be a future kingdom for Israel but said the times were in God's hands (Acts 1:6–7; cf. Matt. 19:28). At no time have the unconditional land-promises, given to Abraham and his descendants "forever," been fulfilled.[30] Consistent application of the historical-grammatical hermeneutic[31] demands that they will be.

The last thing the disciples asked Jesus was "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6; cf. 15:13–16). If there were to be no future literal kingdom, then this was Jesus' last opportunity to correct them, as He had done with their misunderstandings on many other occasions. But He did not; instead, He implied that it would come in the Father's good time, and that meanwhile they were to be witnesses in all the world (1:7–8).

Even after the church began, this future literal kingdom was offered to Israel (in Acts 3) by Peter, who referred to the restoration of Israel (vv. 19–21), promised in the Old Testament and to be fulfilled when Messiah returned. In fact, Peter declared that He would ***not*** return until they repented and accepted Him as their Messiah.

Paul informs us that the nation of Israel will yet be restored to its place of blessing under God. To set the context, Romans 9–11 is about Israel's past blessings (9), present rejection (10), and future national restoration (11). In 9:3–4, Paul makes it evident he is speaking of literal physical Israel, not any kind of "spiritual" Israel, and in 10:1, he declares: "My heart's desire and prayer to God ***for the Israelites*** is that they may be saved." They are said to be the "nation" (v. 19) to whom Moses wrote and the "Israel" to whom Isaiah prophesied (v. 21). Further, in Romans 11, Paul calls them "His [God's] people," of whom Paul is one (v. 1), that God has not rejected forever (vv. 1–2 nkjv), because "God's gifts and his call are irrevocable" (v. 29).

After all, if you [Roman Christians] were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature,

and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches [the people of Israel], be grafted into their own olive tree! I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written. (
11:24–26
)

The nation ***as a whole***[32] will be converted and restored, just as God promised, ***when Messiah returns***.[33]

Revelation speaks of a role for Israel in the last days before the Second Coming,[34] a specific and significant involvement in God's future plan, first mentioned during the Tribulation: "Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 ***from all the tribes of Israel***" (7:4). Neither word, ***tribe*** or ***Israel***, is ever scripturally used in anything but a literal way.[35]

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE NATURE OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

Like the origin of the church, the nature of the church is rooted in the very nature and will of God.[36] God is eternal and, hence, eternally willed this mysterious plan of how individual Jews and Gentiles would be conjoined as coheirs in one body. God is also immutable and thus His will to create the church cannot be changed. By His omniscience He could see His desired end in decreeing the church's existence; by His omnisapience He was able to ordain the best means to His ultimate end; and with his sovereign, omnipotent power, God is able to achieve the plan He has ordained.[37]

An Objection: Based on Christians Being Abraham's Offspring

According to Paul, we are Abraham's heirs:

> It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression. Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. (
> Rom. 4:13–16
>)

Paul added elsewhere, "He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit" (Gal. 3:14). So even though the promise was made to Abraham and his descendants, the church is also the beneficiary; accordingly, why can't this likewise be true of other promises made to Abraham—such as the inheritance of the Promised Land?[38]

Response

In reply, there are several important facts to keep in mind.

For one thing, even if the land-promises were applicable to the church, there is no sense in which she has inherited the literal land of Israel forever. There is no biblical indication that the church ever will, and if it does, then God will have broken His promise to Israel, which He cannot do (Heb. 6:13–18). Christians at best have possessed some of the land for a short time.

In addition, God's promise of the blessing of salvation was given through Abraham to all from the very beginning:[39] "I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen. 12:3). Therefore, this promise of spiritual salvation through the Seed of Abraham (Christ—see Gal. 3:16) was intended by God for all people from the start. This is ***not*** the case with the guarantee of the Holy Land and of

other national blessings God promised to Israel.[40]

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR THE NATURE OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

Early Fathers

There is ample support in the writings of the early Fathers for the nature of the universal church as presented above.

Ignatius (d. c. 110)

"Wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church" (***EIS***, 8).

Justin Martyr (c. 100–c. 165)

"The word of God speaks to those who believe in Him as being one soul, and one synagogue, and one church" (***DJ***, 63).

Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)

"The Catholic Church possesses one and the same faith throughout the whole world" (***AH***, 1.10.3).
"Where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church" (ibid., 3.24.1).

Tertullian (c. 155–c. 225)

"We have one faith, one God, the same Christ, the same hope, the same baptismal sacraments; let me say it once for all, we are one Church" (***OVV***, 2).

“The churches, although they are so many and so great, comprise but the one primitive church, (founded) by the apostles, from which they all (spring)” (***PAH***, 20).

Clement of Alexandria (150–c. 215)

“He who eats of this meal [Communion], the best of all, shall possess the kingdom of God, fixing his regards here on the holy assembly of love, the heavenly Church” (***I***, 2.1).

Origen (c. 185–c. 254)

“The expression … ‘effluents of an earthly church and of circumcision,’ was probably taken from the fact that the church on earth was called by some an effluent from a heavenly church and a better world” (***AC***, 6.35).

The Holy Scriptures declare the Body of Christ, animated by the Son of God, to be the whole Church of God, and the members of this body—considered as a whole—to consist of those who are believers … each individual member belonging to the Church … do[ing] nothing apart from the Word. (ibid., 6.48)

Cyprian (200–258)

“It becomes us all to watch for the body of the whole Church, whose members are scattered through every various province” (***EC***, 29.4).
“There is one God, and Christ is one, and there is one Church” (ibid., 39.5).
“There is one Church, divided by Christ throughout the whole world into many members” (ibid., 51.24).

Athanasius (c. 293–373)

“There is one body of the Catholic Church” (***DA***, 1).

Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–c. 395)

“The populous Church of God … [was] to fill the whole world from end to end of the earth” (***OBC***, 983).

John Chrysostom (347–407)

“The Church amongst you is a part of the Church existing everywhere and of the body which is made up of all the Churches” (***HSJCEPC***, 1.32.1).

“Unto the Church of God” [
1 Cor. 1:2
]. Not “of this or of that man,” but of God … shewing that it ought to be united. For if it be “of God,” it is united, and it is one, not in Corinth only, but also in all the world: for the Church’s name is not a name of separation, but of unity and concord. (ibid., 1.1)

Although [this] letter be written to the Corinthians only, yet he [Paul] makes mention of all the faithful that are in all the earth; showing that the Church throughout the world must be one, however separate in [diverse] places. (ibid., 1.1.2)

The Medieval Fathers

The Fathers of the Middle Ages also spoke of the invisible, universal church as Christ’s spiritual body, of which local churches are a visible manifestation.

Augustine (354–430)

In this manner was I confounded and converted, and I rejoiced, O my God, that the one Church, the body of Thine only Son (wherein the name of Christ had been set upon me when an infant), did not appreciate these infantile trifles. (*C*, 6.4.5)

“On account of their perversity, [the Donatists] have long ceased to receive from the undivided Catholic Church which is spread throughout the world” (***LSA***, 43.1.1).

“The Church is His body, as the apostles’ teaching shows us; and it is even called

His spouse. His body, then, which has many members, and all performing different functions" (***OCD***, 1.16).

Jerome (c. 340–420)

"Though the Church be seven-fold she is but one" (***TAJ***, 2.19).

"Know ye not that your bodies are a temple of the Holy Ghost?" [
1 Cor. 3:16
]. A temple, he [Paul] says, not temples, in order to show that God dwells in all alike. Call the Church what you will, bride, sister, mother, her assembly is but one and never lacks husband, brother, or son. (ibid.)

Reformation Leaders

Ecclesiology came further into focus during the Reformation because of the differences between Roman Catholics and Protestants. This was true not only of the basis of the church but also of its nature and government. The Reformers placed even more emphasis on the universal church's invisible nature, in opposition to the Catholic stress on one visible organization.

Martin Luther (1483–1546)

The true Church is an assembly or congregation depending on that which does not appear, nor may be comprehended in the mind, namely, God's Word; what that says, they believe without addition, giving God the honor. (*TT*, 367)

Where Christ is not preached, there is no Holy Ghost who creates, calls, and gathers the Christian Church, without which no one can come to Christ the Lord. (***LC***, 2.3.63)
God wonderfully preserved his Gospel in the Church, which now from the pulpits is taught to the people, word by word. In like manner, it is a special great work of God, that the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper,

have remained and cleaved to the hearts of those who were ordained to receive them in the midst of Popedom. (op. cit., 220)

John Calvin (1509–1564)

The judgment which ought to be formed concerning the visible Church which comes under our observation, must, I think, be sufficiently clear from what has been said. I have observed that the Scriptures speak of the Church in two ways. Sometimes when they speak of the Church they mean the Church as it really is before God—the Church into which none are admitted but those who by the gift of adoption are sons of God, and by the sanctification of the Spirit true members of Christ. In this case it not only comprehends the saints who dwell on the earth, but all the elect who have existed from the beginning of the world. Often, too, by the name of Church is designated the whole body of mankind scattered throughout the world.…

In this Church there is a very large mixture of hypocrites, who have nothing of Christ but the name and outward appearance: of ambitious, avaricious, envious, evil-speaking men, some also of impurer lives, who are tolerated for a time, either because their guilt cannot be legally established, or because due strictness of discipline is not always observed. Hence, as it is necessary to believe the invisible Church, which is manifest to the eye of God only, so we are also enjoined to regard this Church which is so called with reference to man, and to cultivate its communion. (*ICR*, 4.1.7)

Post-Reformation Teachers

After the Reformation, and particularly in modern times, the nature of the invisible church has become the center of additional attention. This is true not only in the Anabaptist and independent traditions but also in Reformed circles.

Jacob Arminius (1560–1609)

As many of the called profess with their mouths “that they know God, while in works they deny him”; and since of the hearts of these men, God is the sole judge, who alone “knoweth them that are his”; therefore such persons are judged, on account of the promise, to belong to the visible church, although equivocally, since they do not belong to the invisible Church, have none of that inward communion with the Head,

which is the Form of the church. (*D*, 18.15)

The saints, said to be “built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets,” attribute nothing more to them than their being “laborers together with God” in laying down Christ as this foundation, and in building up the whole house on Him. (ibid., 21.4)

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758)

“Pray much for the ministers and the church of God; especially, that he would carry on his glorious work which he has now begun, till the world shall be full of his glory” (***MJE***, 9).

John Wesley (1703–1791)

A provincial or national Church, according to our article, is the true believers of that province or nation. If these are dispersed up and down, they are only a part of the invisible Church of Christ. But if they are visibly joined by assembling together to hear his word and partake of his supper, they are then a visible Church, such as the Church of England, France, or any other. (*EAMRR*, 77)

Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892)

Our afflictions are the sufferings of Christ mystical, the sufferings of Christ’s body, the sufferings of Christ’s church; for you know that if a man could be so tall as to have his head in heaven and his feet at the bottom of the sea, it would be the same body, and the head would feel the sufferings of the feet. (*SSC*, “CPSS—Sermon 13,” 93)

Let us then be doubly earnest in pleading with the Holy Ghost, that he would come and own our labors; that the whole church at large may be revived thereby, and not ourselves only, but the whole world share in the benefit. (ibid., “PHG—Sermon 4,” 36)

CONCLUSION

While the vast majority of New Testament references to the church (the body of

Christ) refer to the local church,[41] many also refer to the universal church, and others include both aspects. These reveal the God-intended unity between the two, the local being a visible and tangible manifestation of the invisible and universal church.

There are many other ways to refer to this spiritual entity, such as “the firstborn,” “living stones,” “a spiritual house,” “a holy priesthood,” “a chosen generation,” “a holy generation,” “a royal priesthood,” “the people of God,” Christ’s “bride,” the Lamb’s “wife,” and so on. All these figures of speech depict a vital, intimate, and dependent relationship on Christ—the Cornerstone, Head, Husband, and High Priest of His redeemed, the universal church.

This body was elected by God from all eternity; it is invisible (in contrast to the local church); it began on the Day of Pentecost by the baptism of the Holy Spirit; it constitutes an ethnically neutral group of spiritual equality; it was a mystery not known in the Old Testament; and it is to be distinguished from the nation of Israel, not inheriting Israel’s unique blessings, such as the eternal inheritance of the Holy Land given to Abraham and his physical descendants.[42]

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CHAPTER THREE

THE NATURE OF THE VISIBLE CHURCH(ES)

Of the 115 New Testament references to ***church*** or ***churches***,[1] nearly one hundred of them refer to the visible church(es). The biblical writers' efforts were focused in that direction; after all, the invisible church is Christ's spiritual body, which is ***His exclusive work***,[2] while the local visible church(es) are ***a work of Christ's disciples on earth***. The local churches' number, nature, and purpose are the subject of this chapter.

THE NUMBER OF THE LOCAL CHURCH(ES)

Again, in all the scriptural references to visible local churches, there is no mention of one universal visible church, such as the Roman Catholic Church claims to be. Indeed, even though a few New Testament letters (called the General Epistles) were written to a group of churches or to believers scattered abroad, there are none that speak of one visible earthly church.[3]

John wrote to seven local churches: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira,

Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea (Rev. 2–3). Paul addressed most of his epistles to local churches.[4] In fact, while there are some cyclical letters for churches in a given area, such as Galatians (cf. 1:2) and Revelation (cf. 1:10), there are no letters explicitly written to the whole visible church.

Even the General Epistles (Hebrews through James, in the New Testament canon) had less-than-universal targets. Hebrews, for example, is from "Italy" to Hebrew Christians elsewhere (13:24). James nears the status of universal epistle but is still specifically addressed to "the twelve tribes" scattered abroad (1:1). Peter targeted his first letter to "the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" (1:1 nkjv), which falls short of true universality. The audience of his second letter—"those who have obtained like precious faith" (1:1 nkjv)—is less well-defined but yet indefinite, with no indication that the epistle is written to one universal visible church.

While John's first epistle has a fairly general audience, his last two are very specific: 2 John is to "the elect lady and her children" (v. 1 nkjv), which shows it is not to one universal church, and 3 John, to "the beloved Gaius" (v. 1 nkjv), refers to "the church" in which Diotrephes was a member (v. 9), obviously a local congregation. The letter from the apostles in Acts 15, while intended for the whole church, was addressed only to "the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia" (v. 23 kjv). The General Epistles had a specific destination: each of the many self-governing churches that had their own independently chosen elders and deacons[5] and disciplined their own wayward members (cf. 1 Cor. 5:1–5), later restoring them by majority congregational vote if they repented (cf. 2 Cor. 2:6).[6]

Again, repeated biblical usage of the word ***churches***[7] reveals that only in a general, collective sense can we speak of the "church on earth"; there are myriad self-governing, independent "churches" based on New Testament teaching. Even by the time of the last book (Revelation), John, the last living apostle, did not write to any supposed single, universal visible church, but to many individual churches scattered throughout Asia Minor (1:4). "The church," when scripturally used in an unqualified way, almost always refers to the invisible universal church.

THE NATURE OF THE VISIBLE CHURCH

The primary ecclesiastical debate in Christendom, which is over the nature of the visible church, can be divided into several points:

(1) Is there one visible church?[8]
(2) Is the Roman Catholic Church the one visible church? Was Peter appointed by Christ to be the visible head of the church?
(3) Is the present bishop of Rome (the pope) Peter's successor?
(4) Is the pope infallible in official pronouncements on faith and practice?

Catholics affirm all of the above; Protestants deny all of the above.[9]

The Head of the Local Church(es)

Christ is not only the invisible Head of the invisible universal church (see Eph. 1:22–23), He is also the invisible Head of the visible local church(es). This is made clear in Revelation, where He stands in their midst as Lord over them.

Christ As Invisible Head Over the Seven Churches in Asia Minor

This is biblically manifest in numerous ways:

(1) He holds the "messengers" (1:20) in His right hand.
(2) He rebukes the churches for their sin (2:9).
(3) He commands them to repent (v. 5).
(4) He will judge and reward them for their deeds (vv. 5, 10, 26; 3:12).
(5) He takes away their lampstand (church) if they are not faithful (v. 5).

(6) He searches all of their minds and hearts (v. 23 nkjv).
(7) He convicts them by His Spirit (3:22).

It is noteworthy that Christ addresses each of the seven (Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea) as an individual church; collectively they are known as "churches" (2:11, 17, 29, etc): "***All the churches*** shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts" (2:23 nkjv). There is no thought of an overarching, singular visible church; there are individual churches that Christ commands, scrutinizes, rebukes, or rewards. He is the invisible Head of all visible churches.

Local Church Leaders Submit to Christ's Headship

Though each individual New Testament church has its own elders and deacons,[10] they are undershepherds of Christ, who is the invisible Shepherd of all:

> Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. (
>
> 1 Peter 5:2–3
>
>)

Further, that they have their own elders who guide the church under Christ demonstrates that they do not have one bishop who rules over a group or over all the churches.

Even Individual Apostles Submitted to a Local Church

To be sure, the apostles, ***as apostles of Christ***, had authority to establish doctrine and practice in the churches (Acts 2:42; 2 Cor. 12:12), and at times they sent their delegates to set things in order (Titus 1:5). Nevertheless, they respected the local churches' authority and leadership. This is evident in that, first, they exhorted the churches to "obey those who rule over you" (Heb. 13:17 nkjv), and, second, they urged the local church to choose their own leaders (Acts 6:3), to

excommunicate unruly members (1 Cor. 5:4ff.; Titus 3:10), and to settle their own disputes (1 Cor. 6:1–11). Paul submitted to a leader of a local church to be baptized (Acts 22:10–16), and he was sent out as a missionary under the authority of a local church (13:1–2).

The Relation of the Local Church to Apostolic Doctrine

In a doctrinal dispute, the local church was subject to the authority of the apostles. The church was built on their doctrinal foundation (Eph. 2:20) and "continued steadfastly" therein (Acts 2:42 nkjv; cf. Titus 1:5–9). For our understanding, an exposition of the relevant Acts 15 text is necessary.

The Occasion of the Dispute

Antioch was Paul's home church; from this church he was sent out on his missionary journeys (Acts 13:1–2), and to this church he reported back about his missionary activity (14:27). Significantly, it was to the Antioch church that zealous teachers "came from Judea" and insisted that "unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved" (15:1). Paul and Barnabas disputed with them, and consequently the church at Antioch determined that Paul, Barnabas, and others should go to "the [Jerusalem] apostles and elders about this question" (v. 2). They preached on "the conversion of the Gentiles, and they caused great rejoicing among all the brethren" (v. 3 amp).

Upon arriving, the Antioch contingent was "received by the church" at Jerusalem and by "the apostles and the elders" (v. 4 nkjv). They reported on the conversion of the Gentiles (v. 4), but "some of the sect of the Pharisees" opposed Paul and insisted that they "circumcise them [his Gentile converts], and to command them to keep the law of Moses" (v. 5 nkjv).

The Parties of the Dispute

The principle parties were Paul and Barnabas on one side (Acts 15:1–2, 5), and

the teachers from Judea who were a “sect of the Pharisees” (Judaizers) on the other (v. 5). The latter believed that one must be circumcised and keep the law of Moses in order to be saved; the former (from the Antioch church) had already debated the issue and now wanted to discuss it with the leaders of the Jerusalem church (the third party).

The Subject of the Dispute

“Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter” (v. 6 nkjv). The issue to consider was twofold: (1) Do Gentile converts need to be circumcised to be saved? and (2) Do they need to keep the Mosaic law? This issue was repeated later in the council’s letter, which contained the Judaizers’ claim that “you must be circumcised and keep the law” (v. 24 nkjv).

Participants in the Dispute

Those who participated were “apostles and elders” (v. 6), other unnamed disputants (v. 7), “the multitude” (v. 12 nkjv), Simon Peter (vv. 6–11), Paul and Barnabas (v. 12), and James (vv. 13–21), a leader in the Jerusalem church and “the Lord’s brother” (Gal. 1:19).
After there “had been much dispute,” Peter rose and testified:

(1) God saved Gentiles through His Word (Acts 15:7).
(2) God had acknowledged the legitimacy of their conversion by giving them His Holy Spirit (v. 8).
(3) God purified their hearts by faith and made no spiritual distinction between them and Jewish converts to the faith (v. 9).

Peter then

(4) urged the group not to put a yoke [of the law] on Gentile converts that not even Jews could bear (v. 10); and
(5) concluded, “We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they” (v. 11 nkjv).

Paul and Barnabas then took the floor, and when they spoke, “all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles God had worked through them among the Gentiles” (v. 12 nkjv). As elsewhere, Paul considered this a divine confirmation of their message (2 Cor. 12:12; cf. Heb. 2:3–4).

Then James summed up the issue:

(1) God had saved Gentiles through Peter’s ministry (v. 14).
(2) The Old Testament prophets agree, as Amos 9:11–12 says: “ ‘In that day I will restore David’s fallen tent. I will repair its broken places, restore its ruins, and build it as it used to be, so that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations that bear my name,’ declares the Lord, who will do these things” (cf. Acts 15:15–17).
(3) God planned this from all eternity (v. 18).
(4) Hence, we should not make keeping the law for Gentiles who are coming to faith in Christ difficult, but ask them only “to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood” (v. 20), adding that Moses (the law) had been read on the Sabbath in the synagogues for many generations (v. 21).

The Decision on the Dispute

The decision-making group was the “apostles and elders, ***with the whole church***” at Jerusalem (v. 22). Originally, the Antioch representatives went up “to the apostles and elders” (v. 2), who “came together to consider this matter” (v. 6 nkjv), but the ruling was made by the apostles and elders ***with the congregation***. This involvement of the local church is an early example of something they would be compelled to do on their own (based on apostolic teaching) after the apostles died. (See appendix 8.)

The content of the decision is recorded in verses 24–29 (nkjv), beginning with “We have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, ‘You must be circumcised and keep the law.’ ”In short, since the Jerusalem church was the source of the people who went to the Antioch church and caused the dispute, they were responding, and their response

was terse: ***"We gave no such commandment***" (v. 24). They then referred to being "assembled with one accord" (v. 25) and sending chosen men to Antioch, men who'd risked their lives for Christ (vv. 25–26). These included Judas (Barsabas) and Silas, who would confirm the content of the statement (v. 27). Then the statement itself opens with these words:

> It seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things [namely,] that you [1] abstain from things offered to idols, [2] from blood, [3] from things strangled, and [4] from sexual immorality. (vv. 28–29 nkjv)

The statement ("letter") concludes with, "If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell" (ibid.).

The decision's authority is plainly revealed by three factors:

(1) It was made by "apostles," who, again, had authority in such doctrinal matters.[11]
(2) There is a reference to the apostle's ability to make a "commandment" in such cases (v. 24).
(3) This ruling was later labeled by Paul as "the decrees to keep" (16:4).

The Destination of the Decision

The decision's destination is described as "to Antioch" (15:22), which was the church that had raised the question (v. 2). However, it was also addressed more broadly "to the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia" (v. 23 nkjv), i.e., intended for Gentile believers in general.

Conclusions

Several conclusions may be drawn from examining this text.

First, although the decision was occasioned by one local church, it is applicable to all believers who may raise this question (v. 23).
Second, since the appeal was made to the apostles and the decision came from them, it has apostolic authority and is not simply an opinion expressed by one local church to another.[12]
Third, although the issue affected the Christian church as a whole, it was not really "the first church council," as is often stated by commentators. Two churches were directly involved, not all churches—there was no general call by any political or ecclesiastical hierarchy for all local congregations to send representatives to decide the issue.[13]
Fourth, there is no idea of appealing to an authoritative or infallible bishop, of Rome or anyone/anywhere else, to make an ***ex cathedra***[14] pronouncement. Indeed, Peter, who simply gave his testimony, doesn't seem to have been in charge of the meeting; if anyone, James was leading, since he had the last word on the matter (vv. 13–21).
Fifth, because this was a doctrinal matter and living apostles were involved (we do not have living apostles today, but apostolic writings,[15]) this cannot be a procedural example for today in all respects.
Sixth, and finally, as we have seen, the local church's role in this decision is significant:

(1) The issue was raised by a local church about those who had come to another local church with their teaching.
(2) The meeting was held in another local church.
(3) The representatives were recognized by the local church.
(4) Elders of the local church were part of the decision.
(5) The local church concurred in the decision.
(6) The decision went back to the local church and to other local churches.

The Authority of Apostolic Delegates in the Local Church

There were also times when the apostles exercised authority on other local church matters. In the very early church, they brought divine judgment on Ananias and Sapphira for lying to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1–6), clearly an act of God that demonstrated their apostolic authority (cf. 2 Cor. 12:12).

At other times the apostles sent their delegates to handle problems. Paul told Titus, "The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you" (Titus 1:5). Several facts must be noted here.

First, this work was part of an apostle's foundational task in establishing a church.

Second, an apostle appointed elders to establish a self-governing independent church.

Third, what an apostle was doing through his delegate was doctrinal; only a few verses later Paul wrote of an elder (bishop)[16] that "he must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by ***sound doctrine*** and refute those who oppose it" (1:9). He added, "But as for you, speak the things which are proper for ***sound doctrine***" (2:1). The church was to continue faithfully in apostolic teaching (Acts 2:42), and the apostle's delegate was to establish "elders" who would help to preserve this path. There is no contradiction between the apostles and the autonomous, independent local churches they were establishing. The "angels" (lit: "messengers") to the seven churches in Revelation 1–3 appear to have been apostolic delegates sent by John to put things in order in those congregations. (See appendix 8.)

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC VIEW OF THE VISIBLE CHURCH

Regarding the visible church(es), the primary debate in Christendom is over the Roman Catholic claim that Christ established one visible organization on earth with a visible head, the infallible teaching magisterium to be identified with the Catholic Church; the Roman pontiff (pope) is the alleged successor of St. Peter, whom Christ supposedly appointed as the first pope and bishop of Rome. All other branches of Christendom, including Eastern Orthodoxy, Anglicanism, and all forms of Protestantism, reject this claim. The Anglican and Orthodox

Churches do have their own episcopal form of government,[17] the difference being that neither acknowledge the bishop of Rome (pope) as their head.
The Roman Catholic view is further distinguished by its belief in the pope's infallibility when speaking ***ex cathedra*** (lit: "from the chair"), that is, as the official interpreter of faith and practice. Of course, this presupposes several other beliefs, such as the Catholic Church's divinely appointed identity as the specific ecclesiastical jurisdiction (true church) that Christ started and a set of divinely appointed doctrines and practices it administers. Since many of these issues are discussed elsewhere,[18] focus here will be on the pope's alleged infallibility.

Statement of the Roman Catholic View[19]

According to Catholic dogma, Rome's teaching magisterium is infallible when officially defining faith and morals for believers. One manifestation of this doctrine is popularly known as "papal infallibility," pronounced as dogma in 1870 at the First Vatican Council (Vatican I). Roman Catholic authorities define infallibility "as immunity from error, i.e., protection against either passive or active deception. Persons or agencies are infallible to the extent that they can neither deceive nor be deceived" (Dulles, "IT" in ***TA***, 71).
Vatican I concluded,

> All the faithful of Christ must believe that the Apostolic See and the Roman Pontiff hold primacy over the whole world, and that the Pontiff of Rome himself is the successor of the blessed Peter, the chief of the apostles, and is the true vicar of Christ and head of the whole Church and faith, and teacher of all Christians.... To him was handed down in blessed Peter, by our Lord Jesus Christ, full power to feed, rule, and guide the universal Church, just as is also contained in the records of the ecumenical Councils and in the sacred canons. (in Denzinger, *SCD*, 454)

The council went on to speak of "The Infallible 'Magisterium' of the Roman Pontiff":

> When he speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, when carrying out the duty of the pastor and teacher of all Christians in accord with his *supreme apostolic authority*, he explains a

doctrine of faith or morals to be held by the Universal Church.... [This he has] through the divine assistance promised him in blessed Peter, *operates with that infallibility with which the divine Redeemer wished* that His church be instructed in defining doctrine on faith and morals; and so *such definitions of the Roman Pontiff from himself*, but not from the consensus of the Church, *are unalterable*. (ibid., 457, emphasis added)

All who reject this are anathematized—excommunicated and condemned to hell by the Church—unless they repent (ibid.).

Qualifications to Papal Infallibility

Roman Catholic scholars have expounded significant qualifications on the doctrine of papal infallibility.
First, the pope is not infallible in everything he teaches, but only when he speaks ***ex cathedra*** as the official interpreter of faith and morals. Avery Dulles (b. 1918), an authority on Catholic dogma, states the conditions for a pope's ***ex cathedra*** pronouncement are that it must be:

(1) in fulfillment of his office as supreme pastor and teacher of all Christians;
(2) in virtue of his supreme apostolic authority, i.e., as successor of Peter;
(3) determining a doctrine of faith and morals, i.e., a doctrine expressing divine revelation;
(4) imposing a doctrine to be held definitively by all. ("IT," 79–80)

Dulles notes that "Vatican I firmly rejected one condition … as necessary for infallibility, namely, the consent of the whole church" (ibid., 79).

Second, the pope is not infallible when pronouncing on matters not pertaining to faith and morals, wherein he may be as fallible as anyone else.
Third, the pope is infallible but not absolutely: "Absolute infallibility (in all respects, without dependence on another) is proper to God.… All other infallibility is derivative and limited in scope" (ibid., 72).

Fourth, infallibility entails irrevocability. A pope cannot, for example, declare void previous ***ex cathedra*** pronouncements of the church.
Fifth, and finally, in contrast to Vatican I, many (usually liberal or progressive) Catholic theologians believe that the pope is not infallible independently of the bishops, but only infallible as he speaks in one voice with and for them in collegiality; infallibility "is often attributed to the bishops as a group, to ecumenical councils, and to popes" (ibid.). Conservatives argue that Vatican I condemned this view.[20]

Roman Catholic Arguments in Support of Papal Infallibility

Ludwig Ott (b. 1906), in his authoritative work on the ***Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma***, offers the two standard arguments for papal infallibility: the proof from Scripture and the proof from tradition.

The Catholic Arguments for Papal Infallibility From Scripture

Ott argues,

> Christ made Peter the foundation of His Church, that is, the guarantor of her unity and unshakable strength, and promised her a duration that will not pass away (Matt. 16 , 18). However, the unity and solidarity of the Church is not possible without the right Faith. Peter is, therefore, also the supreme teacher of the Faith. As such he must be infallible in the official promulgation of Faith, in his own person and in his successors. (*FCD*, 287)

Ott appeals to John 21:15–17 to prove that "Christ installed Peter (and his successors) as the supreme pastor over the whole flock":

> The task of teaching Christian truth and of protecting it from error is part of the function of the supreme pastor. But he could not fulfill this task if, in the exercise of his supreme teaching office, he himself were subject to error. (ibid., 287–88)

For further support, Ott cites Luke 22:32(ff.), where Christ said to Peter, "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not" (kjv). Ott insists that "the reason for Christ's praying for Peter especially was that Peter, after his own conversion, should confirm his brethren in their faith, which clearly indicates Peter's position as head of the Apostles" (ibid., 288).

John 11:49–52 also is used by some Catholics to defend papal infallibility. Caiaphas, in his official capacity as high priest, made an unwitting prophecy about Christ dying for the nation of Israel so they would not perish. Since in the Old Testament the high priest had an official revelatory function connected with his office, Catholics claim it's to be expected that the same would be true in the New Testament, and that this is indeed manifest in the bishop of Rome.

The Catholic Arguments for Papal Infallibility From Tradition

Ott also bases his belief about papal infallibility in the early fathers who "attest the decisive teaching authority of the Roman Church and its Pontiff." Irenaeus said, "With this Church on account of its special eminence, every other Church must agree … in her apostolic traditions [she] has always been kept pure" (***AH***, 3.3.2). Ott further argues that "the teaching Primacy of the Pope from the earliest times was expressed in practice in the condemnation of heretical opinions" (***FCD***, 288), supporting this view by citing Thomas Aquinas, who argued that the papal office had the official power "finally to decide questions of faith, so that they may be held with unshakable faith by all" (ibid., 289). Of course, all Catholic theologians admit that papal infallibility was not officially proclaimed as dogma by the Roman Church until 1870 (Vatican I), and, as we will see, even then it was done under questionable circumstances and with significant opposition.

A Protestant Response to Papal Infallibility

Not only Protestants but also the rest of Christendom—Anglicans and Eastern

Orthodox included—reject papal infallibility.[21] Protestants embrace scriptural infallibility but deny that any human being or institution is Scripture's infallible interpreter. Harold O. J. Brown (b. 1933) writes:

> In every age there have been those who considered the claims of a single bishop to supreme authority to be a sure identification of the corruption of the church, and perhaps even the work of the Antichrist. Pope Gregory I (r. 590–604) indignantly reproached Patriarch John the Faster of Constantinople for calling himself the universal bishop; Gregory did so to defend the rights of all the bishops, himself included, and not because he wanted the title for himself. (*PTP*, 122)

Even within modern Catholicism the doctrine of papal infallibility is not without its opponents. Hans Küng (b. 1928), for instance, wrote a pointed critique in ***Infallible? An Inquiry***, for which he was censured and forbidden to teach under the auspices of the Roman Church.

Response to the Arguments for Papal Infallibility From Scripture

There are several texts Catholics use to defend papal infallibility. Among the Protestant responses are the following points.

Matthew 16:18(ff.)

Roman Catholics use Jesus' statement to Peter—"Upon this rock I will build my church (kjv)"—to support papal infallibility. Properly understood, though, this passage falls far short of support for the dogma.

First, many Protestants, insisting that Christ was not referring to Peter when He spoke of "this rock" being the church's foundation,[22] note:

(1) Whenever Peter is referred to in this passage, it is in the second person;[23] the "this rock" is in the third person.

(2) Further, "Peter" (Gk: ***Petros***) is a masculine singular term, and "rock" (Gk: ***petra***) is feminine singular. Hence, they do not have the same

referent, and even if Jesus spoke these words in Aramaic (which does not distinguish genders), the inspired text is in Greek (which does make such distinctions).

(3) What is more, the same authority to bind given to Peter (v. 18) is given later to all the apostles (18:18).

(4) In addition, no Catholic commentator gives primacy in ***evil*** to Peter simply because he was singled out by Jesus' rebuke a few verses later: "Get behind me, Satan!" (16:23). Why then should they give primacy in ***authority*** to Peter because Jesus singled him out in response to affirmation of His identity? It makes sense for Jesus to have replied to Peter; only Peter spoke, but he was representing the group.

(5) Renowned authorities (some Catholic) can be cited in agreement with this interpretation, including John Chrysostom and Augustine, who wrote: " 'On this rock,' therefore, He said, which thou hast confessed, 'I will build my Church.' For the Rock (***petra***) is Christ; and on this foundation was Peter himself built" (***OGJ*** in Schaff, ***NPNF***, 106).

Second, even if Peter were the rock referred to by Jesus,[24] he would not be the ***only*** rock in the church's foundation. Again, Jesus gave all the apostles the same power to "bind" and "loose" (18:18); these were common rabbinic terms used for "forbidding" and "allowing." The "keys" were not some mysterious power reserved for one person, but the power granted by Christ to His church upon which, when they proclaim the gospel, they can proclaim God's forgiveness of sin to all who believe. Jesus breathed on all the disciples and gave them the power to forgive sins (John 20:21–23) through the proclamation of the gospel (Luke 24:46–49; cf. Matt. 28:18–20). John Calvin noted,

> Since heaven is opened to us by the doctrine of the gospel, the word "keys" affords an appropriate metaphor. Now men are bound and loosed in no other way than when faith reconciles some to God, while their own unbelief constrains others the more. (*ICR*, 1105)

From the scriptural affirmation that the church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone" (Eph. 2:20), two things are clear: (1) ***All*** the apostles (not just Peter) are the church's foundation; and (2) The ***only*** one given a place of uniqueness was Christ, the

Capstone. Indeed, Peter himself refers to Christ as “the capstone” of the church (1 Peter 2:7) and the rest of believers as “living stones” (v. 5) in the church’s superstructure. There is no indication that Peter was given special prominence in the church’s foundation (above the rest of the apostles and below Christ); Peter is one stone along with the others.

Third, Peter’s New Testament role falls far short of the Catholic argument that he was given unique authority among the apostles.[25]

(1) While Peter did use the keys of the kingdom in opening the door of the gospel to Jews (Acts 2) and Gentiles (Acts 10), his role in the rest of Acts is not that of chief apostle; he is no more than ***one of*** the “most eminent apostles” (***plural***, 2 Cor. 12:11 nkjv).

(2) Under God’s inspiration, Paul revealed that no other apostle was superior to him: “I am not in the least inferior to the [so-called ‘superapostles’ ” (2 Cor. 12:11).[26]

(3) No one reading Galatians carefully can come away with the impression that ***any*** apostle is ***superior*** to Paul, who received his revelation independently of the other apostles (Gal. 1:12; 2:2) to be granted the same status (2:8), even using that revelation to rebuke Peter when necessary (vv. 11–14).[27]

(4) That both Peter and John were sent by the apostles on a mission to Samaria reveals that Peter was not ***the*** superior apostle (Acts 8:4–13).

(5) Indeed, if Peter were the God-ordained superior apostle, it would be strange that more attention is given to the ministry of Paul than to Peter’s in Acts. Peter is the focus in chapters 1–12; Paul is the dominant figure in 13–28.[28]

(6) Though Peter addressed the council in Acts 15, he exercised no primacy over the others; once again, the decision came from “the apostles and elders, with the consent of the whole church” (v. 22 tlb, cf. v. 23) and many scholars feel that James, not Peter, presided over the council (cf. vv. 13–21).[29]

(7) In any event, by Peter’s own admission he was not ***the*** pastor of the

church but a "***fellow*** elder" (1 Peter 5:1–2). While he said he was "***an*** apostle" (1:1), he nowhere claimed to be "***the*** apostle" or the chief of apostles; he was one of the church's "pillars" (***plural***) (Gal. 2:9).

Fourth, however Peter's role in the early church is understood, there is absolutely no reference to his having any kind of infallibility. While the word ***infallible*** never occurs in the New Testament, when parallel words or phrases do occur, they are used in reference to God's Word alone, not anyone's ability to interpret it: "***Scripture*** cannot be set aside" (John 10:35 amp), and "until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished" (Matt. 5:18 tlb).

This is not to say that Peter didn't have a significant role in the early church; he did. He even seems to have been the initial leader of the apostolic group and, again, was one of the early church's pillars. Regardless, there is no evidence in Matthew 16 or any other text for the dogma of Peter's superiority (to say nothing of infallibility).

Fifth, and finally, whatever apostolic powers Peter and the other apostles possessed, it is clear that these were not passed on to anyone after their deaths. The repeated New Testament criterion[30] is that apostles had to be first-century eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ; there could be no true apostolic succession in the bishop of Rome or in anyone else. Jesus said, "I will give ***you*** [not to "your successors"] the keys of the kingdom" (Matt. 16:19). The "keys" Peter used to open the door of the gospel to both Jews (Acts 2) and Gentiles (Acts 10) were singular, onetime events,[31] with no New Testament indication that divine, apostolic (let alone infallible) authority was given to the apostles' successors.

Further, these original, select individuals were given certain unmistakable "signs of an apostle" (2 Cor. 12:12 nkjv), including the ability to raise the dead on command (Matt. 10:8), immediately heal diseases that were naturally incurable (ibid.; John 9:1–7), bring supernatural judgment on believers who lied to God (Acts 5), perform instantly successful exorcisms (16:16–18), speak messages in languages they had never studied (2:1–8; cf. 10:44–46), and give gifts to others so that they could assist in the apostolic mission of founding the church.[32]

These unique miraculous powers ceased during their lives;[33] Hebrews (c. 68–69) refers to these gifts as already past:

> This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will. (2:3–4)

Jude, writing late in the first century (c. 71 or later), speaks of "faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (v. 3 tlb), exhorting his hearers to "remember the words that were spoken ***beforehand*** by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 17 nasb). Here too the miraculously confirmed apostolic message was spoken of as ***past***.[34]

In addition, these miraculous signs were specifically given to the apostles to establish their authority as Christ's representatives in founding His church. Jesus had promised them "power" to be his witnesses (Acts 1:8); Paul spoke of "the signs of an apostle" in confirming his authority to the Corinthians, some of whom had challenged it (2 Cor. 12:12 nkjv); again, Hebrews 2:3–4 highlights the apostolic miracles as being given to confirm that God chose them. It was God's pattern (from the time of Moses on) to give unique abilities to his servants to confirm that their revelations were from Him.[35]

In summation, because apostles had to be first-century eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ, because they were given certain unmistakable apostolic signs to establish their authority, and because these miraculous powers ceased during their lifetimes, it follows that no one since has possessed apostolic authority. The absence of these apostolic gifts proves the absence of apostolic authority; what remains today is the apostolic ***teachings*** (in the New Testament) not the ***office*** of the apostles. The authority of the apostolic ***writings*** replaced the authority of the apostolic ***writers***.

John 21:15–17 (nkjv)

In this passage Jesus says to Peter, "Feed My lambs," "tend My sheep," and

“feed My sheep.” Roman Catholic scholars believe this shows that ***Peter alone*** was given infallible authority to be ***the*** pastor of the whole Christian church. A careful examination of the text reveals that this is a serious overclaim.

First, whether this passage is taken of Peter alone or of all the disciples, there is absolutely no reference to infallible authority. Jesus is addressing pastoral care; feeding is a God-given pastoral function that even non-apostles had in the New Testament.[36] One need not be an infallible shepherd in order to properly feed his flock.

Second, if Peter had infallibility—which, essentially, is the ability not to mislead—why did he mislead believers and have to be rebuked by Paul for so doing (Gal. 2:11–14)? The infallible Scriptures, accepted by Roman Catholics, on one occasion declare of Peter, “He clearly was wrong” and “stood condemned”:[37] Peter “acted hypocritically … with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy.” Here ***hypocrisy*** is defined by the Catholic Bible (asv) as “pretense, play-acting; moral insincerity.” Peter’s having led believers astray is hard to reconcile with the Catholic claim that as the universal church’s infallible pastor he would not and could not do so.

The Catholic response that Peter was not infallible in his actions but only his ***ex cathedra*** words rings hollow: Actions speak louder than words. Actions are the domain of morals, and the pope is alleged to be infallible in faith ***and*** morals; accordingly, the despicable behavior of some popes[38] is revealing. Peter cannot both be an infallible guide for faith and morals and also mislead other believers on an important matter of faith and morals (cf. Gal. 2).

Third, contrary to Catholic insistence, the overall import of John 21:15–17 speaks more to Peter’s weakness and need of restoration than to his supposed unique powers. The reason Peter is singled out to be restored is that only Peter denied the Lord three times; here Jesus was not exalting Peter above the other apostles, but bringing him back to their status.[39]

Fourth, and finally, in view of the New Testament titles used of Peter, it’s clear he would never have accepted those used of the pope today, like “Holy Father” (cf. Matt. 23:9), “Supreme Pontiff,” or “Vicar of Christ.” The Vicar of Christ on earth today is the Holy Spirit (John 14:16, 26; 16:13–14). Also, as noted earlier, Peter referred to himself in much more humble terms: “***an*** apostle,” not ***the*** apostle (1 Peter 1:1), and “***fellow*** elder” (5:1).

John 11:49–52

As mentioned (regarding Caiaphas), the Catholic argument is that since the Old Testament high priest had an official revelatory function connected with his office, it is to be expected that there would be a New Testament equivalent (namely, the pope). This contention begs the question and is gravely flawed.
First, this is merely an argument from analogy, not based on any New Testament affirmation.
Second, the New Testament affirmations about the Old Testament priesthood reject this analogy, explicitly stating that the Old Testament priesthood has been abolished: "There is a change of priesthood" from that of Aaron (Heb. 7:12), the Aaronic priesthood having been fulfilled in Christ, who is a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek (vv. 15–17).
Third, Catholics acknowledge that there is no new revelation after the time of the New Testament; thus, no one (popes included) after the first century can have a revelatory function in the sense of giving new revelations.
Fourth, and finally, there was a New Testament revelatory function: the apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20; cf. 3:5), whose revelation ceased when they died.

Response to the Arguments for Papal Infallibility From Tradition

That there is evidence Peter eventuated in Rome (cf. 1 Peter 5:13)[40] and was, by virtue of being an apostle, the leader in its church falls far short of establishing a basis for papal authority. There are crucial links missing in this chain of reasoning. For one thing, evidence is lacking that Peter was appointed by Christ as His successor, the head of the visible church.[41] For another, there is no real evidence of any living apostolic succession after Peter. To the contrary, there are strong lines of evidence that support no living apostolic authority after the apostles: (1) "the signs of an apostle" (2 Cor. 12:12 nkjv) ceased—these were the credentials of an apostle[42]—and (2) there was consistent belief that only the Bible is the infallible authority for faith and practice. Consider the following

citations.[43]

Irenaeus, who is reported to have heard Polycarp, the disciple of the apostle John, declared in his treatise ***Against Heresies***:

> The Lord of all gave the power of the Gospel to his apostles, through whom we have come to know the truth, that is, the teaching of the Son of God.... This Gospel they first preached. Afterwards, by the will of God, they handed it down to us in the Scriptures, to be "the pillar and ground" of our faith. (3.1.1)

Tertullian, "The Father of Latin Theology," maintained that the four gospels "are reared on the certain basis of Apostolic authority, and so are inspired in a far different sense from the writings of the spiritual Christian; all the faithful, it is true, have the Spirit of God, but all are not Apostles" (in Westcott, ***ISG***, 434). The "apostles have the Holy Spirit properly, who have Him fully, in the operations of prophecy, and the efficacy of [healing] virtues, and the evidences of tongues; not particularly, as all others have" (in Schaff, ***OEC***, 4).

J. N. D. Kelly (1909–1997), a highly regarded authority on early church doctrine, affirmed:

> There is little need to dwell on the absolute authority accorded to the Scripture as a doctrinal norm. It was the Bible, declared *Clement of Alexandria* about a.d. 200, which, as interpreted by the Church, was the source of Christian teaching. His greater disciple *Origen* was a thorough-going biblicist who appealed again and again to Scripture as the decisive criterion of dogma.... "The holy inspired Scriptures," wrote *Athanasius* a century later, "are fully sufficient for the proclamation of the truth." Later in the same century *John Chrysostom* bade his congregation seek no other teacher than the oracles of God. (*ECD*, 42–43)

Jerome declared,

> I beg you ... to live among these books, to meditate upon them, to know nothing else, to seek nothing else. Does not such a life seem to you a foretaste of heaven here on earth? Let not the simplicity of the scripture offend you; for these are due either to faults of translators or else to deliberate purpose: for in this way it is better fitted for instruction. (*LSJ*, 53.10, 102)

Also, Augustine said,

When they [the apostles] write that He [Christ] has taught and said, it should not be asserted that he did not write it since the members only put down what they had come to know at the dictation [*dictis*] of the Head. Therefore, whatever He wanted us to read concerning His words and deeds, He commanded His disciples, His hands, to write. Hence, one cannot but receive what he reads in the Gospels, though written by the disciples, as though it were written by the very hand of the Lord Himself. (*HG*, 1.35)

Consequently, he added, “I have learned to yield this respect and honour only to the canonical books of Scripture: of these alone do I most firmly believe that the authors were completely free from error” (ibid., 40). “If we are perplexed by any apparent contradiction in Scripture, it is not allowable to say, the author of this book is mistaken: but either the manuscript is faulty, or the translation is wrong, or you have misunderstood” (***AF***, 11.5).

In *Cur Deus Homo?* Anselm declared: “The God-man himself originates the New Testament and approves the Old. And, as we must acknowledge him to be true, so no one can dissent from anything contained in these books” (***SABW***, 287–88). As archbishop of Canterbury, Anselm addressed the question of biblical authority in another treatise: “What is said in Scripture … I believe without doubting, of course” (***TFWE***, 185).

In *Summa Theologica*, Thomas Aquinas stated, “The Author of Holy Scripture is God.” The Scriptures are “divine revelation” (1.1.1.8.2) and “without error” (2.1.6.1 in ***CBJ***, 13.1). “That God is the author of Holy Scripture should be acknowledged.… The author of holy Scripture is God” (***ST***, 1a.1.10). Thus, “revelation is the basis of sacred Scripture or doctrine” (1a.1–2; 2); the Bible is “divinely inspired Scripture” (1a.1.1). Aquinas maintained that we stood in need of an errorless “divine revelation,” otherwise the “rational truth about God would have appeared only to a few, and even so after a long time and mixed with many mistakes” (ibid.).

“It is heretical to say that any falsehood whatsoever is contained either in the gospels or in any canonical Scripture” (***CBJ***, 13.1); “a true prophet is always inspired by the spirit of truth in whom there is no trace of falsehood, and so he never utters untruths” (op. cit., 2a2ae.172.6.2). “Nothing false can underlie the literal sense of Scripture” (1a.1.10.3); therefore, “the truth of prophetic proclamations must … be the same as that of divine knowledge. And falsity … cannot creep into prophecy” (1a.14.3).

Agreeing with Augustine, Aquinas confessed of Holy Scripture, “I firmly

believe that none of their authors have erred in composing them" (1a.1.8). In this same passage he referred to Scripture as "unfailing truth" and concurred with the later Protestant principle of *sola scriptura*, the Bible alone as the inerrant Word of God, the totally sufficient norm for our faith:

> We believe the prophets and apostles because the Lord has been their witness by performing miracles.... And *we believe the successors of the apostles and the prophets only in so far as they tell us those things which the apostles and prophets have left in their writings*. (*OT*, XIV.10.11, emphasis added)

"The truth of faith is contained in sacred Scripture" (***ST***, 2a2ae.1.9), and "the reason for this is that ***only the canonical Scriptures are normative for faith***. Whereas others who write about the truth do so in such a way that they do not want to be believed unless what they affirm is true" (***CGJ***, 21.6, emphasis added).

There were, of course, early fathers who appealed to the authority of certain leaders and traditions, but this once again falls far short of their having claimed there was a divinely appointed, living infallible authority seated in Rome. The Catholic Church's "infallible pronouncement of the pope's infallibility" in 1870 is not only more than eighteen centuries late, it is also without biblical, theological, or historical foundation.

OTHER ARGUMENTS AGAINST PAPAL INFALLIBILITY

In addition to the total lack of scriptural support and equivocal backing from tradition, there are many other arguments against papal infallibility, here categorized as theological, philosophical, and historical.

Theological Problems With Papal Infallibility

The Problem of Heretical Popes

For instance, Pope Honorius I (r. 625–638) was condemned by the Sixth General Council (680–681) for teaching the monothelite heresy (that there was only one will in Christ);[44] Ludwig Ott admits that "Pope Leo II (r. 682–683) confirmed his anathematization" (***FCD***, 150). We are left, then, with the incredible situation of an infallible pope teaching a fallible (and heretical) doctrine. If the papal teaching office cannot mislead on doctrine and ethics, how could a pope's teaching be heretical? To claim that the pope was ***not*** infallible on this occasion only further undermines the doctrine of infallibility: How can a pope know when his doctrinal pronouncements are or are not infallible? Without an infallible list,[45] the Catholic Church cannot provide infallible guidance on doctrine and morals; if the pope can be fallible on one doctrine, why can't he be fallible on another?

Further, Ott's comment that Leo II did not condemn Honorius I with heresy "but with negligence in the suppression of error" (ibid.) is an ineffective defense. *First*, it still raises serious questions as to how Pope Honorius could be an infallible guide in faith and morals while teaching heresy; the Catholic response that he was not speaking ***ex cathedra*** on this point is convenient but inadequate. Even if such a distinction ***were*** to exist, invoking it would only tend to undermine the authority of the far more numerous occasions when the pope is allegedly speaking with authority but not with infallibility.

Second, it does not explain why the Sixth General Council condemned Honorius as a heretic.

Third, disclaiming papal infallibility on this and like situations makes supposedly infallible pronouncements extremely rare; for example, by this standard, a pope has spoken ***ex cathedra*** only one time in the last hundred years (on the bodily assumption of Mary). "Infallibility" exercised this rarely has almost no practical value on almost all occasions. With the pope nearly always having only fallible speech, Catholics are bound to accept his authority on faith and morals when he may be (and sometimes has been) wrong. The infallible guidance the papacy is supposed to provide is negligible at best; and, by the Church's admission, on the overwhelming number of occasions there is no supposed infallible guidance at all.

Also, in 1590, Pope Sixtus V authorized a version of the Bible that alleged to have full authority for all future time. Its preface declared, "By the fullness of apostolic power, we decree and declare that this edition, approved by the

authority delivered to us by the Lord, is to be received and held as true, lawful, authentic, and unquestioned, in all public and private discussions, reading, preaching and explanations."

If ever an infallible pope laid claim to an infallible pronouncement, this is it. However, the Pope Sixtus' version of the Bible was so error-ridden with thousands of mistakes that it had to be revised only two years later (see Mathison, ***SSS***, 222). So much for papal infallibility!

The Problem of Revelational Insufficiency

One of the chief reasons given by Catholic authorities for an infallible teaching magisterium is that we need infallible guidance to understand God's infallible revelation, lest it be misinterpreted.

There are at least two problems with this. For one thing, how is an infallible interpretation any better than the infallible revelation? Divine revelation is a disclosure or unveiling by God; to claim that God's infallible unveiling needs further infallible unveiling is to say it was not properly unveiled to begin with. To be sure, there is a difference between objective disclosure (revelation) and subjective discovery (understanding), but the central problem in this regard is not in our ***perception*** of God's truth (cf. Rom. 1:19–20). More critical to the truth of God's revelation is ***reception***; the "natural man does not ***accept***[46] the things of the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. 2:14 tlb). He cannot "know"[47] these truths because he does not receive them into his life, even though he understands them in his mind. Indeed, what he clearly perceives (Rom. 1:19–20) he does not openly receive but "suppress[es]" (v. 18); he chooses atheism for his mind by rejecting the truth about God in his heart (Ps. 14:1). Though there ***is*** a difference between objective disclosure and subjective understanding, humans are "without excuse" for failing to understand God's revelation, whether in nature or in Scripture.[48]

Interestingly, Catholic theology itself maintains that unbelievers can and should understand the truth of ***natural law***[49] apart from the Roman teaching magisterium. As such, why should they need an infallible magisterium in order to properly understand ***divine law***? It seems singularly inconsistent for Catholic

scholars to claim they need another mind to interpret Scripture correctly on their behalf, when the minds God gave them are sufficient to interpret everything else. For instance, many of them are experts in interpreting classical literature, involving both the religious and moral meaning of those texts. Yet we're asked to believe that these same highly educated minds are inadequate to obtain a reliable religious and moral interpretation of their own Scriptures.

The Catholic response that Protestants have their own teaching magisterium of modern scholarship misses the mark for several reasons.

For one thing, the Catholic magisterium depends on scholarship just as much as Protestants do. If they didn't, they would not be able to translate the texts and understand them in context.

For another, Protestants do not claim it is necessary to have ***infallible*** scholarship in order to interpret the Bible.

Further, for Protestants the scholarship needed for biblical understanding does not provide a theological framework to ***interpret*** the Bible, as does the teaching magisterium of the Roman Church; rather, it provides the necessary linguistic tools to ***translate*** the Bible.

Finally, the skills of scriptural interpretation are the same as those for interpreting any other document: to understand in the text the author's expressed meaning.[50] Again, Catholic attorneys and judges who are experts in interpreting the Constitution are told that their skills are inadequate to obtain a reliable interpretation of the Scriptures God gave to all believers.

It doesn't take an expert to interpret Scripture's crucial teachings. For instance, the New Testament was written in the vernacular of the times, the first-century trade language known as ***koine*** Greek, the common, everyday language for the common, everyday person. Likewise, the vast majority of English Bible translations (including Catholic versions) are written in plain English; the essential truths of God's Word can be understood by any literate person. In fact, it is a profound insult to our God-given intelligence to suggest that we can read and understand the daily news but need some infallible magisterium in order to understand God's Good News for all people.

The Problem of Indecisiveness With Infallible Pronouncements

Another difficulty for Catholic doctrine: If an infallible teaching magisterium is

needed to overcome conflicting interpretations of Scripture, why are their supposedly infallible declarations also subject to conflicting interpretations? There are many hotly disputed differences among Catholic scholars on just what ***ex cathedra*** statements mean, including those on Scripture, tradition, Mary, and justification. Though there may be future clarifications on some issues, the problem remains for at least two reasons: (1) It shows the indecisive nature of supposedly infallible pronouncements; (2) judging by past experience, even future declarations will not settle all matters completely. Pronouncements on scriptural inerrancy are a case in point, for despite infallible statements, there is strong internal disagreement on whether the Bible is really infallible in all matters or only on matters of salvation.[51]

Philosophical Problems With Papal Infallibility

The Epistemic Problem

Catholicism's supposed need for an infallible magisterium is epistemically[52] insufficient ground for rising above the level of probable knowledge. Catholic scholars admit (as they must) that they do not have infallible evidence for an infallible teaching magisterium; they merely have what they believe to be good (probable) arguments. This being the case, epistemically (or apologetically) there is no more than a probable basis for a Catholic to believe that a supposedly infallible pronouncement by the Church is true. The bottom line: he is in no better position to be certain about matters of faith and morals than is a Protestant who accepts scriptural infallibility on good (probable) arguments.[53]

The Problem of Death by Qualification

Once all qualifications are presented, both in theory and in practice, papal infallibility is defrocked of its glory, standing as nakedly fallible as any other human teaching. The pope is allegedly infallible only when speaking

(1) in fulfillment of his office as supreme pastor and teacher of all Christians;
(2) in virtue of his supreme apostolic authority, i.e., as Peter's successor;
(3) to determine a doctrine of faith and morals, i.e., expressing divine revelation;
(4) to impose a definitive doctrine to be held by all (Dulles, "IT," 79–80);
(5) as the real pope (as opposed to rival popes).[54]

Also, many Catholic scholars believe the pope speaks infallibly only in concert with all the bishops (with collegiality);[55] that is, his decision must be ratified by an ecumenical[56] council.

But not only are all these criteria not infallibly pronounced, they are not all universally accepted among Catholics. What is more, when one tries to apply these criteria to the doctrine of papal infallibility, it begins to suffer "death by a thousand qualifications." For instance, if the pope was not infallible when excommunicating Galileo[57] or when teaching heresy,[58] how can we be sure when he really is? If we can't ever be sure, then what good is the doctrine of infallibility?

Historical Problems With Papal Infallibility

The Problem of the Antipopes

Another anomaly of Roman Catholicism is the scandalous specter of having had more than one supposedly infallible pope at the same time—a pope and an antipope: "There have been about thirty-five antipopes in the history of the Church" (Mercati, "NLP" in ***MS***, 71–80).[59] How can there be infallible and opposing popes at the same time? Which is the true pope? Since there is no

infallible list of popes, or an infallible way to determine who is the infallible pope, the system has a serious logical problem that surpasses the hypothetical; this difficulty has had several actual historical manifestations.[60] Catholic apologists claim there never have actually been two popes, since only one can be infallible. This is at best a theoretical solution, for the faithful have no way of knowing with certainty which one can give legitimate (and infallible) guidance in faith and morals. In times of multiple popes, each can excommunicate (and sometimes has excommunicated) the other.

The Problem of Galileo

Perhaps one of the greatest embarrassments to the "infallible Church" is its fallible judgment about Galileo Galilei (1564–1642). In opposition to Galileo's heliocentric model of the solar system, Rome sided with the scientifically outdated Ptolemaic geocentric model. Galileo's unjust condemnation and banishment has caused pause for any subsequent infallible pronouncements on scientific matters. (Perhaps this explains Rome's reluctance to formally reject macroevolution, allowing belief in it for fear it might prove to be true.) Galileo, using his telescope to view the heavens, adopted the Copernican view[61] that the sun, not the earth, was the center of the solar system. This, of course, opposed the Church-held theological position of an earth-centered system. Trouble arose when Galileo wrote his ***Letters on Sunspots*** in 1613, and attention shifted from discussions of science to scriptural difficulties:

> People wanted to know why [Joshua] would command the sun to stand still if it never moved anyway (see
>
> Josh. 10:12–13
>
>). They wondered how a moving earth could be reconciled with the statement that God "fixed the earth upon its foundation, not to be moved forever" (
>
> Ps. 103:5
>
>). (Marthaler, *NCE*, 252)

In 1616, Rome condemned the Copernican theory.[62] In 1632, Galileo was summoned by the Inquisition; in 1633, after being tried, he was pronounced

"vehemently suspected of heresy." By way of punishment, he was ordered to repeat the seven penitential psalms once a week for three years. After five months, Pope Urban VIII (r. 1623–1644) allowed Galileo to return to his home in Florence, where he remained under house arrest until his death in 1642.[63]

In 1979, after the Church had suffered centuries of humiliation for its errant condemnation of Galileo, Pope John Paul II (r. 1978–2005) spoke to the Pontifical Academy of Science; in his address titled "Faith, Science, and the Galileo Case," he called for a reexamination of the whole episode (Brown, ***PTP***, 177). In 1983, while addressing "the church and science," John Paul II conceded that "Galileo had 'suffered from departments of the church.' "[64] This, of course, is neither a clear retraction of the condemnation nor a solution to the problem of how an infallible pronouncement of the Roman Church could be in error.

There have been various Catholic responses to the Galileo fiasco. One authority claims that while both Pope Paul V (r. 1605–1621) and Pope Urban VIII were committed anti-Copernicans, their pronouncements were not ***ex cathedra***: the 1616 decree "was issued by the Congregation of the Index, which can raise no difficulty in regard to infallibility, this tribunal being absolutely incompetent to make a dogmatic decree" (Herbermann, ***CE***, 345). As to the second trial in 1633, this condemnation sentence of Galileo is said to be of lesser importance because it "did not receive the Pope's signature" (ibid., 346). A different Catholic source states that although the treatment of Galileo was inappropriate, "the condemnation was the act of a Roman Congregation and in no way involved infallible teaching authority" (Marthaler, ***NCE***, 254). Still another observes that "the condemnation of Galileo by the Inquisition had nothing to do with the question of papal infallibility since no question of faith or morals was papally condemned ***ex cathedra***" (Delaney and Tobin in ***DCB***, 456). One Catholic apologist suggests that although the decision was a "regrettable" case of "imprudence," the pope made no error, since Galileo was not ***condemned*** of heresy, but ***strongly suspected*** of it.

None of these "solutions" is convincing, having all the earmarks of after-the-fact tinkering with the pronouncements that resulted from this episode. Galileo ***and*** his opponents would be nonplussed to discover that the serious charges leveled against him were not ***ex cathedra*** in force. Furthermore, in view of the weighty nature of both the condemnation and the punishment, Galileo would be ***beyond***

surprised to hear Catholic apologists claim he was not being condemned for false teaching, but rather that "His 'proof' did not impress even astronomers of that day—nor would they impress astronomers today."[65] At any rate, the pope's condemnation of Galileo further weakens this notoriously shaky Roman doctrine. The persistent claim that the pontiff wasn't speaking infallibly on that occasion is an appeal to an unverifiable distinction that undermines the alleged infallibility it purports to defend.

A PROTESTANT VIEW OF THE VISIBLE CHURCH

The Protestant response to Catholic ecclesiology points out several biblical teachings that conflict with the Church of Rome, including the principle of *sola scriptura* (the Bible alone) and the principle of Scripture's perspicuity (clarity) on all essential matters. There is no need for a teaching magisterium: The Bible alone is sufficient and plain for all matters of faith and practice. There is also no need for apostolic succession: Again, the writings of the apostles (written authority) succeeded the apostles (living authority).

The Principle of *Sola Scriptura*

Roman Catholics affirm, as an unchangeable part of their faith, *de fide*, the infallible teaching authority of the Church as manifested in the bishop of Rome (the pope). What Catholics affirm infallibly, Protestants deny emphatically, and talk about "first among equals" or "collegiality" will not solve the problem, for the very concept of an infallible teaching magisterium, however composed, is contrary to *sola scriptura*, the Bible alone.[66] While both sides believe the Bible is infallible, Protestants deny that Rome or the pope has an infallible interpretation of it. Catholics believe that the visible church Christ started is the Roman Catholic Church; they hold that it's the same organization over which Christ established Peter as the first pope. As we have seen, there is no legitimate

support for this contention, leaving the door open to an examination of the biblical evidence for the nature of the visible, local church(es) of the New Testament.

While all Protestants agree that there is no infallible head of the visible church(es), they do have intramural differences as to the form of government the visible church(es) should have.[67] Nonetheless, all concur that Christ (the Word) is the invisible Head of the visible church (cf. Rev. 1–3) and that the visible church's only infallible authority is Holy Scripture (the Word).[68] Local church governance was left in the hands of the congregation and their elders, who were at first appointed by the apostles (Acts 14:23) to lead the church.[69]

The Principle of the Perspicuity of Scripture

The oft-misunderstood principle of biblical perspicuity does not claim that everything in Scripture is clear; it affirms that ***Scripture's central teachings are clear***. As stated popularly: In the Bible, the main things are the plain things, and the plain things are the main things. Indeed, the gospel itself is stated in one-syllable words, none of which is over four letters:[70] "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life" (1 John 5:12). Also, Jesus said plainly, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Doubters and distorters only need be asked, "Which of these words do you not understand?"

As proof of the perspicuity of the Scriptures, Protestants can point Roman Catholics to there being more essential unity among evangelical Protestants—who have an infallible Bible but no infallible interpreter—than there is among Catholics, whose views range from nearly evangelical to radically liberal. What is the value, then, of an infallible teaching magisterium?

There Is No Apostolic Succession

Apostleship was not only a gift, it was a temporary gift. There is no apostolic succession; Peter wasn't the first pope, he wasn't infallible, and he has no successors. The many reasons for this are briefly summarized here:[71]

(1) Apostles lived only in the first century.
(2) Apostles were only needed for the church's foundation (Eph. 2:20).
(3) The gifts of an apostle (2 Cor. 12:12) ceased in the first century.
(4) Jesus gave the kingdom authority to His apostles, not to successors; i.e., the twelve apostles never appointed apostles to succeed them.[72]
(5) Apostles never appointed their successors (Acts 12:1–2).
(6) The term ***apostle*** faded in the latter New Testament.
(7) Second-century impostors had to claim apostleship to gain acceptance for their writings.
(8) Apostolic succession is contrary to the priesthood of all believers. (See appendix 8.)

The Autonomy of the Local Church(es)

Once again, there is no visible head of the local church: Christ, the invisible Head of His body, has not been decapitated and replaced by the bishop of Rome.[73] There is astonishing wisdom in God's plan to establish self-governing, independent local churches, with many benefits to the ongoing ministry of Christ.

First, it preserves His lordship and headship, as He is still the invisible Head of each visible local church.

Second, individual independent churches are less vulnerable to wide-scale corruption, since if one goes astray doctrinally or morally, the others are not automatically or directly affected by it.

Third, a church with checks and balances—such as elders and deacons being voted in by the congregation and being ultimately responsible to it—can better

overcome the corrupting influence of the penchant for power resident in depraved human beings. John warned of the primacy of the episcopacy in the first century when he spoke of "Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them" (3 John 9).

Fourth, independent, self-governing churches are more conducive to the development of lay leadership, which is essential in fulfilling the Great Commission.[74]

Fifth, people have a stronger motive to promote and preserve that in which they have a vital voice.

Sixth, and finally, authority is best kept on the level it is to be exercised—in this case, on the local level.

As for the objection that a visible head of the visible church is more conducive to Christian unity, the facts do not support it. For one thing, it has not helped preserve the unity and orthodoxy of the Roman Catholic Church. Further, it confuses true ***unity*** with ***uniformity***:[75] That everyone belongs to the same organization with the same supposedly visible head does not mean they maintain true spiritual and doctrinal unity, let alone vitality as an assembly of God's people. A survey of the dichotomy between what the Roman Catholic Church teaches and what its members believe and practice will reveal that it doesn't measure up to what evangelical Christianity exhibits in its membership as compared to its teachings.

The Plurality of Elders in the Local Church

Another New Testament church check-and-balance was the plurality of elders, not just one bishop or pastor with centralized power. That "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely"[76] is true no matter what kind of church exercises episcopal government. In-depth discussion of New Testament elder roles will further elucidate this point.[77]

The Purposes of the Local Church

The purpose of a local church can be viewed in many relationships.
First, in relation to God, the church's purpose is to glorify Him: "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31 kjv). Specifically, the church should glorify Him whose church it is: "Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."[78]
Second, in relation to the universal church, the purpose of the local church is to be a visible manifestation, an outward expression of the inward character of Christ's body, manifesting its recognition of His headship and our unity. Paul urged,
[We should be] endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling, [recognizing that] there is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. (Eph. 4:3–6 kjv)
Third, in relation to other believers, the purpose is to edify Christ's body:

It was he [the ascended Christ] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, *to prepare God's people for works of service*, [1] so that the body of Christ may be built up [2] until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and [3] become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (
Eph. 4:11–13
)

Of course, part of edification is fellowship with other believers, the earliest of whom "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42 kjv). The result of all this?

We will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each

part does its work. (
Eph. 4:14–16
)

Fourth, in relation to unbelievers, the purpose is evangelism. This is evident even in keeping the ordinances:[79] The Lord's Supper, which is only for believers, "proclaim[s] the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Cor. 11:26 nasb). Further, Paul refers to unbelievers coming into the local church and being convinced by the message (1 Cor. 14:24). The service was not primarily for evangelism of unbelievers, but for edification of believers; nonetheless, ***edification is the internal mission of the church, and evangelism is the external mission***. Jesus said to his disciples:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you*. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. (
Matt. 28:18–20
)

Indeed, the last thing He said before ascending was "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).[80] *Finally, in relation to the angels*, the church's purpose should be to exhibit God's wisdom and grace. Paul said,

To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. (
Eph. 3:9–11
nkjv
)
[81]

The Destiny of the Church

In addition to discussing the church's nature, a word should be added here about its destiny.[82] James, the brother of Jesus, declared:

> Men and brethren, hearken unto me: [Peter] hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, after this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up. (
>
> Acts 15:13–16
>
> kjv
>)

When the church is completed, Christ will return and rapture her to heaven (1 Thess. 4:16–18).[83] ***Then*** will come the marriage and supper of the Lamb, when the bride will be united with her Bridegroom forever.[84]

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR THE NATURE OF THE VISIBLE CHURCH

The history of the Christian church is really the history of Christian churches. Regardless of the varying authority from outside the local church, in the final analysis all church government is local. While the church became institutionalized after the Roman emperor Constantine (c. 274–337) made Christianity the official religion of the empire; nonetheless, from the beginning there was a strong, continual emphasis on the biblical doctrine of the visible local church. (See appendix 7.)

Early Fathers

Beginning immediately after the time of the New Testament apostles, the Church Fathers wrote about the visible local churches and of Christ's headship over them, speaking of apostolic, Bible-based congregations functioning under the ultimate authority, their invisible Head.

Clement of Rome (c. first century a.d.)

> The Church of God which sojourns at Rome, to the Church of God sojourning at Corinth, to them that are called and sanctified by the will of God, through our Lord Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, from Almighty God through Jesus Christ, be multiplied. (*FECC*, 1.14)

Ignatius (d. c. 110)

> Remember in your prayers the Church which is in Syria, which, instead of me, has now for its shepherd the Lord, who says, "I am the good Shepherd." And He alone will oversee it, as well as your love towards Him. (*EIR*, 9)

To the Church of God the Father, and of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is at Philadelphia, which has obtained mercy through love, and is established in the harmony of God, and rejoiceth unceasingly, in the passion of our Lord Jesus, and is filled with all mercy through His resurrection. (***EIP***, 1)

Justin Martyr (c. 100–c. 165)

> In the body, although the members are enumerated as many, all are called one, and are a body. For, indeed, a commonwealth and a church, though many individuals in number, are in fact as one, called and addressed by one appellation. (*DJ*, 42)

Methodius (c. 260–311)

It is frequently the case that the Scriptures thus call the assembly and mass of believers by the name of the Church, the … body of the Church … a church and help-meet of Christ, betrothed and given in marriage to Him as a virgin. (*BTV*, 1.8)

Today, the trumpet-blasts of the prophets have roused the world, and have made glad and filled with joyfulness the churches of God that are everywhere amongst the nations. (***OP***, 1)

Constitutions of the Holy Apostles

Hear this, you of the laity also, the elect Church of God. For the people were formerly called "the people of God," and "an holy nation." You, therefore, are the holy and sacred "Church of God, enrolled in heaven, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people," a bride adorned for the Lord God, a great Church, a faithful Church. (II, 25)

Clement of Alexandria (150–c. 215)

The Church, to whom the stable name of endurance is given; for this cause surely, because she alone remains to all generations, rejoicing ever, subsisting as she does by the endurance of us believers, who are the members of Christ.… For the Lord's crown prophetically pointed to us, who once were barren, but are placed around Him through the Church of which He is the Head. (*I*, 1.5, 2.8)

Tertullian (c. 155–c. 225)

[The apostles] founded churches in every city, from which all the other churches, one after another, derived the tradition of the faith, and the seeds of doctrine, and are every day deriving them, that they may become churches. Indeed, it is on this account only that they will be able to deem themselves apostolic, as being the offspring of apostolic churches. Every sort of thing must necessarily revert to its original for its classification. Therefore the churches, although they are so many and so great, comprise but the one primitive church, [founded] by the apostles, from which they all [spring]. (*PAH*, 20)

They who reject that Scripture can neither belong to the Holy Spirit, seeing that they cannot acknowledge that the Holy Ghost has been sent as yet to the disciples, nor can they presume to claim to be a church themselves who positively have no means of proving when, and with what swaddling-clothes, this body was established. (ibid., 22)

To this test, therefore, will they be submitted for proof by those churches, who, although they derive not their founder from apostles or apostolic men (as being of much later date, for they are in fact being founded daily), yet since they agree in the same faith, they are accounted as not less apostolic because they are akin in doctrine. (ibid., 32)

Origen (c. 185–c. 254)

The God who sent Jesus dissipated all the conspiracies of the demons, and made the Gospel of Jesus to prevail throughout the whole world for the conversion and reformation of men, and caused Churches to be everywhere established…. Whereas the Churches of God which are instructed by Christ, when carefully contrasted with the assemblies of the districts in which they are situated, are as beacons in the world. (*AC*, 3.29)

Cyprian (200–258)

“When we came before them, and our purpose was understood, they themselves also began to observe what the others did, so that the agreement of the churches abiding there was in no respect broken” (***EC***, 44.2).
“There is one Church, divided by Christ throughout the whole world into many members” (ibid., 51.24).

John Chrysostom (347–407)

“Ought not each individual believer to build a Church, to get a Teacher, to cooperate (with him), to make this above all his object, that all may be Christians?” (***CAA***, 18.220).
“Let the house be a Church, consisting of men and women” (ibid., 26.303).
“A man is more dignified than a Church: for it was not for walls that Christ died, but for these temples” (***HESPR***, 26.954).

“If we thus regulate our own houses, we shall be also fit for the management of the Church.… Indeed a house is a little Church” (***HE***, 20.313).

Medieval Fathers

Even after the church was institutionalized,[85] the doctrine of Christ’s headship in the visible church continued to be elaborated upon in biblical and apostolic teaching. The authority and autonomy of the local church diminished increasingly throughout the Middle Ages, but the authority of Scripture and the foundation of the church persisted.

Augustine (354–430)

“We have seen that things severally are good, and all things very good, in Thy Word, in Thine Only-Begotten, both heaven and earth, the Head and the body of the Church” (***C***, 13.34.49).
“The whole earth consists of many lands, and the Church universal of many churches” (***CG***, 13.12).
“The Church is His body, as the apostles’ teaching shows us; and it is even called His spouse. His body … has many members” (***OCD***, 1.16.15).

Jerome (c. 340–420)

It is not the case that there is one church at Rome and another in all the world beside. Gaul and Britain, Africa and Persia, India and the East worship one Christ and observe one rule of truth. If you ask for authority, the world outweighs its capital. (*LSJ*, 146.1)

Reformation Leaders

Through the Reformation there was a rediscovery and reaffirmation of the biblical teaching on the church (as well as on salvation). This included an emphasis on independent church governance, Christ's invisible headship, and the Word's primal authority.

John Calvin (1509–1564)

When in the Creed we profess to believe the Church, reference is made not only to the visible Church of which we are now treating, but also to all the elect of God, including in the number even those who have departed this life. (*ICR*, 4.1.2)

Often, too, by the name of Church is designated the whole body of mankind scattered throughout the world, who profess to worship one God and Christ, who by baptism are initiated into the faith; by partaking of the Lord's Supper profess unity in true doctrine and charity, agree in holding the word of the Lord, and observe the ministry which Christ has appointed for the preaching of it. (ibid., 4.1.7)

Jacob Arminius (1560–1609)

As many of the called profess with their mouths "that they know God, while in works they deny him;" and since of the hearts of these men, God is the sole judge, who alone "knoweth them that are his"; therefore such persons are judged, on account of the promise, to belong to the visible church, although … they do not belong to the invisible church. (*D*, 18)

Post-Reformation Leaders

After the Reformation, especially among the Anabaptists, a stronger emphasis was placed on local church autonomy as found in the New Testament.[86] Church leaders continued to make known the biblical teaching on the visible church and the headship of Christ.

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758)

"Not only will Christian humility dispose persons to honor those wicked men that are out of the visible church, but also false brethren and persecutors" (***RA*** in ***WJE***, 3.948).

When God, in any great dispensation of his providence, remarkably sets his King on his holy hill of Zion, Christ in an extraordinary manner comes down from heaven to the earth and appears in his visible church in a great work of salvation for his people. (*PRR* in ibid., 2.1.48)

John Wesley (1703–1791)

What do you mean by the Church? A visible Church (as our article defines it) is a company of faithful or believing people—*coetus credentium* ["a congregation of believers"]. This is the essence of a Church; and the properties thereof are (as they are described in the words that follow), "among whom the pure word of God is preached, and the sacraments duly administered" (*EAMRR*, 76).

A provincial or national Church, according to our article, is the true believers of that province or nation. If these are dispersed up and down, they are only a part of the invisible Church of Christ. But if they are visibly joined by assembling together to hear his word and partake of his supper, they are then a visible Church. (ibid., 77)

The Dordrecht Confession of Faith (1632)

We believe in, and confess a visible church of God, namely, those who, as has been said before, truly repent and believe, and are rightly baptized; who are one with God in heaven, and rightly incorporated into the communion of the saints here on earth. (VIII)

The Schleitheim Confession of Faith (1527)

The shepherd in the church shall be a person according to the rule of Paul.... The office of such a person shall be to read and exhort and teach, warn, admonish, or ban in the congregation, and properly to preside among the sisters and brothers in prayer, and in the breaking of bread, and in all things to take care of the body of Christ, that it may be built up and developed, so that the name of God might be praised and

honored through us, and the mouth of the mocker be stopped. (5)

CONCLUSION

There is a fundamental difference between the Roman Catholic and Protestant views on the nature of the visible church. Catholics believe that the one true visible church Christ established is the Roman Church, over which He placed a visible vicar of Christ, namely, St. Peter. They further hold that God set up an apostolic succession so that those who subsequently served as bishop of Rome are the only divinely appointed, infallible, official interpreters of faith and practice for believers.

All other branches of Christendom, including Eastern Orthodoxy, Anglicanism, and every form of Protestantism, reject this claim, though both the Anglican and Orthodox Churches have their own episcopal form of government with a single head.[87] The biblical and historical evidence favors the Protestant view, which asserts that an infallible Bible is sufficient for faith and practice without any alleged infallible interpreter of it.[88] Indeed, both Scripture and the early Fathers support the position that neither Peter nor his supposed successors in Rome were divinely appointed to any such position. And, as we shall see,[89] Christ's apostles established independent, self-governing churches that didn't have overarching human governing authority but rather were based on apostolic teaching that was later replaced, upon the death of the apostles, with apostolic writings (the New Testament).

Hence, there is no one visible church: There are many visible churches—with one invisible Head, Christ—that are to be based on the teachings of His infallible Word (the Bible). These doctrines are best expressed in the helpful but not infallible ecumenical confessions, creeds, and councils of the churches in the first five hundred years after the earthly life of Jesus. Accordingly, the root basis for historic orthodoxy is found in ***one Bible, two Testaments*** (Old and New), ***three creeds*** (Apostles' [c. 150], Nicene [325], Athanasian [428]), ***four councils*** (Nicea [325], First Constantinople [381], Ephesus [431], Chalcedon [451]), and ***five centuries***. After this there was increasingly no catholicity, little unity, and progressive unorthodoxy, which culminated in the Roman Catholic Council of

Trent's (1545–1563) "infallible" decisions, including the rejection of crucial Protestant teachings, such as salvation being

(1) by faith alone;[90]

(2) based on the Bible alone;[91]

(3) accomplished by the work of Christ alone;[92] and
(4) for the glory of God alone (1 Cor. 10:31).

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE GOVERNMENT OF THE VISIBLE CHURCH

Christendom contains three main views about the basic governmental form the visible church should have: episcopal, presbyterian, or congregational. These three forms of church government take their meaning from three Greek New Testament words for offices or entities. The word for "elder" is ***presbuteros***, from which we get the word ***presbyterian***; a ***presbuteros*** form of government is one of elder authority. The word for "bishop" is ***episcopos***, from which we get the word ***episcopalian***; an ***episcopos*** form of government is one ruled by the bishop, who is considered higher than elders. Naturally in a congregational form of government the congregation (corresponding to the word ***ekklésia***, "assembly") is the final authority.

The Episcopal View

The word ***episcopos*** ("bishop") means "overseer," distinguishing the office of a bishop from that of an elder, giving him authority over the elders and the congregation. Various forms of episcopal government are found in the Roman

Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, some Lutheran,[1] Anglican, Episcopal, and Methodist churches; many smaller denominations (particularly but not exclusively those springing from a Methodist background) are episcopal in practice. The classic exposition of episcopal government is found in the multivolume ***The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*** by Richard Hooker (1553–1600); Kenneth Kirk (1886–1954), in ***The Apostolic Ministry***, attempts to give a New Testament foundation for this view; see also ***The Church and the Ministry in the Early Centuries*** by T. M. Lindsay (1843–1914).

The Presbyterian View

The word ***presbyterian***, from the Greek ***presbuteros***—meaning "older," "more mature," or "wiser"—signifies that a board of elders holds final authority in the administration of church affairs. This view sees elder and bishop as ***one*** office, based on two different words, one (***bishop***) coming from the Greek background and the other (***elder***) from the Hebrew background of the early church. Presbyterian government is represented in Presbyterian churches, Plymouth Brethren assemblies, and a growing number of baptistic and independent churches influenced by the Reformed tradition. A prime exposition is ***The Form of Presbyterial Church Government*** approved by the Westminster Assembly in 1645; a more recent treatment is found in the ***Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible***.[2]

The Congregational View

While it may also have elders and/or deacons, the congregational form views the final authority as resting in the congregation, which, accordingly, must approve major matters relating to faith and practice. Congregational government is represented by Congregational, Free, Baptist, and many independent churches. Baptist theologian A. H. Strong (1836–1921) provided the most succinct explanation of congregational church government (see ***ST***); the article on the

church in ***Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible***[3] is also helpful.

CHURCH GOVERNMENT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Doctrinally, the basis of New Testament church government was apostolic: The church was built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ being the cornerstone and the apostles being the living authority. Paul implied that either "word" or "letter" from him is authoritative (2 Thess. 2:2 nkjv); as the church was built on the "apostles' teaching" (Acts 2:42), their word was the final authority on matters of faith and practice. However, since there is no apostolic succession,[4] after their deaths the living apostles were replaced by their writings. Because their oral authority was replaced by their written authority, the New Testament is the sole divine authority for determining the type of church government they established.

Offices and Gifts

The New Testament makes an important distinction between an ***office*** and a ***gift***. Gifts for ministry are given only by God.[5] Apostleship, prophecy, evangelism, and pastoring/teaching are all gifts; elder and deacon (Gk: ***diakonos***), however, are offices under the domain of the local church (Acts 6:1ff.), which must find people who meet the required qualifications (see 1 Tim. 3:1–13; Titus 1:5–9) and then place them in office. Thus, while the church determines ***offices***, she cannot bestow ***gifts***.[6]

God provided for the ***whole*** church "apostles and prophets" (who received His revelation that became the New Testament); they were the ***universal*** church's foundation (Eph. 2:20) and, as apostles, had authority in all the churches. On the other hand, pastors and evangelists were/are God's gifts to the ***local*** church; the

apostles appointed “elders in every church” (Acts 14:23 nkjv), “in every town” (Titus 1:5), and bishops (elders) and deacons in Philippi (Phil. 1:1). These offices (elder and deacon) are the only two recognized in the New Testament.

The Overall Principle of Church Government

In dealing with a turbulent church in Corinth, the apostle Paul set forth the most basic principle beneath all church government: “***Everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way***” (1 Cor. 14:40). This he applied to many situations: People who were speaking at the same time, he told to wait and speak consecutively (v. 27). Others who were speaking out of place, he told to be silent (vv. 28, 34). Those who were overusing a gift not edifying to all, he told to cease (v. 19). All were to take their God-given place in the body according to the gifts He had given them (12:14–27); all were to recognize the primary role of a living apostle, followed by prophets and teachers (v. 28). God is not the God of confusion but of order (14:33), and Paul stressed the “order” needed in the church.[7]

Specific Order in the Local Church

Of course, the New Testament gives more intricate directions as to precisely what form orderliness should take in the local church, the manifestations of which Earl Radmacher (b. 1933) summarizes well:

There was what approximated an orderly local church election in Acts 6:1–6. There were local church rolls, at least for the widows who were to receive help (1 Tim. 5:9), and evidence seems to support … carefully kept membership records, for all were associated with a particular local church. [Further,] the numbers were known (Acts 1:15; 2:41;

4:4
); election of officers assumes a roll (
Acts 6:2–5
); and church discipline assumes a roll (
1 Cor. 5:13
). There were rules for orderly procedures and practices in the local churches (
11:1–34
;
14:1–40
). There was an orderly system of local church finances (
16:2
). (*WCAA*, 355)

That there were also local church officers to whom proper submission was to be given (Heb. 13:17) leads directly to a discussion of the officers and government expressed in the New Testament.

The Role of Elders in New Testament Church Government

The office of elder was one of authority, maturity, sagacity, and dignity.

A Position of Authority

In the Jewish community, elder was a position of great authority.[8] The elders were rulers: “Then assembled together the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders of the people, unto the palace of the high priest (Matt. 26:3; cf. 15:2).[9] Paul received authority from the Jewish elders: “As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished” (Acts 22:5). He adds, “About [another prisoner], when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed [me], desiring to have judgment against him” (25:15).

A Position of Dignity

Elder was also a position of dignity: “Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land (Prov. 31:23); “she [Jezebel] wrote letters in Ahab’s name, and sealed [them] with his seal, and sent the letters unto the elders and to the nobles” (1 Kings 21:8).

A Position of Maturity

The term ***elder*** also implies maturity: “Rebuke not an elder, but entreat [him] as a father” (1 Tim. 5:1). An “elder” in time (i.e., older) was generally wiser in truth. However, the term can also mean “more mature,” for while some people are wise beyond their years, some are old and foolish.

A Position of Sagacity

By virtue of his age and/or maturity, an elder also held a position of wisdom: “They will try to get a vision from the prophet; [but] the teaching of the law by the priest will be lost, as will the counsel of the elders” (Ezek. 7:26 niv).

The Location of Elders in the New Testament Church

There Were Elders in Jerusalem

“[It was] determined that Paul and Barnabas … should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question” (Acts 15:2 nkjv). The church had collected a gift for the poor believers in Jerusalem “and sent it to the elders” with Paul and Barnabas (11:30); “when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and elders, and they reported all things that God had done with them” (15:4; cf. v. 6). “As they went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the

apostles and elders at Jerusalem" (16:4).

There Were Elders in Every City

Luke records that "from Miletus he [Paul] sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church"[10] (Acts 20:17). Further, Paul said to Titus, "I left you in Crete … that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you" (Titus 1:5 niv).

There Were Elders in Every Local Church

"When they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed" (Acts 14:23). Since not "every" church was large, it's clear that a plurality of elders (not just one) was intended for each church (not just the whole church)—even the small Philippian congregation had many "bishops" (Phil. 1:1).

The Function of an Elder in the New Testament Church

The elder's many functions included being an overseer, ruler, shepherd, teacher, apologist, arbiter, and watchman.

An Elder Is an Overseer

Peter exhorted elders: "Ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls" (1 Peter 2:25). Since ***bishop*** means "overseer," and since elders were undershepherds of the Great Shepherd (5:1–4), it follows that elders were to be overseers of God's flock.

An Elder Is a Ruler

Referring to elders (leaders/rulers), Hebrews commands believers: “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves” (13:17). Indeed, the Greek word for “rule” (from ***hégeomai***) means “to lead, guide, think, consider.” However, ***ruler*** here connotes “director,” not “dictator”; they were leaders, not commanders; their leadership was administrative, not legislative. Further, the members were to obey their leaders in matters of ***administrating*** faith and practice in the church, not in establishing it: ***God’s*** revelation is the basis for faith and practice (2 Tim. 3:16–17), and this is found in the Old Testament and in the New Testament teaching of the apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20). In contrast to obeying leaders who come with alleged revelations from God (2 Thess. 2:2), congregations are exhorted to watch out for false prophets and false teachers (cf. 1 Tim. 4; 1 John 4).

An Elder Is an Undershepherd

The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint,
11
but willingly; not for filthy lucre,
12
but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. (
1 Peter 5:1–4
)

Therefore, elders are to rule as undershepherds, not as overlords; elders should lead members like sheep rather than drive members like goats; elders should guide by example, not by executive order.

An Elder Is a Teacher

An elder feeds “the flock of God” (1 Peter 5:2 nkjv); he is “apt [able] to teach” (1 Tim. 3:2; cf. 2 Timothy 2:24); he must be able to teach “sound doctrine”

(Titus 1:9). Again, these teachings (Acts 2:42) are the church's doctrinal basis.

An Elder Is an Apologist

Further, an elder must be a defender of the faith. Paul (an elder) said, "I am set for the defence of the gospel" (Phil. 1:17). Elders are commanded: "[Hold] fast the faithful word as [you have] been taught, that [you] may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers" (Titus 1:9), or, "He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it" (niv).

An Elder Is an Arbiter of Disputes

The New Testament elders assisted the apostles in the arbitration of disputes: "Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders" (Acts 15:2 niv; cf. 1 Cor. 6:1–4).

An Elder Is a Watchman

Hebrews says of elders, "They watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you" (13:17). As such, an elder should be a restorer of the wayward: "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted" (Gal. 6:1).

The Gender of an Elder

All elders were males, for they needed to be "the husband" of one wife (1 Tim. 3:2). Elder was a position of authority, and women were not "to usurp authority over the man" (1 Tim. 2:12). The reasons given, which clarify that this is not merely cultural, are based here on the order of creation and elsewhere (1 Cor. 11:3) on the nature of the Godhead.[13] However, ***women are not inferior in***

nature, redemptive status, or spiritual gifting; they differ only in function.

Women Are Equal to Men in Nature

If women were naturally unequal to men because of their God-appointed role as submissive to their head, then Christ would be naturally inferior to God, since He is submissive to the Father (1 Cor. 11:3; 15:28). For instance, Jesus said, "I can of my own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me" (John 5:30; cf. 8:28). ***Both women and men were created in God's image*** (cf. Gen. 1:27).

Women Are Equal to Men in Redemptive Status

Neither are women inferior as to redemptive status; soteriologically (salvifically), "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for ***you are all one in Christ Jesus***" (Gal. 3:28 niv).

Women Are Equal to Men in Spiritual Gifting

Nor are women inferior to men in the area of spiritual gifts, there being no sex indicators on the gifts. There were prophetesses in the New Testament (Acts 21:29); the woman Priscilla taught the man Apollos (Acts 18:26); and women prophesied in the church service, since Paul told them how to do it (1 Cor. 11:13).

Women Are Different in Function From Men

That women are different in function in no way makes them inferior; if anything, they have an unparalleled function—childbearing—which Paul singles out in 1 Timothy 2:15. Functions (or lack thereof) do not make one naturally ***inferior*** or ***superior*** to members of the opposite sex; they merely make one ***different***. Everyone, male or female, functions best in his/her God-given role. For example, men are neither inferior because they cannot bear children nor superior

because Jesus chose males to be His apostles or because the Bible teaches elders should be males.

The Interchangeability of the Terms *Elder* and *Bishop*

As noted earlier, in the episcopal form of church government, a bishop is distinguished from an elder, bishop being considered a higher position. However, the two terms are used interchangeably in the New Testament—different backgrounds, same basic function. ***Elder*** (***presbuteros***) is from the Jewish term for an overseer, and ***bishop*** (***episcopos***) is the Greek term for an overseer; the early church had officers from both backgrounds, and that both terms were used of the same office can be seen from several facts.

Both Were a Plurality in Each Church

We've noted that there were "elders in every church" (Acts 14:23 nkjv). Likewise, Paul reminded Titus that there were bishops in each: "Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops [plural] and deacons" (Phil. 1:1).

Both Had to Have the Same Basic Qualifications

Paul wrote to Timothy:

> Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer [Gr: *episcopos*], he desires a noble task. Now the overseer must be [1] above reproach, [2] the husband of but one wife, [3] temperate, self-controlled, [4] respectable, [5] hospitable, [6] able to teach, [7] not given to drunkenness [lit. "much wine"], [8] not violent but gentle, [9] not quarrelsome, [10] not a lover of money. [11] He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) [12] He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. [13] He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap. (
>
> 1 Tim. 3:1–7
>
> niv
>)

Paul gives the same basic requirements for an “elder” to Titus:

An elder [Gk: *presbuteros*, v.
5
] must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Since an overseer is entrusted with God’s work, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. (
1:6–9
niv
)

Elder and Bishop Are Used Interchangeably

The terms are used interchangeably ***in name*** by Paul in the ***same text***:

For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldst set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain *elders* in every city, as I had appointed thee: If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly. For a *bishop* must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre. (
Titus 1:5–7
)

Further, the terms are also used interchangeably ***in function*** by Peter:

Ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop [overseer] of your souls.... [Yet] the elders which are among you I exhort ... and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: *Feed the flock of God* which is among you, *taking the oversight* thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind” (
1 Peter 2:25
;
5:1–2
).
14

Acts 20 also shows this interchangeability: “Paul sent to Ephesus for the ***elders*** of the church.… ‘Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you ***overseers*** [bishops]. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood’ ” (vv. 17, 28 niv).
Again, ***elder*** was the term for Jews to denote the same function that ***bishop*** denoted for Greeks. Hence, the New Testament inclusively used both words for the same office, setting no distinction in function or authority.*

Must Every Church Have Elders?

Some opponents of presbyterian and/or congregational church governments have suggested, contrary to the biblical evidence, that the texts on the plurality of elders in each church are descriptive rather than prescriptive; that is, the straightforward New Testament directive (to us) is simply the broad imperative “Let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:40).
In response, ***first***, many passages about elders/bishops are in a didactic (teaching) context (e.g., 1 Tim. 3:16; Titus 1:5).
Second, Paul explicitly exhorts Titus to appoint elders in every city.
Third, since these churches were the originals in their areas, there were not yet many congregations, yet all were to have a plurality of elders.
Fourth, again, even the little Philippian church, which grew out of the converts from Lydia’s riverside prayer meeting, had pluralities of elders and deacons (1:1).
Fifth, it wasn’t only every city that required elder plurality but every ***church*** (e.g., Acts 14:23).
Sixth, taking such texts descriptively undermines other teachings in these books, reducing them to “what they were doing” and eliminating “what we ***should*** also be doing.”
Seventh, and finally, the language and contexts of the passages on church government ***are*** prescriptive; the appointment of elders was established by the apostles, the church’s foundation (Eph. 2:20; Acts 2:42).

The Proper Treatment of an Elder in the New Testament Church

The function of elders/bishops can also be seen from the treatment that was accorded them.

Elders Should Not Be Rebuked but Entreated

Paul said, “Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren; the elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters, with all purity” (1 Tim. 5:1–2).

Elders Should Be Honored

“Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine” (1 Tim. 5:17).

Elders Should Not Be Unfairly Accused

“Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses” (1 Tim. 5:19 niv).

Elders Should Receive Submission

Peter said, “The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed.… Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder” (1 Peter 5:1, 5).

Elders Should Be Obeyed

“Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account” (Heb. 13:17). Again, the Greek

word for ***rule*** means “to lead” or “to guide” (Arndt and Gingrich, ***GELNT***, 344), not to command or to dictate. Even so, this obedience was not blind but biblical, not unthinking but thoughtful. Just as Paul said to children, “Obey your parents in the Lord” (Eph. 6:1), even so obedience to elders should be only “in the Lord” and according to His Word. Further, since ultimately the congregation was the final authority,[15] the elders’ “rule” was administrative, not legislative (see below).

Elders Should Be the Subject of Our Prayers

“Pray for us [elders]: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly” (Heb. 13:18).

Elders Should Be Remembered

“Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith” (Heb. 13:7 niv). Whatever form this remembrance took, it showed honor and respect for the elders.

Elders Should Be Saluted (Greeted)

“Salute all them that have the rule over you, and all the saints” (Heb. 13:24). While Jesus said, “Call no man your father” in a spiritual sense (Matt. 23:9), the Bible also says, “Render therefore to all their due … fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor” (Rom. 13:7 nkjv).

Elders Should Be Called Upon for Prayer

When the sick needed prayer they were to call on the elders: “Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord” (James 5:14). The sick were not taken to the church, and it was not one leader praying for them but many.

The Role of Deacons in New Testament Church Government

The role of deacons is seen from their origin, qualifications, and relationship to the elders.

The Origin of Deacons

When the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve [who were elders] gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.”

This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. (

Acts 6:1–6

niv
)

The Qualifications of a Deacon

Paul, in 1 Timothy 3:8–13 (niv), lays down the qualifications of a deacon:

Deacons … are to be [1] men worthy of respect, [2] sincere, [3] not indulging in much wine, and [4] not pursuing dishonest gain. [5] They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. [6] They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, [7] not malicious talkers but [8] temperate and [9] trustworthy in everything. A deacon must be [10] the husband of but one wife and [11] must manage his children and his household well. Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.

Unlike elders, deacons could be younger in the faith (v. 6) and need not have the same aptness to teach (3:2) or refute heresies (1:10). Nonetheless, some deacons

—such as Stephen (Acts 7) and Philip (Acts 8)—were gifted for ministry.

THE RELATIONSHIPS AND FUNCTIONS OF ELDERS, DEACONS, APOSTLES, PASTORS, AND THE CONGREGATION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

The Relationship Between Elders and Deacons

Each church had a plurality of both deacons and elders (Phil. 1:1). Deacons were created to assist the elders. As subordinates, they were to relieve the elders of menial tasks so that the elders could concentrate on prayer and the ministry of the Word of God (Acts 6:2). Elders were overseers of the church's doctrinal and spiritual matters; deacons, as assistants, were in charge of the social and physical ministries.[16]

As for the deacons' tasks, first of all, they distributed food and clothing:

> In those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration [of food]. Then the twelve [said] ... Brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. (Acts 6:1–3)

Jesus taught, "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on" (Matt. 6:25). Paul added, "Having food and raiment let us be therewith content" (1 Tim. 6:8); such was the concern of deacons.

Furthermore, deacons took care of widows and orphans. Regarding these, Paul admonished, "No widow may be put on the list of widows [to receive aid] unless she is over sixty [and] has been faithful to her husband" (5:9). James added,

"Pure religion and [being] undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, [and] to keep [one]self unspotted from the world" (James 1:27).

Paul called one woman a ***deacon*** in Romans 16:1: "I commend unto you Phebe our sister … a servant [Gk: ***diakonon***] of the church … at Cenchrea." Since the word ***deacon*** means "servant," there is no certainty as to whether Phebe was an official deacon or an unofficial servant.[17] Even so, in favor of the latter are these facts:

(1) No group of female deacons is biblically mentioned (cf. Phil. 1:1).
(2) One qualification of a deacon was to be a husband (male) of one wife (1 Tim. 3:12).
(3) All the original deacons were men (Acts 6:5).

The reference to "the women" with a separate list of qualifications (1 Tim. 3:11) may be to the wives of deacons or to a separate group of females who served in the church:

> If they were deaconesses one would expect that they would be mentioned after verse 13 when the discussion of the deacons was finished rather than inserted right in the middle of the paragraph about deacons. That seems to point to the conclusion that they were the wives of the deacons. (Ryrie, *SBD*, 145)

The Special Role of Apostles in the New Testament Church

That the apostles played a foundational, authoritative, and temporal role in the church can be seen from their relationship to others.

The Relationship of Apostles and Elders

All apostles were elders, but not all elders were apostles; elder is an ***office*** in the church, while apostleship was a ***gift*** to select individuals in the church. For

instance, the apostles John and Peter were elders (2 John 1:1; 1 Peter 5:1; cf. 3 John); when Judas defected, Peter, citing Psalm 109, said, "May another take his place of ***leadership***" (lit.: "bishop's office" or "eldership"; Acts 1:20 niv). All apostles were elders (bishops) by ***office***; they were apostles by ***gift***, given by God to the church (Eph. 4:8, 11). An apostle was an elder with the apostolic gift.

The Apostolic Role Was Temporary

Not only was apostleship a gift, it was also a ***temporary*** gift; apostles lived only in the first century, for they had to be eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ, a qualification laid down when Judas was replaced by Mathias in Acts 1:22. Paul also defended his apostleship by saying, "Am I not an apostle? … have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?" (1 Cor. 9:1; cf. 15:7–9). Further, apostles were part of the church's ***foundation***, laid only in the first century (Eph. 2:19–20). What is more, apostles, along with prophets, received the revelation inscripturated in the New Testament, which was given ***once*** to edify the church of ***all*** times (2 Tim. 3:16–18). These men were the living authority who recorded a permanent written authority for our faith. (See appendix 8.)
Never did they appoint new apostles ***to replace them*** (Acts 12:2), ***but only new*** elders ***to serve with them and after them*** (cf. 14:23; Titus 1:5). In fact, even those who were apostles called themselves "elders" in their later epistles (cf. 2 John 1; 3 John 1; 1 Peter 5:1). Also, after the death of the apostles, when second- and third-century authors wanted to claim divine revelation and authority for their writings, they claimed to be apostles, implying ***they knew such revelation and authority had died with the apostles***.

Apostles Were the Early Church's Final Authority

Not only were the apostles the New Testament church's foundation (Eph. 2:20), they were also its ruling authority. They appointed the elders (Acts 1:23; Titus 1:5), their teaching (being God's revelation) was the church's basis (Acts 2:42), and they settled doctrinal disputes (Acts 15; cf. Gal. 2).

Apostles Were the Early Church's Source of New Revelation

Paul said, “I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ” (Gal. 1:11–12). Peter recognized Paul’s epistles as revelation from God (2 Peter 3:13–16) and placed them alongside Old Testament Scripture (cf. 2 Tim. 3:15–16).

In point of fact, (1) since Jesus had promised to lead the apostles into “all truth” and bring to their mind “everything I have said to you”;[18] (2) since apostles lived only in the first century;[19] and (3) since the New Testament is the only authentic record from the first century of apostolic teaching,[20] it follows that the apostles were the vessels of God’s final revelation for the church. This is why ***only*** they were given and could give “signs of an apostle” (2 Cor. 12:12 nkjv), miracles to confirm their revelation from God (Heb. 2:3–4). Indeed, when the last apostle wrote the New Testament’s last book, he appended to it this warning:

> I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. (Rev. 22:18–19 niv)

The Relationship Between Elders and Pastors

There is a close connection between elders and pastors, but here again, not all elders were pastors, since elder is an office and pastoring is a gift. Paul said, “If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work” (1 Tim. 3:1; cf. Acts 1:20). Pastoring is a gift that ***some*** elders had (Eph. 4:8, 11), so a pastor is a unique elder gifted with pastoring/teaching: ***“Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine”*** (1 Tim. 5:17).

The Role of the Congregation in Local Church Government

Not only was the New Testament church self-governing, but the congregation also played an important role in that governing. While the elders were the congregational leaders, the congregation significantly impacted the church's affairs.

The Congregation Screened Their Own Membership

While Jesus ***described*** Christendom between His two comings as having both wheat and tares, believers and unbelievers (Matt. 13:24–30), nowhere is it ***prescribed*** by Jesus or His apostles that unbelievers should be part of a local church. Like the invisible church, the visible church ***should*** have only a regenerate membership; only those who are in Christ's invisible church (2 Cor. 5:17) ***should*** be in His visible church, for He is the Head of both. Never does a New Testament epistle address itself to unbelievers; if there were unbelievers in the church, it is because they "crept in" (Jude 4 kjv) under false pretenses, not because they were knowingly accepted. The devil sowed the tares among the wheat (Matt. 13:26–28).

The Congregation Chose Their Leaders

It is clear from the emphasized words in the following quotation about the origin of deacons that the congregation actually ***chose*** the deacons whom the apostles then ***appointed*** to their work:

> The Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. *Brothers* [the church], *choose* seven men *from among you* [the church] who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."
>
> This proposal pleased *the whole group* [the church]. *They* [the church] chose [the deacons].... *They* [the church] presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. (
>
> Acts 6:2–6
>
> niv
>)

Acts 14:23 says that apostles “ordained” [not elected] elders in the church. The wording in 6:3 is important: The congregation was to select them, and the apostles would appoint them. We may presume that since elders and deacons had similar qualifications, the same procedure applied to both. John Calvin said:

Luke relates that Barnabas and Paul ordained elders throughout the churches, but he at the same time marks the plan or mode when he says that it was done by suffrage [voting]. [Thus,] the whole body, as was the custom of the Greeks in elections, declared by a show of hands which of the two they wished to have.... Certainly it is not credible that Paul conceded more to Timothy and Titus than he assumed to himself. Now we see that his custom was to appoint bishops by the suffrages of the people. (*ICR*, 4.3.15)

The whole church was involved; apparently, the congregation screened and chose deacons, whom the apostles then appointed and dedicated (set apart) for their ministry. When the apostles died, the body of believers likely chose the elders too, just as they chose their own deacons (Acts 6, 15).

The Congregation Exercised Church Discipline

In addition to choosing their own leaders, the local church exercised discipline:

It is reported commonly that there is fornication *among you* [the congregation], and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father’s wife. And *ye*
21
[the congregation] are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you.... In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when *ye* [the congregation] are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. (
1 Cor. 5:1–2
,
4–5
)

Obviously, all were involved in the decision to excommunicate this member. Happily, he repented, and the whole congregation was also involved in restoring him to membership:

> Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted *of many* [the congregation]. So that contrariwise *ye* [the congregation] ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. (2 Cor. 2:6–7)

Paul speaks of the whole church at Thessalonica being involved in discipline: "As for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right. If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed" (2 Thess. 3:13–14 niv). (1) Paul refers to those involved as "brothers" (brethren); (2) all of them were to disassociate with the disciplined member; and (3) all of them were to persist in doing right.

The Congregation Made the Final Decision in Cases of Offense

Further, the procedure for offenses set forth by Jesus in Matthew 18 shows that the "church" as a whole (i.e., the congregation) made the final decision in these crucial matters:

> If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just *between the two of you*. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, *take one or two others* along, so that "every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses." If he refuses to listen to them, *tell it to the church*; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. (vv. 15–17 niv)

The final court of appeal was not the elders but the whole church.

The Congregation Commissioned Missionaries

In *the church* at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While *they* were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” So after *they* had fasted and prayed, *they* placed their hands on them and sent them off. (Acts 13:1–3 niv)

While “they,” in context, seems to refer directly to these named church leaders, the leaders were probably acting as representatives of the entire congregation. Indeed, later (in 15:40) Luke speaks of “the brethren” commending Paul and Barnabas, which implies the broader congregation’s involvement in the commissioning. This is particularly noteworthy with regard to the role of the local church; even Paul, who received revelation directly from God (Gal. 1), was commissioned by a local church to do missionary work.

The Whole Jerusalem Congregation Was Involved in a Doctrinal Decision

Though there were living apostles who had divine authority in doctrinal matters,[22] nonetheless, “the whole church” at Jerusalem was involved in deciding whether circumcision was necessary under the New Covenant: “The apostles and elders, ***with the whole church***, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose … two men who were leaders among the brothers” to present the decision (Acts 15:22 niv). The inclusion of these men seems to reveal a role for which they were being prepared in the absence of apostles, when the local church would have to handle these kinds of issues on the basis of apostolic doctrine, recorded in the apostolic writings of the New Testament. So the living “apostles and elders” of the Jerusalem church[23] made the decision with which the whole church concurred;

the groups involved were (1) the apostles, (2) the elders (vv. 2, 6), and (3) the congregation (v. 22).

By this time (c. 49), Paul had already completed his first missionary journey, churches were planted throughout Asia Minor, and Christianity was expanding rapidly; James, although not one of the twelve apostles, was one of the leading elders; his status can be inferred from his summing up the group's decision (vv. 13–21), as well as his being mentioned as "our Lord's brother" (Gal. 1:19 nlt) and, along with Peter, as a highly respected leader in the Jerusalem church (cf. Gal. 2:2).

Since the living apostles were still the primary authority, the church's decision may simply have been a concurring one, although this is not entirely clear. What seems plain is that although they had authority to specify doctrine, the apostles had already brought in other elders, were training them for leadership, and were involving the entire congregation in decisions. Again, perhaps this was in preparation for when living apostolic authorities would no longer be present and the local congregations (with their leaders) would have to make these decisions.[24]

Elder Rule or Congregational Rule?

In the light of the congregation's role as spelled out in the New Testament, we must disagree with Alexander Strauch (b. 1944), who says,

> The New Testament does not indicate that the congregation governs itself by majority vote, and there is no evidence that God has granted every member one equal vote with every other member. Rather, the New Testament congregation is governed by its own congregational elders. (*BE*, 293)

There is an important distinction between elder ***rule*** and elder ***guidance***; the former is not taught in the New Testament, but the latter is. As we have seen, the final authority for the church—including the selection of leaders and the discipline of members—rests with the congregation.

Relationships Between the New Testament Churches

The apostles and early evangelists started independent, self-governing congregations, all of which had their own elders and deacons and were responsible, with their leaders, for making decisions. This, of course, was based on God's infallible Word (John 10:35; 2 Tim. 3:16–17), which was the Old Testament[25] and, incrementally, the authoritative teaching of the "apostles and prophets" (Eph. 2:20; cf. Acts 2:42) who were receiving additional revelation from God that would later be inscripturated in the New Testament. Therefore, as to the relationship between these churches, what (if anything) were the organizational ties between them and was there a "denomination" of churches? Before these questions can be answered, a preliminary question must be asked: Is the biblical data regarding church government merely ***descriptive*** of the way it was done then, or is it ***prescriptive*** of the way it should be done now? Without getting into many details, it would seem that the related texts in the pastoral epistles are more than descriptive—they are ***prescribing what ought to be*** as is made evident by the exhortations therein.[26] Paul even specifically told Timothy that he was writing so his congregation would "know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15 niv). Further, just as "everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Rom. 15:4), and just as "these things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us" (1 Cor. 10:11 niv), even so the pattern for how the church should be operated, as exemplified by the apostles, was a pattern prescribed by God that we likewise should follow.

It is difficult to improve upon Earl Radmacher's summary of this topic:

> (1) ***The local church has the authority to judge its own membership*** (1 Cor. 5:13). Even an apostle [did] not assume to excommunicate a member, but call[ed] upon the local church to do so.
> (2) ***The local church has authority to elect its own officers*** (Acts 6:1–6). Not even the apostles assume[d] to choose the officers of a local church but

call[ed] upon the church to do it.

(3) ***The local church has authority to guard and observe the ordinances*** (1 Cor. 11:23, "I delivered unto you"). Not to the clergy, the elders or bishops [was this authority given].…

(4) ***The local church has authority to settle its own internal difficulties*** (1 Cor. 6:1–5). Paul [did] not appoint a committee, but direct[ed] the church to look into the matter.…

(5) ***The local church has authority in matters involving the relationship of various local churches*** (Acts 15:1–2, 22–23, 25, 30). This was not a conference of ecclesiastical overlords but of two local churches, each sovereign in its own affairs. One protests through delegates (22), the other answers through delegates (22). Even the apostles [did] not assume exclusive authority in the matter.

(6) ***All "Church Government in the New Testament applies onto local bodies"*** (see Forrester, "CG" in ***ISBE***).

(7) ***The authority of the local church is final as far as its own affairs are concerned*** (see Matt. 18:17). There is no higher court.[27]

(8) ***Voluntary cooperation and fellowship of churches is possible and desirable***. (***NC***, 347–48)

Voluntary cooperation can and should occur between independent churches of like precious faith; today we have too much turf building and not enough kingdom building. However, such cooperation should be ***voluntary, not compulsory***—a fellowship, not a hierarchical organization that usurps the local church's autonomy and authority. Paul specifically encourages churches to help each other: He himself sponsored an offering to help poor believers in another church (Rom. 15:26; Gal. 2:10); he requested prayer for those in other churches (1 Thess. 5:25; 2 Thess. 3:1); he was sent out as a missionary from one church to start others (Acts 13:1–3); and he received the "right hand of fellowship" from another group of members (Gal. 2:9 niv). In addition, there is the overall duty to manifest love to the brethren of other churches (John 15:13; 1 John 3:16).

The Autonomy of the Local Church

There are many indications (most of which are contained in the above

discussion) that each local church had its own autonomy. Each church:

(1) had its own officers (Phil. 1:1; Acts 14:2);
(2) had its own membership rolls (1 Tim. 5:9);
(3) elected its own officers (Acts 6:1–7);
(4) sent its own representatives to the Jerusalem conference (Acts 15:2);
(5) had its own duty to deal with internal difficulties (1 Cor. 6:1–5);
(6) disciplined its own members (5:1–5);
(7) had authority to extend fellowship to those of other churches (Gal. 2:9);
(8) sent its own missionaries (Acts 13:2);
(9) bore its own responsibility to its invisible Head (Rev. 1–3);
(10) had freedom to cooperate with other churches (2 Cor. 8:8–19); and
(11) had authority to guard and administer its own ordinances (1 Cor. 11:23).

The Lessons of John the Apostle and the Seven Churches of Asia Minor

Even while John was still alive and many churches of his area were in decline or disarray, the manner of his approach leaves us several remarkable lessons.

First, ***John never used his apostolic power to override local church autonomy***. Indeed, he never used his title of ***apostle*** in the entire book of Revelation. No doubt by this time, the apostolic doctrine as the church's foundation had been firmly laid, the signs of an apostle had passed away,[28] most or nearly all of the New Testament had been written,[29] and the permanent form of intended church government had been established. John never pulled apostolic rank even as some of these churches were in dire straits.

Second, by contrast, ***John showed great respect for the plurality and autonomy of the churches***. He recognized each church as a self-governing authority, and he appealed to each one to rectify its own problems. Not once did he hold a denominational club over their heads and demand that they conform; rather, he called upon them as individual churches to "repent."[30]

Third, ***John assumed that Christ was the invisible Head of these churches***. No

appeal is made to a visible head in Rome, Jerusalem, or anywhere else; instead, John reminds them that Christ is walking in their midst and would judge them. Indeed, He threatens to take away their lampstand (Rev. 2:5) if their light for Him goes out. We have noted that this idea of Christ as Head of the visible body of believers is present in other passages (cf. Acts 9:4; 1 Cor. 12:12–31); the Head holds the local churches in His right hand (Rev. 1:16), His holy eyes penetrating their inner thoughts and His righteous hand weighing their every deed.

Fourth, and finally, ***the Holy Spirit, who indwells the church, is an all-sufficient guide***. Because of the omnisapient Spirit, the church has no need for a visible head or a super-organization imposing its will on the local congregations. Seven times in Revelation 2–3 we read: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22 niv). ***The Spirit of God speaking through the Word of God is sufficient to guide the church of God***.

Comparing and Contrasting the Universal Church and Local Churches

Now that we have discussed both the universal church[31] and the local church,[32] we can compare and contrast them. The universal church is invisible; the local churches are visible. There is only one universal church; there are many local churches. The universal church is an organism; a local church is an organization. The universal church has only saved members; the local church may contain both saved and lost members. The universal church possesses all believers from this age, both living and dead; the local church has only living members.

Hence, whereas the universal church contains the whole body of Christ, the local church has only part of it. Christ, the Head of the church, is visible to members of the universal church who are in heaven, but He is the invisible Head of the local churches on earth. There are no elders or deacons in the universal church, but local churches have both. Likewise, the ordinances are not practiced in the universal church, since they have been fulfilled, but local churches practice baptism and the Lord's Supper.[33] There are no denominations in heaven; the

local church is represented by many denominations. Finally, while the gates of hell cannot destroy the universal church, some local churches have been destroyed by their influence.
To summarize:

Universal Church	**Local Church(es)**
Invisible	Visible
One church	Many churches
An organization	An organism
Saved members	Saved and lost members
Living and dead members	Living members
Whole body of Christ	Part of the body of Christ
Christ is visible Head in heaven	Christ is invisible Head on earth
No elders or deacons	Elders and deacons
No ordinances	Two ordinances
No denominations	Many denominations
Indestructible	Destructible

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE NATURE OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

In addition to the visible church's biblical basis, there is also a strong theological foundation, both in the nature of God and in the nature of humans.

The Nature of God

A number of God's attributes undergird the doctrine of the local church, including eternality, immutability, omnisapience, sovereignty, and grace. Support for these has already been presented.[34]

However, regarding the local church, at least one more doctrine should be mentioned: human depravity.[35] God knew His local churches would be in the hands of finite and fallible people. Among other aspects of depravity is the human penchant for power, which John noted in his third epistle: “I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us” (v. 9 niv). This desire for preeminence may be the origin of the primacy of the episcopacy’s dogmatic basis.[36] At any rate, God foreknew what human history has revealed to us about the correlation of power to corruption, and He apparently deemed that His visible church would be best off with authority distributed throughout many churches rather than localized in one top-heavy organization.

For example, poisoning one well doesn’t affect other disconnected wells, but poisoning a city’s central water supply will affect everything and everyone tapped into it. Similarly, one individual congregation diseased by false teaching doesn’t directly pollute others the way that false teaching in a hierarchical organization, coming from the top down, will pervade all the churches under its domain. ***Human depravity calls for the existence of independent, self-governing churches***. Just as govenment is best done on the local, not national, level; even so church government is best done locally, not denominationally. God’s wisdom as to our depravity is also manifest inside the local church; congregational government contains a check-and-balance structure not found in elder-rule or bishop-rule models. In the multitude of counsel there is wisdom: The majority of the congregation is less likely to deviate from the truth than one or a few leaders.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR THE NATURE OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT

When approaching church government's historical development, three things stand out.

First, the apostles' immediate successors followed the pattern of government laid down in the New Testament—independent, autonomous local churches led by a plurality of elders (synonymous with bishops).

Second, by the second century, a basic episcopal form of government had emerged, with one bishop in each church (along with elders).

Third, as time passed, increasing authority was given to bishops until there was a bishop over a whole region and ultimately a bishop over bishops, the bishop of Rome; eventually, the Roman Catholic Church, in 1870, at the First Vatican Council, pronounced the bishop of Rome infallible in faith and practice.[37]

Apostolic Fathers on Church Government

The late-first-century apostolic Fathers, and most of the early-second-century Fathers, followed the New Testament pattern of a plurality of elders (bishops) in independent, autonomous local churches united by the common authority of Old and New Testament doctrine.

The Epistle of Pseudo-Barnabas (c. 70–130)

Many scholars consider this work the earliest of all post-New Testament extrabiblical sources. The epistle is addressed to "sons and daughters"[38] in the faith (1); they are urged to avoid any "schism" (19) and make peace between contending factions, which implies that congregations had the authority to do so. There is no reference to any bishop over a church or group of churches.

Clement of Rome (c. first century a.d.)

Even though the ***First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians*** is written from the "the Church of God which sojourneth in Rome," he exhorted believers to be

“submitting yourselves to your rulers [plural] and rendering to the older men among you the honour which is their due” (1). “Let us set before our eyes [the example] of the good Apostles” (5). There is no affirmation of Petrine primacy; believers were admonished to “oppose leaders exalting themselves over others” (13; cf. 23). That they are warned not to “exalt themselves over the flock” (16) speaks against an authoritarian episcopalianism. Instead, “Let us reverence our rulers; let us honour our elders” (21); “submit yourselves unto the presbyters” (57).

Clement spoke of “the Apostles [who] received the Gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ.” When they established a church they “appointed … bishops and deacons” (42). He even affirmed that the apostles foresaw “that there would be strife over the name of the bishop’s office” and thus appointed “approved men [who] should succeed to their ministrations” (44). This belies any apostolic succession—the apostles appointed ***elders*** to succeed them in each church (Acts 14:23). Even Ludwig Ott admits: “The letter contains neither a formal statement of the Primacy, that is, an express invocation of the pre-eminence of the Roman Church, nor juridical measures” (***FCD***, 283).

Ignatius (d. c. 110)

Ignatius manifests what may be the earliest form of episcopal government in which each church has a bishop in addition to elders and deacons.[39] He speaks to the Ephesians about “your bishop” (***EIE***, 1)[40] and about their need of “submitting yourselves to your bishop and presbytery” (2). “Let us therefore be careful not to resist the bishop, that by our submission we may give ourselves to God” (5); “plainly therefore we ought to regard the bishop as the Lord Himself” (6); “assemble yourselves together in common … to the end that ye may obey the bishop and the presbytery without distraction of mind” (20).

While he makes similar statements in his other epistles (e.g., ***EIM***, 3), this respect is to be paid ultimately to God, “the Bishop of all” (ibid.). Ignatius speaks of a group of “churches” (12) as independent entities with their own elders and bishop (pastor) and of his being a “member” of a local church (13). He also wrote to “Polycarp, who is bishop of the church of the Smyrnaeans or rather who hath for his bishop God the Father and Jesus Christ, abundant greeting” (***EIS***, intro.).

> Give ye heed to the bishop, that God also may give heed to you. I am devoted to those who are subject to the bishop, the presbyters, the deacons.... It becometh thee, most blessed Polycarp, to call together a godly council and to elect someone among you who is very dear to you and zealous also, who shall be fit to bear the name of God's courier to appoint him, I say, that he may go to Syria and glorify your zealous love unto the glory of God. (6–7)

These texts obviously represent a form of episcopal government in which each church has one bishop, many elders, and many deacons. The bishop is not only a leader of the elders but is in a position of authority to which they must submit (cf. ***EIR***, intro).[41] However, there is no affirmation of the primacy of the bishop of Rome over other bishops: Peter is given recognition alongside Paul (ibid.), but not over him. Likewise, first-century authority rested in the "apostles" (plural—***EIM***, 6; cf. ***EIR***, 4), and several times God is called the invisible "Bishop of all" (***EIM***, 3) and the "Shepherd" (***EIR***, 9). This fits with the biblical emphasis of Christ as the invisible Head of the visible churches, just as the apostle John pictured Him in Revelation (cf. 1–3).

Even J. B. Lightfoot (1828–1899), who defends the rise of the episcopacy, comments on the extremes to which Ignatius took it:

> It need hardly be remarked how subversive of the true spirit of Christianity, in the negation of individual freedom and consequent suppression of direct responsibility to God in Christ, is the crushing despotism with which this language, if taken literally, would invest the episcopal office. (*SPEP*, 237)

The Shepherd of Hermas (c. early second century)

Hermas's form of government involved plurality of elders and deacons (2.4; cf. 3.1) guided by "the book" (2.4). He provided an implicit warning against the rise of episcopal government, speaking of one "who, seeming to have the Spirit, exalts himself and would fain have the first seat" (Mand. 11; cf. 3.9). He also spoke of "the apostles and bishops and teachers and deacons" (3.5) and of "the rulers of the Church" who "occupy the chief seats" (3.9). There is no reference to a singular bishop over any church or churches.

Polycarp (fl. second century)[42]

One value of Polycarp's writings is that their author was a disciple of the apostle John, thus bringing us into immediate contact with the apostolic age. His ***Epistle to the Philippians*** begins: "Polycarp and the presbyters (elders) that are with him" (introduction). He declared that "the presbyters [plural] also must be compassionate, merciful toward all men" (6); he placed himself alongside the other "elders" (op. cit.);[43] he also made reference to "deacons," insisting that they should be "blameless" (5).[44] He referred to "Paul himself and the rest of the Apostles" (9) but made no reference to Peter by name. He wrote of those who "are well trained in the sacred writings" (12), which he himself repeatedly quoted in this short letter, showing his belief in their importance.

The Didache (The Teachings of the Apostles—c. 120–150)

The Didache exhorted all believers to follow "according to the ordinance of the Gospel" as they received it from "the apostles and prophets" (11). The form of government was patterned after the New Testament (see Phil. 1:1; Acts 14:23): "Appoint for yourselves therefore bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord.… Despise them not; for they are your honourable men along with the prophets and teachers" (15). While there is no affirmation of any episcopacy, there is a hint of the conditions that led to the development of bishopric primacy, found in the warning against any "schism" (4); the persistent presence of schisms led to later developments of episcopal-form attempts to unify the visible church against divisions in doctrine and practice.

An Ancient Homily (the So-Called "Second Epistle of Clement"—c. 120–140)

"Scripture" is cited repeatedly as having divine authority (2–7, etc.). Citations are prefaced with "He [God] Himself saith" or the like (e.g., 3–5). Believers are to "give heed to the things which are written" (19). Both "the Books [of the Bible] and the Apostles" declare God's truth (14). Church leadership was not episcopal but had a plurality of elders; there is no mention of a single bishop in a

church or over a group of churches; the church was “admonished by the presbyters,” that is, elders (18); woe is pronounced on those who “obeyed not the presbyters” (17).

Papias (fl. second century)

Papias’s famous ***Exposition of Oracles of the Lord*** has perished; only fragments of his writings survive. Irenaeus preserved two fragments, and other writers, including Eusebius (263–340), contain additional material about him, including that he is believed to have been “a hearer of John and a companion of Polycarp” (Lightfoot, ***AF***, 527). Papias confirmed that there is no primacy of Peter—his two lists of the apostles have Andrew first and Peter second (***F***, 3, 7), and he gave unique attention to John (1, 3–4, 6, 9, 19–20). While Polycarp is called a bishop by later writers, Papias referred to all the apostles as “elders” (3), again showing the terms’ interchangeability, and made no mention of episcopal government in the church or churches.

Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)

Irenaeus, an important witness in early Christianity, claimed to have heard Polycarp, the disciple of John, when he was a boy. Irenaeus is said to have later become bishop of Lyons (France) and was the first great Western Father. His major work, ***Against Heresies*** (see Cross, ***ODCC***, 713), is dated between 182 and 188 (Schaff, ***ANF***, 1.312).

On the Church’s Apostolicity

Repeated statements emphasize that the church’s final authority rests in the apostles, not in any one apostle; even the founding of the church at Rome was said to be by Paul and Peter (***AH***, 3.1.1). Irenaeus repeatedly speaks of “the apostolic tradition” (3.3.2) and “the blessed apostles” (plural) who “founded and built up the Church” (3.3.3), “the doctrine of the apostles” (3.12.4), and “the tradition from the apostles” (3.5.1).

These [apostles] are the voices of the Church from which every Church had its origin. … These are the voices of the apostles; these are the voices of the disciples of the Lord, the truly perfect, who after the assumption of the Lord, were perfected by the Spirit. (3.12.4)

On the Church's Unity

Irenaeus often refers to "churches" in the plural, e.g., to "that tradition which originates from the apostles, and which is preserved by means of the successions of presbyters in the Churches" (3.2.2). He sometimes spoke generically about the unity of the Christian church, as when he said: "The Catholic [universal] Church possesses one and the same faith throughout the whole world" (1.10.3). However, as just noted, this unity was not organizational but spiritual and doctrinal: "The Church, though dispersed throughout the world, even to the ends of the earth, has received from the apostles and their disciples this faith" (1.10.1); this one church, "although scattered throughout the whole world, yet, as if occupying but one house, carefully preserves it" (1.10.2).

Nor will any one of the rulers (bishops) in the Churches, however highly gifted he may be in point of eloquence, teach doctrines different from these (for no one is greater than the Master). (ibid.)

In short, Christ is the invisible Head of all the visible churches, and His teaching through the authority of His apostles is the basis for one church's unity:

The Word of God [Christ] is supreme, so also in things visible and corporeal He might possess the supremacy, and, taking to Himself the pre-eminence, as well as constituting Himself Head of the Church, He might draw all things to Himself at the proper time. (3.16.6)

Clearly, Christ has no vicar over earth; He Himself heads His church universal. As even Peter said, elders are only undershepherds who lead the local congregations to follow the "chief Shepherd" (1 Peter 5:1–4).

On the Church's Authority

Much controversy revolves around a disputed text in Book Three of ***Against Heresies***, where Irenaeus refers to

> that tradition derived from the apostles, of the very great, the very ancient, and universally known Church founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul; as also by pointing out the faith preached to men, which comes down to our times by means of the succession of the bishops.... It is a matter of necessity that *every Church should agree* [Lat: *convenire*] *with this Church*, [Lat: *principalitas*] on account of its preeminent authority, that is, the faithful everywhere, inasmuch as the apostolic tradition has been preserved continuously by those faithful men *who exist everywhere*. (3.3.2, emphasis added)

If *convenire* here means "agree with" and *principalitas* refers to the Roman primacy (in whatever sense), then it would favor the claim of the Roman Church. However, many scholars, including J. N. D. Kelly (1909–1997), have found fault with this translation for two reasons.

First, the weakness of the final clause strikes them as "intolerable" (ibid.).

Second, "the normal meaning of *convenire* is 'resort to,' 'foregather at,' and *necesse est* does not easily bear the sense of 'ought' " (ibid.).

Indeed, Arthur Cleveland Coxe, editor of the ***Apostolic Fathers*** volume in ***The Ante-Nicene Fathers***, cites one candid Roman Catholic scholar who translates it as follows: "For to this Church, on account of more potent principality, it is necessary that every Church (that is, those who are on every side faithful) ***resort***; in which Church ever, ***by those who are on every side***, has been preserved that tradition which is from the apostles" (Schaff, ***ANF***, 1.415). Coxe adds,

> Here it is obvious that the faith was kept at Rome, by *those who resort there* from all quarters. She was a mirror of the Catholic World, owing her orthodoxy to them; not the Sun, dispensing her own light to others, but the glass bringing their rays into focus. (ibid.)

In short, Irenaeus meant that Rome was the center of orthodoxy, since she, by virtue of being the empire's capitol, was the repository of all Catholic tradition —"all this has been turned upside down by modern Romanism" (ibid.). Kelly adds that many scholars

have judged it more plausible to take Irenaeus's point as being that the Roman church [of that day] supplies an ideal illustration for the reason that, in view of its being placed in the imperial city, representatives of all the different churches necessarily (i.e., inevitably) flock to it, so that there is some guarantee that the faith taught there faithfully reflects the apostolic tradition. (ibid., 193)

That is to say, Rome's primacy is ***reflective***, not ***authoritative***. Lightfoot's comment is to the point: "The episcopate is regarded now [by Irenaeus] not so much as the ***centre of ecclesiastical unity***, but rather as the ***depository of apostolic tradition***" (***SPEP***, 239).

Irenaeus asked, "How should it be if the apostles had not left us writing? Would it not be necessary to follow the course of the tradition which they handed down to those to whom they did commit the churches?" (3.4.1). J. Barton Payne (1922–1979) responds:

First of all, the above statements by Irenaeus are theoretical; it was not necessary to follow the course of traditions, because the apostles *had* left writings.

Second, the above statements have as their subject the facts which one must accept to be saved, and not the degree of authority which lies behind any given medium. [45]

Third, the above statements assume that the truths of the tradition are in fact those recorded in the Scriptures. ("BII" in Walvoord, *II*, 63–64)

The traditions are to be judged by the Scriptures, not the reverse. Again, the apostles did not appoint more apostles to replace themselves after Pentecost, where they became the "foundation" of the church (Eph. 2:20). Rather, they appointed "elders in every church" (Acts 14:23), and Irenaeus spoke of "the disciples of the apostles" as "presbyters [elders]" (***AH***, 5.35.2): "We refer them [heretics] to that tradition which originates from the apostles, and which is preserved by means of the successions of presbyters in the Churches" (3.2.2).

However, Irenaeus seemed to believe that each church was to have a single bishop over it, for he spoke of Polycarp as "bishop of Smyrna" (cf. 3.3.4) and a line of bishops in Rome beginning with Linus (r. c. 67–79; 3.3.3). Once more, ***this is in contrast to the New Testament, which affirms that every local church***

had its own "bishops and deacons" (cf. Phil. 1:1).[46] Their leadership was to be followed by their congregations (Heb. 13:7, 17, 24) as from Christ, the Chief Shepherd, the invisible Head of the visible church who rebuked individual churches for not recognizing His headship.[47]

Pope Victor I (r. 189–198)

By the end of the second century, a new milestone was reached in the episcopacy's development. According to Lightfoot, Victor was "the first Latin prelate who held the metropolitan see of Latin Christendom" and "the first Roman bishop who is known to have intimate relations with the imperial court, and the first also who advanced those claims to universal dominion" (***SPEP***, 223–24). Victor held a council at Rome and assumed the authority to excommunicate other bishops (Cross, ***ODCC***, 1437).

Clement of Alexandria (150–c. 215)

Clement spoke of "the elders [who] attend to the department which has improvement for its object and the deacons to the ministerial" (***S***, 7.1). He distinguished a bishop from an elder, referring to "grades" in the church of "bishop, presbyters, [and] deacons" (ibid., 6.13). Likewise, he mentioned biblical commands that apply "some to presbyters, some to bishops, [and] some to deacons" (ibid., 3:12).

Cyprian (200–258)

While Irenaeus saw the episcopate as the depository of apostolic tradition and Ignatius as the center of Christian unity, Cyprian added to the evolution of the monarchial episcopate by viewing it as "the absolute vicegerent [deputy] of Christ" (Lightfoot, ***SPEP***, 240); "there is one God, and Christ is one, and there is one chair [episcopate] founded upon the rock by the word of the Lord" (Cyprian, ***EC***, 43 (39).5). "The Bishop is appointed directly by God, is responsible directly to God, [and] is inspired directly from God" (op. cit., 243).

Under this system, “Each bishop in his place succeeded to and exercised the apostolic authority. Each bishop therefore had a right to a voice in the common concerns of the whole church.” But even the bishop of Rome—who certainly enjoyed a special dignity and a special right to leadership as Peter’s successor—“was nevertheless, substantively, the colleague and therefore the equal of his brethren” (Walker, ***HCC***, 83). Catholic authority Ludwig Ott admits, “The Fathers did not expressly speak of the Infallibility of the Pope, but they attest the decisive teaching authority of the Roman Church and its Pontiff” (***FCD***, 288).

Eusebius (c. 263–c. 340)

The great church historian Eusebius recorded other important developmental steps. Eventually, bishops gained authority over their areas, and before the end of the second century (by c. 180–190), there were bishops over Alexandria, Antioch, Caesarea, Jerusalem, Corinth, and Ephesus (and perhaps others—see ***CH***, 5.22). When a dispute arose over when the passion and resurrection of Christ should be observed (ibid., 5.23), “Victor, who presided over the church at Rome, immediately attempted to cut off from the common unity the parishes of all Asia, with the churches that agreed with them, as heterodox; and wrote letters and declared all the brethren there wholly excommunicate” (ibid., 5.24). This early tendency for the Roman Church, due to its size and location at the seat of political power, to exercise widespread authority was a portent of things to come. Disputes like this, and later more serious doctrinal ones, occasioned the development of a stronger and more authoritarian head. In fact, they called for general church councils to decide on the matter. The first of these was the Arian dispute over the deity of Christ, which occasioned the Council of Nicea (325). Constantine’s motives for calling the council can be seen in this citation from a “copy of an epistle in which the emperor commands another synod to be held for the purpose of removing all dissensions among the bishops” (ibid., 10.5.21). It reads, “I formerly gave command that certain bishops should be sent from Gaul, and that the opposing parties … should be summoned from Africa; that in their presence, and in the presence of the bishop of Rome, the matter which appeared to be causing the disturbance might be examined and decided with all care” (ibid). Little wonder a top-heavy and monolithic Roman Church soon emerged with a structure similar to the Roman government, with the pope corresponding to the emperor. Add to this that Constantine put the church on the state payroll,

which bound them with strong economic cords (ibid., 10.6.1).

Augustine (354–430)

Augustine added to the developing doctrine of the episcopacy's authority when he concluded that heretics could be coerced by the church to deny their unorthodox doctrine and accept ecclesiastical authority. In ***On the Coercion of the Donatists*** he wrote:

> Great mercy is shown toward them, when *by the force of those very imperial laws* they are in the first instance *rescued against their will* from that sect … so that afterwards they might be made whole in the Catholic Church, becoming accustomed to the good teaching and example which they find in it. (3.13, emphasis added)

In ***Against the Epistle of Manichaeus*** he stated:

> The consent of peoples and nations keeps me in the Church; so does her authority, inaugurated by miracles.... The succession of priests keeps me, beginning from the very seat of the Apostle Peter, to whom the Lord, after His resurrection, gave charge to feed His sheep, down to the present episcopate. (5.4)

Thus, the church presided over by the bishop of Rome, as Peter's successor, has authority to coerce people to believe in its truth. Indeed, Augustine added,

> The Catholic Church alone is the body of Christ, of which He is the Head and Saviour of the body. Outside this body the Holy Spirit giveth life to no one.... Therefore they have not the Holy Ghost who are outside the Church. (op. cit., 11.50)

General Church Councils

Church councils played an important role in the development of monolithic Roman episcopalism.[48] Roman Catholics acknowledge twenty-one ecumenical councils, which, allegedly, involved the whole Church, even though sometimes major portions of the Church have been only sparsely represented. Local

councils were only in specific geographical areas and are not held to be binding unless affirmed by a later ecumenical council. Most sections of Christendom accept the doctrinal pronouncements of the first four councils; the Eastern Church accepts the first seven; the Roman Church claims that all twenty-one are authoritative.

Actually, from the very first council (Constantinople, 381) called by Constantine, there were forces moving toward a more authoritarian ecclesiastical structure.[49] By the eighth century (The Fourth Council of Constantinople, 869), this was becoming even more evident, but Roman Catholicism as known today begins its development from the twelfth council (The Fourth Lateran, 1215), which pronounced the doctrine of transubstantiation, the primacy of the bishop of Rome, and seven sacraments. The counterreformational Council of Trent (1545–1563) solidified Romanism's unique doctrines, including purgatory, prayers for the dead, the necessity of works for salvation, transubstantiation, veneration of Mary and images, indulgences, prayers to the saints, and the addition of the Apocrypha to the Bible. At Vatican I (1870), the pope's infallibility was proclaimed, and in 1950, Mary's bodily assumption was made an infallible dogma.

A Summary of the Development of Roman Catholic Church Government

While the development of Roman Catholicism from the original church was gradual, beginning in early centuries, one of the most significant turning points came in 1215—here the seeds of what distinguishes Roman Catholicism were first pronounced as dogma. Furthermore, the evolution of the doctrine of papal infallibility illuminates the development of the Roman Church in general, standing in stark contrast to the apostolic teaching. As we have shown, in the New Testament the visible church had no hierarchy; each church was independent and congregational in form. There was no episcopal government, where a single bishop held authority over elders. Again, ***elder*** and ***bishop*** are terms that refer to the same office,[50] but gradually ***bishop*** was used to refer to the office at each church's head.

The Emergence of One Bishop Over a Church

Richard A. Norris (b. 1930) provides a plausible explanation of how this happened:

> It came about almost naturally, and certainly informally, as special status and responsibility in each church came to be assigned to an elder who regularly chaired meetings of what Ignatius calls "the presbytery."… [First,] even after the development of the monarchial episcopate, bishops seem often to have been referred to as "elders." [Second,] the third-century church order known as the *Didascalia Apostolorum* [*The Teaching of the Apostles*] identifies the chief pastor of a local church as "bishop and head among the presbytery." … [Third,] for a long time elders were regarded not as the bishop's representatives or delegates but as his colleagues. [Fourth,] at least for a while the two different structures must have existed simultaneously. (cited in Walker, *HCC*, 48–49)

The Appearance of One Bishop Over a Region

This informal and local episcopate eventually gave way to regional bishops and then to one prime bishop, viz., the bishop of Rome. Eusebius speaks of "Silvanus, bishop of the churches [plural] about Emesa" during the wicked reign of Emperor Diocletian (r. 284–305). It is understandable that the growth of one church in an area might lead to many churches in that area, over which the bishop of the mother church would remain in charge.

The Evolution of One Bishop Over the Whole Church

Rome, being the empire's capital city, would naturally have a powerful and influential bishop. Irenaeus seems to have been a transition in this process, for he took a key step in the direction of a bishop of bishops (***AH***, 3.3.2[51]). Once again, while Irenaeus was probably not stressing the ***authority*** of the medium, but its ***accuracy*** in transmitting the apostolic message, nonetheless, he did believe that each church had a single bishop over it. Likewise, he believed there was some sense of primacy in the bishop of Rome, whether reflective or authoritative.

At least by the time of Cyprian (d. 258), the evolution of a more monarchial episcopate had occurred. Lightfoot's general comment is instructive of the origins of the Catholic Church: "There was a crying need for some organization which should cement together the diverse elements of Christian society and preserve it from disintegration. Out of this need the Catholic Church arose" (***AF***, 201–03).[52] There is merit, though not justification, in the suggestion of Jerome (340–420) that "one presbyter was elected from among the elders … [and] placed over the rest, so that the care of the church should devolve on him, and the seeds of schism be removed" (cited by Lightfoot, ibid., 206). If true, however noble the motives, the results eventually contradicted the intents. Lightfoot may be correct that "the Church of Jerusalem … presents the earliest instance of a bishop," and this "as early as the middle of the second century" (ibid., 208). Even so, this is a far cry from the primacy of the bishop of Rome, let alone his alleged infallibility—both of which were many more centuries in the making.

The Emergence of the Bishop of Rome's Coercive Authority

We saw that Augustine gave credence to the developing doctrine of the episcopacy's authority when he concluded that the church could coerce heretics to deny unorthodox doctrine (***OCD***, 3.13; cf. 11.50). As time has passed, the church presided over by the bishop of Rome (as Peter's successor) has assumed authority to coerce people to accept its truth.

The Appearance of Monarchial Papal Authority to Formulate Creeds

Another step had been taken in doctrinal emergence in the late Middle Ages by the time of Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274).

> There must be one faith for the entire Church.… This norm could not be followed unless every question arising out of faith were resolved by one having care over the whole Church. A new version of the creed, then, falls to the sole authority of the Pope, just as do all other matters affecting the whole church. (*ST*, 2a2a1.10.1)

However, Aquinas upheld the primacy of Scripture, for he affirmed that "the

truth of faith is sufficiently plain in the teaching of Christ and the apostles" (ibid.). Further,

> The truth of faith is contained in sacred Scripture, in diverse ways and, sometimes, darkly.... That is why there was a need to draw succinctly together, out of the Scriptural teachings, some clear statements to be set before all for their belief. The symbol [i.e., creed] is not added to Scripture, but drawn from Scripture. (2a.2a2.1.9)

Aquinas never repudiated his earlier statement: ***"We believe the successors of the apostles only in so far as they tell us those things which the apostles and prophets have left in their writings"*** (***OT***, 14.10.11). Likewise, the pope has no authority to set forth doctrines not found in Scripture, which differs from restating in clear form (e.g., by creeds) what the Scriptures teach.
Catholic authority Yves Congar (1904–1995) admitted: "It is a fact that St. Thomas has not spoken of the infallibility of the papal magisterium. Moreover, he was unaware of the use of ***magisterium*** in its modern sense" ("STAIPM" in ***T***, 102). He went on to say it is not certain that Aquinas would even have said that the pope is without error "in his role of supreme interpreter of Christ's teaching" (ibid.), citing several texts in support (see Aquinas, op. cit.). So while Aquinas believed in the Roman bishop's authority to promulgate a creed based on apostolic truth,[53] it is evident from the foregoing quotation that he also held to *sola scriptura*, which would later be repudiated by the Council of Trent.

The Pronouncement of Papal Infallible Authority Over the Whole Church

The final step in the evolution of the Roman episcopacy's primacy, however, awaited the pronouncement of Pope Pius IX (r. 1846–1878), at the First Vatican Council (1870), that the bishop of Rome is infallible when speaking from Peter's chair (***ex cathedra***) on matters of faith and practice.

> We, adhering faithfully to the tradition received from the beginning of the Christian faith ... teach and explain that the dogma has been divinely revealed, that the Roman Pontiff, when he speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, when carrying out the duty of pastor and teacher of all Christians in accord with his supreme apostolic authority he explains a doctrine of faith or morals to be held by the universal Church, through the divine assistance promised him in blessed Peter, operates with that infallibility with which the divine Redeemer wished that His church be instructed in defining a doctrine on faith and morals; and so such definitions of the Roman Pontiff from himself, but not

from the consensus of the Church, are unalterable. (in Denzinger, *SCD*, 1840)

This declaration of papal infallibility was the climax of centuries of increasing authority for the Roman bishop and his successors, a macro leap from (A) the New Testament role of a bishop/elder as one among many leaders in a local church to (B) one God-appointed vicar of Christ over all Christian churches. As we have seen,[54] there is no real foundation for this teaching in the New Testament or in the earliest Fathers; it resulted from a long process whereby more and more authority was given to fewer and fewer persons until at last it rested in one person, the alleged bishop of all bishops, the bishop of Rome. Consider the following contrast:

New Testament Role of Peter	**Pope's Role As Peter's Alleged Successor**
One of many apostles	Chief apostle and Peter's successor
Only part of the church's foundation	Visible head of the church on earth
No governmental authority over any church	Governmental authority over all churches
Not infallible in faith or practice	Infallible in matters of faith and practice

There is a great gulf between the New Testament and papal infallibility, an essential difference between the New Testament form of government and that of the post-Vatican I Roman Catholic Church. This entirely new creation, genetically unrelated to the governmental structure of the New Testament church, has produced serious doctrinal deviations.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In summary, it took many centuries for monolithic episcopal government to gradually emerge from the simple self-governing independent New Testament churches. This evolution can be traced in several steps.

First, the seeds of the Roman view existed in New Testament times, as John the

apostle revealed when he warned, “I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us” (3 John 9 nkjv; cf. Hermas 2.4).

Second, even in apostolic times, a false tradition began based on some disciples’ misinterpretation of one of Christ’s statements; this also had to be corrected by John (see John 21:22–23). If false traditions could spring up even during the time of the apostles, it is easy to see how quickly they could spread without an apostle to squelch them. Tradition as such is neither authoritative nor reliable, except insofar as it is accurately transmitted. Written transmission (such as exists in Scripture and other writings based on it) are the only reliable source we have of apostolic teaching.

Third, the mid-second century, during which Irenaeus wrote, was almost a century after most apostles had died—the era when even apocryphal gospels were emerging.[55] Plenty of time had elapsed for false views to emerge, even among those who were otherwise orthodox.

Fourth, considering the attacks on Christianity at that time, there was strong external motivation to develop an ecclesiology that would provide a united front against the divergent heretical groups. This is reflected in Irenaeus’s emerging episcopal view of church government, a view that achieved a more mature form in Cyprian.

Fifth, even if some second-century writers can be shown to have favored the primacy of Rome as the center of Christianity, this does not support later Roman Catholic pronouncements of papal infallibility: The early Fathers constantly appealed to the original “apostles” (plural) as the God-established authority. Further, they did not single out Peter as superior to the other apostles—he was at best a cofounder of the Roman church and was, in fact, on the same level as Paul and the other apostles to whom he repeatedly refers. His own stress on the primacy of Scripture as the final written authority of the Christian faith demonstrates that all ecclesiastical authority is based on Scripture, not the reverse. Even Ludwig Ott admits: “The Fathers did not expressly speak of the Infallibility of the Pope” (***FCD***, 288).[56]

Sixth, even if the disputed text of Irenaeus (***AH***, 3.3.2) was understood that “every Church should agree with this Church [at Rome]”in his day, it does not follow that Rome couldn’t later deviate from the truth and be an unreliable source for all essential Christian truth. This is precisely what Protestants believe,

pointing to numerous Catholic teachings supported neither by Scripture nor the early church Fathers.[57]

Seventh, and finally, the conversion of Constantine and his use of imperial power to influence the emergence of an imperial church structure was a significant catalyst in the formation of monolithic episcopal church government. This, combined with the natural penchant for power manifest in the political extension under Charlemagne (d. 816), produced the Roman Church with its claim to papal infallibility and other unbiblical teachings; the travesty was well under way by 1215 (Fourth Lateran Council) and culminated in the doctrinal deviations of the Council of Trent (1545–1563) and the disastrous dogma of papal infallibility of Vatican I (1870).

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CHAPTER FIVE

THE ORDINANCES OF THE VISIBLE CHURCH

The ordinances of the visible or local church are a subject of wide diversity and debate among churches. Some (Bullingerites) say there are none; others (ultradispensationalists; Bereans) claim there is one; most Protestants say there are two; Roman Catholics insist there are seven. Further, there is a great deal of difference as to the nature of the communal elements. For instance, Catholics consider them a ***cause*** of grace in one's life; Anglicans and Lutherans believe they are a ***means*** of grace; Congregationalist, Baptist, and most Independent churches believe the ordinances are a ***symbol*** of grace.

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC VIEW OF THE SACRAMENTS

The Council of Trent (1545–1563) proclaimed in general that "if anyone shall say that the sacraments of the New Law were not all instituted by Jesus Christ our Lord … let him be anathema" (in Denzinger, ***SCD***, 1.844.262). This excommunication includes almost all Protestants,[1] because they adhere to less

than seven sacraments, and it never has and never can be revoked as an infallible ***ex cathedra*** pronouncement of the Roman Catholic Church.
The Catholic view, unique in many respects, differs from Protestant views on sacramental nature, function, necessity, number, and administration.

The Nature of the Sacraments

According to Catholic authority Ludwig Ott (b. 1906), by "its etymology the word *sacramentum* means a sacred or holy thing" (***FCD***, 325). Early scholastic theologians, such as Hugo of St. Victor (1096–1141) and Peter Lombard (1100–1160), defined it "not merely as a sign but as a cause of grace" (ibid.). "The Roman Catechism defines a sacrament as "a thing perceptible to the senses, which on the grounds of Divine institution possesses the power both of effecting and signifying sanctity and righteousness [sanctifying grace]" (II, I, 8 in ibid., 326).
By decree of the Roman Catholic Church,

> If anyone shall say that the sacraments of the New Law do not contain the grace which they signify, or that they do not confer that grace on those who do not place any obstacle in the way, as though they were only outward signs of grace or justice, received through faith ... let him be anathema. (Denzinger, *SCD*, 6.849.262)

Furthermore, according to Catholic dogma it is anathema to claim that "grace is not conferred from the work which has been worked" [Lat: *ex opere operato*]; grace is not from "faith alone" (ibid., 8.851.263).

The Function of the Sacraments

It is through the outward sacramental sign that the inner workings of God's grace occur; Catholicism maintains that "the Sacraments of the New Covenant contain the grace which they signify, and bestow it on those who do not hinder it" (Ott,

FCD, 328). Sacraments are effective objectively, whether or not their efficacy is felt subjectively: "Sacraments confer grace immediately, without the mediation of fiducial faith. [However,] it is true that in the adult recipient, faith is an indispensable precondition or a disposing cause, but it is not an efficient cause of grace" (ibid., 329). In order to designate the objective efficacy of a sacrament, Catholic theology coined the phrase *ex opere operato*,[2] that is, "the Sacraments operate by the power of the completed sacramental rite." This phrase, which Trent adopted (op. cit., 8.851.263), was vigorously opposed by the Reformers, who believed it demeaned the grace of God. Nonetheless, Catholics hold that "the sacraments … not only point externally to salvation; they contain and bestow the salvation they signify" (Arndt and Jordan, ***CCA***, 265).

Catholic scholars differ as to precisely how the sacraments work. According to the "moral mode of operation" view (following John Duns Scotus [1266–1308]), the sacraments "move God to bestow the grace by their objective value. God gives grace ***immediately*** on account of the moral pressure exercised on Him by the Sacrament" (Ott, ***FCD***, 331, emphasis added).

According to the "physical mode of operation" view (following Thomas Aquinas [1225–1274]), "the sacraments operate physically if, through the power received from God indwelling in them, they cause the grace which they signify" (ibid., 330). That is, God, as the primary cause of grace, utilizes the physical sacrament as an instrument (secondary cause) to produce grace in the recipient's soul. Grace is conveyed ***mediately*** [not immediately] through the sacrament.

The Necessity of the Sacraments

The purpose of a sacrament is to bestow the grace of God through the Roman Catholic Church[3] to its recipient in seven stages from birth (baptism) to death (extreme unction). Thus, the sacraments are necessary for salvation, said Trent (infallibly):

> If anyone shall say that the sacraments of the New Law are not necessary for salvation, but are superfluous, and that, although all are not necessary individually, without them or without the desire of them through faith alone men obtain from God

the grace of justification: let him be anathema. (in Denzinger, *SCD*, 4.847.262)

The Number of the Sacraments

Again, Trent proclaimed:

If anyone shall say that the sacraments of the New Law were not all instituted by Jesus Christ our Lord, or that there are more or less than seven, namely Baptism, Confirmation, the Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, [Holy] Order, and Matrimony, or even that any one of these seven is not truly and strictly a sacrament: let him be anathema. (ibid., 1.844.262)

According to Catholic theology, "Holy Scripture attests that Christ immediately instituted the Sacraments of Baptism, Eucharist, Penance and Consecration [Confirmation]. The other Sacraments … were [already] in existence in apostolic times" (Ott, ***FCD***, 337). The apostles, then, simply became the dispensers of these sacraments.

The Administration of the Sacraments

"Except for Baptism and Matrimony, a special priestly or episcopal power conferred by Holy Order, is necessary for the valid ministration of the Sacraments" (ibid., 341); this is known as ***sacerdotalism***. Catholic laypersons and even Protestants may administer baptism in the name of the Trinity; however, Trent soundly condemned the view that "all Christians have the power to administer all the sacraments" (ibid.). "The validity and efficacy of the Sacraments is independent of the minister's orthodoxy and state of grace" (ibid.), meaning, the priest does not have to be holy in order for the sacraments to convey grace.

Only human beings are valid recipients of sacraments, and, "excepting the Sacrament of Penance, neither orthodox belief nor moral worthiness is necessary for the validity of the Sacrament, on the part of the recipient" (ibid., 345).

Heretics and the immoral can be valid recipients, although in adults "the intention of receiving the Sacrament is necessary" (ibid.), as is moral worthiness in the sense of removing any obstacle to grace (ibid., 346).

The Roman Catholic Defense of the Seven Sacraments

Acknowledging that the Bible and the Church Fathers do not agree on the enumeration of these seven sacraments as such, Catholic scholars seek other grounds to support them.
Theologically, they argue that the existence of seven sacraments "has been regarded as a truth of Faith since the middle of the twelfth century." Later, "it was confirmed by the official teaching of the Church from the thirteenth century on" (ibid., 338).
Historically, "the Greek-Orthodox Church … agrees that there are seven Sacraments" (ibid., 339); even the nestorian and monophysite sects of the fifth century "held firmly to the sevenfold number" (ibid.).
Speculatively, foundation for seven is sought in "the appropriateness of the number seven of the Sacraments [which] flows from the analogy to the supernatural life of the soul with the natural life of the body" (ibid.).[4]
Therefore, Roman Catholics insist that there are seven (and ***only*** seven) sacraments—the ones the Church has infallibly proclaimed and enumerated.

A DISCUSSION OF TWO IMPORTANT SACRAMENTS

Although Catholics and Protestants disagree about the ***number*** of the sacraments (the latter generally affirming only two—Baptism and the Eucharist [Communion]), the difference on the ***nature*** of the sacraments is more crucial.[5]

The Sacrament of Baptism

Trent declared that baptism must be administered with water:

If anyone shall say that natural water is not necessary for baptism, and on that account those words of our Lord Jesus Christ: “Unless a person is born of water and spirit” (

John 3:5

), are distorted into some sort of metaphor; let him be anathema. (Denzinger, *SCD*, 2.858.263)

And, according to the same Council, “If anyone shall say that baptism is optional, that is, not necessary for salvation: let him be anathema” (ibid., 5.858.264). Baptism properly administered is a once-for-all act, not to be repeated (ibid., 11.867.264); however, baptism is not a guarantee of salvation,[6] which even the regenerate can lose (ibid., 6.862.264). Even baptism done by heretics (Protestants and others) in the name of the Trinity is valid (ibid., 5.860.263), but denial of infant baptism (such as is the case with Baptists and many other Christian groups) is heresy:[7]

If anyone shall say that infants, because they have not actual faith,
[8]
after having received baptism are not to be numbered among the faithful, and therefore, when they have reached the years of discretion, are to be rebaptized ... let them be anathema. (ibid., 13.869.264)

This, of course, condemns all Baptists and like groups, including the author of this book.

Crucial to the debate between Catholics and Protestants is the Catholic belief that “baptism confers the grace of justification” (Ott, ***FCD***, 354), an ***ex cathedra*** (nonnegotiable) pronouncement of the Catholic faith (by Trent):

If anyone denies that by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ which is conferred in Baptism, the guilt of original sin is remitted; or even assert that the whole of that which has the true and proper nature of sin is not taken away ... let him be anathema.

(op. cit., 792.247)

The many proof texts offered in support of infant salvation by baptism have already been discussed.[9]

The Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist (Communion)

Few things strike to the core of the difference between Catholics and Protestants more than the doctrine of Holy Communion, which Catholic theology defines as follows:

> The Eucharist is that Sacrament, in which, under the forms of bread and wine, [Christ] is truly present, with His Body and Blood, in order to offer Himself in an unbloody manner to the Heavenly Father, and to give Himself to the faithful as nourishment for their souls. (op. cit., 370)

In the words of Trent's infallible pronouncement:

> The holy Synod teaches and openly and simply professes that in the nourishing sacrament of the Holy Eucharist after the consecration of the bread and the wine our Lord Jesus Christ, true God and man, is truly, really, and substantially contained under the species of those sensible things. (op. cit., 1.874.265)

The reason the Eucharist is Catholicism's greatest sacrament is found in its official doctrine of ***transubstantiation***—that the bread and wine at consecration are ***literally*** transformed into Christ's actual body and blood:

> By the consecration of the bread and wine a conversion takes place of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the Body of Christ our Lord, and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of His blood. This conversion is appropriately called transubstantiation by the Catholic Church. (ibid., 4.877.267–68)

Since transubstantiation turns the elements of Communion into the actual body and blood of Christ, Catholics believe it is appropriate to worship the consecrated elements as God. Trent pronounced emphatically that there is "no

room left for doubt that all the faithful of Christ … offer in veneration (can. 6) the worship of ***latria*** [the act of adoration] which is due to the true God, to this most Holy Sacrament" (ibid., 5.878.268). The reasoning for this is that since Christ in His human form is God and, therefore, appropriately worshiped (e.g., John 20:28), and since in the Mass the bread and wine are transformed into His actual body and blood, this sacrament can be worshiped as God.

If anyone says that in the holy sacrament of the Eucharist the only-begotten Son of God is not to be adored even outwardly with the worship of *latria* … and is not to be set before the people publicly to be adored, and that the adorers are idolaters; let him be anathema. (op. cit., 6.888.271)

The Catholic defense of the doctrine of transubstantiation is based primarily on the words of Christ when He instituted this sacrament at the Last Supper: "This is my body" (Matt. 26:26; cf. 1 Cor. 11:24). Other passages are sometimes used, especially John 6:53, where Jesus said, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you." Of course, taking Jesus' words here literally (rather than symbolically) is the key to the Roman Catholic view. Ott summarizes the argument as follows:

The necessity of accepting a literal interpretation in this case is evident:

(a) From the nature of the words used. One specially notes the realistic expressions *aléthés brôsis* = true, real food (v. 55); *aléthés posis* = true, real drink (v. 55); [from] *trôgein* = to gnaw, to chew, to eat (v. 54 et seq.).

(b) From the difficulties created by a figurative interpretation. In the language of the Bible to eat a person's flesh and drink His blood in the metaphorical sense means to persecute Him in a bloody fashion, to destroy Him (cf. Ps. 26, 2; Isa. 9:20; 49:26; Mic. 3:3

).

(c) From the reactions of the listeners, which Jesus does not correct, as He had done previously in the case of misunderstandings (cf.
John 3:3
et seq.;
4:32
et seq.;
Matt. 16:6
et seq.). In this case, on the contrary, He confirms their literal acceptance of His words at the risk that His disciples and His apostles might desert Him (
John 6:60ff
.).

A PROTESTANT RESPONSE TO THE CATHOLIC VIEW OF THE SACRAMENTS

Protestants respond in different ways to different aspects and different sacraments of the Roman Catholic model. Virtually all, however, disagree regarding the number and nature of the sacraments.[10]

Response Regarding the Number of the Sacraments

Ludwig Ott frankly admits that "Holy Writ … does not summarize them in the figure seven. Again, no formal enumeration of the seven Sacraments is found in the Fathers." In fact, "this [enumeration of seven] emerged only around the middle of the 12th century" (ibid., 338). Further, Catholic scholars openly acknowledge,

It cannot be shown that any one of the seven Sacraments was at any particular time instituted by a Council, a Pope, a Bishop or a Community…. The doctrinal decisions of the Church, the Fathers and the theologians *presuppose* the existence of the individual Sacraments as something handed down from antiquity. From this one may *infer* that the seven Sacraments existed in the Church from the very beginning. (ibid., 338–39, emphasis added)

This argument for seven sacraments is so weak that it scarcely needs critique; the italicized words speak for themselves. There is no real basis in the Bible, the Church Fathers, or the church councils for the enumeration of seven, and the decision to recognize seven (and only seven) was late.

The other argument (from analogy) is also weak. At ***best***, Catholic scholars can point to the scriptural acts or events that allegedly correspond to these sacraments. Even so, proving they were/are sacraments, especially as Catholics understand them (namely, as a ***cause*** of grace), is another matter to be discussed.[11] Roman Catholic scholars claim that seven sacraments exist in Scripture implicitly, as the Trinity does. But ***this is a false analogy***, since all the premises from which the Trinity is logically derived are taught explicitly in Scripture: (1) There is one God; (2) there are three persons who are God;[12] so (3) there must be three persons in the one God. ***Nowhere*** does the Bible teach that marriage, penance, and confirmation (for example) are sacraments. These activities are no more sacramental than Bible reading, which is also a means of receiving grace.[13]

Response Regarding the Nature of and Necessity for Sacraments

Catholic theology claims that sacraments are an actual cause of grace to the recipient; baptism, for example, is said to cause the grace of justification and sanctification to occur in the infant recipient's life,[14] even though he or she has exercised no actual faith in God.[15] Likewise, Catholicism maintains that the Holy Eucharist actually conveys Christ's literal physical body and blood to the recipient.[16]

Since our response to the Roman Catholic use of Scripture to support baptismal regeneration is found elsewhere,[17] we will now concentrate on other problems with the Catholic view of baptism as a saving sacrament.[18]

Baptismal Regeneration Is Contrary to Grace

The belief that baptism brings regeneration is inconsistent with scriptural teaching on God's grace. Salvation came "by grace through faith," not by any "righteous works" (including baptism). Jesus called baptism a work of "righteousness" (Matt. 3:15), and Paul declared that it was "not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy" that God saved us (Titus 3:5): "By grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God; it is not from works, so that no one can boast" (Eph. 2:8–9 net). So baptism is no more necessary for being saved than is any other work of righteousness.[19]

Baptismal Regeneration Is Contrary to the Need for Faith

The Bible consistently maintains that faith and faith alone[20] is commanded as a condition for receiving God's gift of salvation.[21] If baptism (or anything else) is soteriologically necessary, then Jesus misled His audience throughout the entire gospel as recorded by His beloved disciple.

Baptismal Regeneration Is Contrary to Paul's Teaching

Paul, the great apostle called of God to take the Good News to the Gentiles, said emphatically: "Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel" (1 Cor. 1:17). Clearly, baptism is not part of the gospel; ***the gospel "is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes"*** (Rom. 1:16). Since, then, the gospel saves us and baptism is not part of the gospel, it follows that baptism cannot be part of what saves us. ***Baptism is an outward sign of what saves us***, namely, the Spirit's regeneration in the lives of those who believe.

"Baptism of Desire" Proves That Baptism Is Not Essential

According to Roman Catholic theology, someone who has never been baptized can be saved if the desire to be baptized was present; "baptism of desire, it is true, replace[s] Sacramental Baptism in so far as the communication of grace is concerned" (Ott, ***FCD***, 311). Even Aquinas conceded "that a person may be saved extrasacramentally by baptism of desire and therefore [there is] the possibility of salvation without actual membership … in the Church" (ibid., 313; see Aquinas, ***ST***, III.68.2).

The same applies to those who suffered but were not baptized—the so-called "baptism of blood." As Augustine acknowledged, "I find not only suffering for the sake of Christ can replace that which is lacking in Baptism, but also faith and conversion of the heart, if perhaps the shortness of time does not permit the celebration of the mystery of Baptism" (***OB***, cited by Ott, ibid., 357). That within Catholic theology there is salvation without baptism proves that baptism is not essential to salvation (cf. Luke 23:43).

In brief, consistent biblical and evangelical teaching affirms the historic Protestant principle that we are saved by faith alone. Adding ***anything*** else as a condition for salvation is inconsistent with this fundamental truth. (See Vol. 3, chap. 16.)

A Response to the Catholic Defense of Transubstantiation

Even more important than differences over baptism is the disagreement about Communion. Catholic scholars argue that it is necessary to take Jesus' words in a physical sense: for example, "This [the bread] is my body"[22] and "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you" (John 6:53). Evangelicals believe there are many good reasons for rejecting this view.

It Is Not Necessary to Take These Phrases Physically

Jesus' words need not be taken in the sense of ingesting His actual (physical) body and blood; He often spoke in metaphors and figures of speech.[23] Jesus

also said, “I am the true vine” in this same book (15:1); Roman Catholic scholars do not take this physically, nor do they understand Jesus to be speaking physically in saying, “I am the gate” (10:9). There is, therefore, no necessity to take Jesus’ words “this is my body” or “eat my flesh” in a literal way. He Himself said that He often spoke in graphic parables and figures (Matt. 13:10–11), and, as we shall see, these can be understood from context.

It Is Not Plausible to Take Jesus’ Words Physically

Vivid phrases are no proof of their literalness (cf. John 15:1). The Psalms and other writings are also filled with vivid figures of speech: God is depicted as a rock (Ps. 18:2), a bird (Ps. 63:7), a tower (Prov. 18:10), and by many other means in Holy Writ.[24] Further, the Bible often uses the language of ingesting in a figurative sense, such as “taste and see that the Lord is good” (Ps. 34:8 nkjv). When John was told to eat a scroll in the Apocalypse, he did and then said, “When I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour” (Rev. 10:10)—undeniably vivid, yet it was all part of a vision John had in reference to his receiving God’s Word (the scroll). Peter tells young believers, “Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk” (1 Peter 2:2 tlb); the writer of Hebrews speaks of “solid food” for mature Christians (5:14) and of others who “tasted the heavenly gift” (6:4). Neither is it necessary (as Catholic scholars suggest) to take “flesh and blood” literally just because the phrase was used that way in many places in other contexts. As all biblical scholars know, the same words can have different meanings in different contexts; the very word ***flesh*** (Gk: ***sarx***) is used in the New Testament in a spiritual, nonphysical sense of fallen human nature, such as when Paul said, “I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells” (Rom. 7:18 nkjv; cf. Gal. 5:17). ***Meaning is discovered by context, not by whether the same or similar words are used***. The word ***body*** (Gk: ***soma***), which means a physical body when used of an individual person, means the spiritual body of Christ (the universal church) in other contexts (cf. Eph. 1:22–23), as both Catholics and Protestants acknowledge.

That some of Jesus’ listeners took His words in a physical sense without His giving explicit and immediate rebuke is not a solid argument. First of all, Jesus rebuked their understanding (at least implicitly) when He later said in the same discourse, “It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail. The words that I

have spoken to you are spirit and life" (John 6:63 rsv).[25] To borrow a phrase from Paul, Jesus' words are to be "spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14; cf. Matt. 16:17), not in a cannibalistic sense.

Furthermore, Jesus did not have to explicitly rebuke their immediate response in order for it to be wrong. Since a literalistic understanding in this context would have been so vile, no disciple should have expected Him to be making such an absurd statement.

Neither is the appeal to an alleged miraculous transformation of the elements (bread and wine) called for by the context. The only miracle in this connection is the feeding of the five thousand (John 6:11), which was the occasion for this discourse on the Bread of Life (v. 35). An appeal to miraculous transubstantiation here is *deus ex machine*,[26] a failed attempt to evoke God in order to keep one's interpretation from collapse.

Finally, appealing to the Church Fathers to support Trent's dogma of transubstantiation is poorly grounded for many reasons.

First, as even Catholic scholars admit, the Fathers were by no means unanimous in their interpretation. Trent speaks of the "unanimous consent of the Fathers" as the means of determining true apostolic tradition, but some Fathers clearly opposed taking the phrase "this is my body" literally.

Second, at best many of the Fathers were simply supporting the idea of Christ's real presence in the Communion, not that the elements were literally transformed into His actual body and blood.[27] The later dogma of transubstantiation cannot be based on any early or unanimous consent (even though Catholics claim it).

Third, the Eastern Orthodox Church, whose roots are at least as old as Rome's, has always held a mystical view of Christ's presence in Communion and has never upheld transubstantiation.[28] Likewise, the Lutheran understanding, which rejects transubstantiation, appeals to the same Fathers in support of its view over against Catholicism.

Fourth, as noted before, the early Fathers had only a fallible interpretation of the infallible Word. They could be and often were wrong, and there is no reason any of them could not have been wrong on this issue.[29]

The Catholic Church's use of the Fathers to proclaim a doctrine as infallibly true is not always consistent with the evidence; sometimes their proclamation of a

view as apostolic truth isn't well supported in the early Fathers. In the final analysis, the decision of the teaching magisterium to proclaim a view as an article of faith is not based on the evidence, and their appeal to the Fathers and councils is imbalanced and after the fact (*ex post facto*). For example, when earlier Fathers or councils condemned a view that Rome later pronounces as infallible, Rome ignores the earlier statements against it. But even when only a few early Fathers and councils support a view they desire to pronounce *de fide*,[30] they point triumphantly to this minority voice. The Catholic use of the Fathers is not only inconsistent but also circular; the Fathers are used as a basis for the church's infallible teaching, while the church's infallible teaching is the actual basis for the use of the Fathers.

It Is Not Possible to Consistently Take a Physical View

In at least one very important respect, it is not theologically possible for an orthodox Christian to hold to a literalistic interpretation of "This is my body." ***When Jesus said this of the bread in His hand, no apostle present could have understood Him to mean that the bread was actually His physical body, which was right there with them, the hands of which were holding that very bread; or we must believe that Christ was holding His own body in His own hands***. Jesus could not have been speaking physically in this case, because ever since the Incarnation He has always been a human being and has always dwelt continuously in a human body (except when He was in the grave). ***If the bread and the wine He held in His hands were actually His literal body and blood, then He would have been incarnated in two different places at the same time***. One physical body cannot be in two different locations at the same time, so despite Catholic protests to the contrary,[31] transubstantiation (logically) involves two bodies and two incarnations of Christ, which is contrary to the orthodox doctrine of ***the*** Incarnation.

It Is Idolatrous to Worship the Host

As we have seen, official Catholic dogma says the consecrated Eucharist can and

should be worshiped. Most Protestants believe this is a form of idolatry,[32] for this is the worship of something that our God-given senses say is a finite creation of God (bread and wine). Worshiping God under a physical image is clearly forbidden by the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:4).

Furthermore, the appeal to the ubiquitous presence of Christ's body (or omnipresence of Christ ***as God*** in the host) does not resolve the problem;[33] that is, considering the Eucharistic elements as only the "accidental clothing" under which Christ is somehow localized does not avoid the difficulty. By the same kind of argument, one could justify pagans worshiping stones or statues, since God is everywhere present, including their objects of worship. After all, no animistic pagan truly worships the stone but rather the spirit that animates it.

Transubstantiation Undermines Belief in the Resurrection

Finally, claiming that the consecrated host is anything but finite undermines the very epistemological basis by which we know anything in the empirical world[34] and, indirectly, the very historical basis of support for the truth about the incarnate Christ's life, death, and resurrection.[35] If the senses cannot be trusted when they experience the Communion elements, then neither can the apostles' senses be trusted to verify Christ's claims to resurrection: "***Look*** at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! ***Touch*** me and ***see***" (Luke 24:39; cf. John 20:27). John said of Christ that He was "what was from the beginning, what we have ***heard***, what we have ***seen*** with our eyes, what we have ***looked at*** and ***touched*** with our hands" (1 John 1:1 tlb).

The Mass Shows No Evidence of the Miraculous

The Roman Catholic response to the foregoing arguments is that the Mass is a miracle and, hence, appealing to the normal, natural way of observation is irrelevant. True, miracles are not normal occurrences; however, this strategy will not work, since the Mass shows absolutely no evidence of the miraculous.

First of all, by similar reasoning—attempting to justify an invisible material

substance miraculously replacing the empirically obvious signs (bread and wine)—one could justify belief in Santa Claus at Christmas or an invisible gremlin moving the hands on a watch. This is literally nonsense; it is ***not sensible***, even though its object is a sensible (physical) body. Philosophically, it is alleged to be an empirically unknowable event in the empirical world; theologically, it is presented as a matter of pure faith. One must simply believe what the Church's teaching magisterium says—namely, that the host is really Jesus' body—even though his senses plainly tell him otherwise.

Furthermore, if the Mass is a miracle, then virtually ***any*** natural empirical event could also be a miracle, and if this is true, then ***nothing*** is a miracle, since nothing is unique. Hence, claiming the Mass is miraculous undermines the nature of miracles as special events with apologetic value.[36]

Finally, the appeal of Catholic apologists to divine appearances (theophanies) in attempting to avoid these criticisms is futile: ***When God Himself appears in a finite form, it is an obvious miraculous appearance, so that observers know clearly it is not a normal event***. There are supernatural manifestations, voices, prophecies, or unusual events of nature connected with it (cf. Ex. 3:1ff.); the Mass has none of these. Nowhere in the New Testament are the normal words for "miracle" (***sign, wonder***, and ***power***)[37] used of the Communion; there is absolutely no evidence that it is anything but a natural event with natural elements on which Christ places spiritual blessings as we remember His death (1 Cor. 11:25).

The Problem With the Mass As a "Sacrifice"

Roman Catholics and Anglicans[38] view the Eucharistic Feast as a "sacrifice" (although bloodless).[39] The term ***sacrifice*** is found as early as Pope Gregory the Great (r. 590–604), who held that at every mass Christ was sacrificed afresh (Cross, ***ODCC***, 594–95); as a result, "this notion of the mass as sacrifice eventually became standard doctrine of the Western church—until it was rejected by Protestants in the sixteenth century" (González, ***SC***, 247).

In 831, a Frankish monk named Paschasius Radbertus (c. 786–c. 860) addressed this issue in a work titled ***On the Body and Blood of the Lord***. Radbertus taught

that Christ is “corporeally” present during Communion. Early in the church, the Eucharist had been considered a fellowship meal, but now,

> The new emphasis on the corporeal presence of Christ permitted the Church to begin to treat Christ as a victim, rather than as the host [of the feast], to think of itself as offering him to the Father, rather than as coming to be nourished at table. (Brown, *H*, 233)

Thus, the Lord’s Supper itself became known as a sacrifice; what was intended as ***memorializing*** a sacrifice became ***enactment*** of that sacrifice (see ibid.). That the New Testament term ***remembrance*** (Gk: ***anamnesis***) is often used in a sacrificial context (as Roman Catholics point out) does not justify the contention that Communion is a sacrifice. Jesus wants us to ***remember*** His sacrifice on the cross, not ***reenact*** it.[40]

Regarding Roman Catholic belief in the need for mediation in the Eucharist, even if they were to grant that God is the ***primary*** cause of the transformation, Protestants still object to the sacerdotal belief that the priest is a ***secondary*** cause or instrument through which God accomplishes it.[41] It is contrary to the ways of God revealed in Scripture to endow any human with the power to transform created things (the bread and wine) into the body of the Creator (Christ).[42] In brief, the whole concept of reenacting and re-presenting Christ’s sacrifice on the cross is contrary to the clear message of Hebrews that this sacrifice occurred only “once for all” (10:10). Trent’s dogma on Christ being repeatedly “immolated” (sacrificed)[43] in the Mass violates the clear teaching of Scripture.

The Problem With Multilocality of Christ’s Physical Body

As mentioned earlier, the Roman Catholic doctrine of Christ’s corporeal (bodily) presence during the Eucharist poses another problem for most evangelicals.[44] The difficulty may be stated as follows: “In order to be bodily present at thousands of altars, the Body of Christ must possess one of the so-called

attributes of the majesty of God, namely, omnipresence or ubiquity" (Brown, ***H***, 229).[45] Simply put, "to believe that Jesus was in two places at once is something of a denial of the incarnation, which limited His physical human nature to one location" (Erickson, ***CT***, 1121).

This Eucharistic understanding is fraught with difficulties. Those who try to preserve Christ's "actual presence" in Communion come perilously close to monophysitism, which held that, following the Incarnation, Christ possessed only one incarnate divine nature, thereby combining and comingling His two natures.[46] Monophysitism was condemned by the Council of Ephesus (431), an official condemnation reaffirmed at Chalcedon (in 451; see Brown, op. cit., 168–72; 181–85). Why then should not the comingling of divine and human in the substance of the Communion elements also be condemned as unorthodox?

In summation, the sacraments (especially the Eucharist) are at the heart of Roman Catholic belief and practice, and few issues involve greater disagreements between Catholics and Protestants. Catholics untenably maintain transubstantiation[47] and believe that a sacrament is a cause of grace—for example, that the grace of justification and sanctification are conveyed through baptism.[48] Further, we have examined the Roman Catholic arguments from both Scripture and tradition and found them wanting. In fact, some dimensions of Catholic teaching on the sacraments are clearly contrary to Scripture, contrary to other orthodox Christian teaching, and even contrary to fact and logic.

In view of these significant differences between Roman Catholic and evangelical Protestant doctrine, realism demands that we take a less optimistic view than the ecumenical call "Rome is home." As long as Catholics maintain that these are nonnegotiable dogmas, we will have to find ecclesiastical lodging elsewhere. This is in spite of all the other theological truths on which we agree and the practical areas in which we can cooperate.

THE VIEW THAT THERE ARE NO ORDINANCES

On the other end of the spectrum is the view of E. W. Bullinger and William Booth, who both claimed there are no ordinances required for observance by the

local church today. (This includes both baptism and the Lord's Supper, observed by the vast majority of all churches.) Booth did not observe them on practical grounds; Bullinger opposed them on theological grounds.

The Salvation Army Position

The Salvation Army, founded by William Booth (1829–1912), is a movement that began as a Christian mission and rescue operation on London's east side, shunned by mainline churches and left unprotected by magistrates. In spite of being an ordained Methodist minister, Booth adopted a nondenominational policy; while he drew criticism for observing no sacraments, he "denied he was against them. Perhaps, the wrangling these had caused in other churches did not encourage him to change his mind" (Elwell, ***EDT***, 172).

The Bullinger View

E. W. Bullinger (1837–1913), a noted Greek scholar, is considered the father of the ultradispensational movement. Ultradispensationalism[49] places the origin of the Christian church ***after*** Acts 28, contending that earlier believers were a Jewish church in which baptism and the Lord's Supper were practiced. The true church, the mystery body of Christ, did not appear until Paul's prison epistles, which Bullinger contended have no reference to water baptism or Communion.[50]

Response to the No-Ordinance View

There is little to address in Booth's position, since it's more of a nonview than a view; he didn't so much oppose the sacraments as he omitted them. Furthermore, he omitted them on pragmatic grounds, seeing them as a seemingly endless

source of conflict that merely wasted precious resources better spent in helping the needy.

Because Bullinger, on the other hand, presented a sophisticated biblical argument against both ordinances, his position requires a more extensive reply. His essential reasoning is based on two contentions: (1) The Christian church did not begin until after Acts 28 (hence, all references to baptism or the Lord's Supper before this point do not apply to our dispensation);[51] (2) there are no references to water baptism in any epistle written after this time.[52]

First, the second argument is at best a weak argument necessarily from silence. However, from nothing, nothing follows. Omission is not exclusion; that some ordinance is not mentioned in some letters doesn't mean it was not in effect. For example, the Resurrection is unmentioned in certain epistles;[53] this in no way demonstrates that the authors didn't believe in it or affirm its essential significance.

Second, it is possible that Paul does refer to water baptism in the Prison Epistles. Colossians 2:12, for example, refers to baptism as "burial" with Christ; this depicts immersion, the mode of baptism expressed in the New Testament. Indeed, in a parallel reference, Paul refers to baptism by burial as an outward act that is in the "likeness" of the real act of salvation, which is Spirit baptism into Christ's body (1 Cor. 12:13); the only baptism that is an outward likeness of the inner reality is baptism by water. Ephesians 4:5 is also a likely reference to water baptism, since Spirit baptism is implied in the preceding verse (where there is "one body" formed by "one Spirit"—precisely what Spirit baptism is). Further, "baptism" follows "faith" in the text, the same order for faith and water baptism throughout the New Testament.[54] Finally, these elements form a confessional unity, a kind of mini-creed that bespeaks water baptism, an outward confessional activity, which Spirit baptism is not.

Third, Bullinger's entire argument collapses if it can be shown that the church as Christ's body occurs earlier than Acts 28, and there is good evidence that it does.[55] (1) The church as Christ's body resulted from the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13), which occurred only "days" after His ascension (Acts 1:5) on the Day of Pentecost (2:1ff.); (2) Jesus told Saul that he was persecuting ***His*** body in Acts 9:4, and the only earthly body of Christ that Paul could have been

persecuting was His church, which he himself plainly acknowledged (1 Cor. 15:9). Both water baptism and the Lord's Supper were practiced by the church after Acts 9 (e.g., Acts 19; 1 Cor. 11).

Fourth, ultradispensationalism engages in distinctions without real differences, making a lot out of little or nothing. Distinguishing an earlier Jewish church from the later Christian church is based on circumstantial appearances and arguments for silence, not positive and solid evidence. (Indeed, it overlooks negative evidence.)

Fifth, and finally, ultradispensationalism misses the whole point of Acts 10, where Peter was called to the Gentiles and they too were baptized into Christ's body. It also misses the point of Acts 15, where the apostles[56] issued a declaration that Gentiles were fellow heirs of the gospel along with Jews (Eph. 3:6; Col. 1:27). This, the mystery—how Gentiles could be joined with Jews in one body, which Bullingerites proclaim as the true church—existed at least as early as Acts 10, which Peter said was the same as Acts 2 (cf. 11:15). Bullinger's view against the church's two ordinances, plainly practiced in Acts, cannot stand.

The Berean View (One Ordinance)

Perhaps because of some of the above criticism, there arose a modified form of ultradispensationalism that claims there is only one ordinance for the church—the Lord's Supper. This view, expressed by Cornelius Stam (1909–2003), Charles Baker (1910–2002), and the Berean [Grace] movement, holds that the Christian church began sometime between Acts 9 and 13.[57] Modified ultradispensationalists believe they can thereby avoid Bullinger-related criticisms and retain the Lord's Supper without holding to water baptism.

Response to the Berean View (One Ordinance)

This view fares little better than its precursor; the Berean problems are much the

same as those of the Bullingerites.
First, as shown above, it is largely an argument from silence.
Second, it again makes distinctions without real differences. For instance, the ministries of circumcision (Peter) and uncircumcision (Paul) are different ***audiences*** but not different ***gospels***.
Third, even granting that the mystery of the church was not ***revealed*** to anyone before Paul does not mean the church did not ***exist*** before Paul spoke it.
Fourth, the church existed from the time the Holy Spirit baptized people into Christ's body (1 Cor. 12:13), at Pentecost (Acts 1:5; 2:1ff.).
Fifth, Christian water baptism took place after Acts 9–13 (when the Bereans say the New Testament church began). In Acts 19 Paul baptized converts in Christ's name who'd already undergone an earlier Jewish baptism.
Sixth, modified ultradispensationalism confuses Old Testament prophecies that Gentiles ***would be*** blessed with there being no predictions as to ***how*** they would be on the same (soteriological) level with Jews.[58]
Seventh, and finally, its claim that there are different gospels contradicts Paul, who said there is only one (Gal. 1:8; cf. 3:8). A more extensive evaluation of ultradispensationalism can be found later.[59]

PROTESTANT VIEWS ON THE ORDINANCES

With the above exceptions, Protestants are almost universally agreed that there are two ordinances: baptism and the Lord's Supper. It is at this point that the differences begin.

Differences Concerning Baptism

First, there are differences over the ***mode*** of baptism. Baptists, Congregationalists, and others springing from the Anabaptist tradition[60] insist on baptism by immersion. Others, like Anglicans, Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Methodists, baptize by effusion (sprinkling or pouring). Each side presents its

case based on biblical images of salvation that depict baptism as an outward sign of its reality.

Second, there are differences over the ***candidate*** for baptism. Baptists and other Baptistic groups insist on believer's baptism.[61] Eastern Orthodox, Anglicans, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Methodists, and others also baptize infants.

Third, there are differences over the ***efficacy*** of baptism. Eastern Orthodox, Lutherans, and Anglicans hold to baptismal regeneration; Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, and others do not. Some differences spring from views on the nature of the sacraments, such as whether they are merely ***symbols*** or the actual ***means*** of grace.[62]

Differences Concerning the Lord's Supper

As will be discussed below,[63] Protestants differ over the nature, number, participation, and effect regarding the Lord's Supper. While Roman Catholicism claims that the elements (bread and wine) actually become the body and blood of Christ (transubstantiation), Protestants hold two other primary views (consubstantiation[64] and memorial[65]) with varying degrees in between. Again, while Catholics believe the Eucharist is a cause of grace, other sacramentalists maintain it is a means of grace, and nonsacramentalists insist it is a symbol of grace. Note too that Catholics believe only the priest should partake of the cup and that only properly ordained priests can administer this sacrament.[66]

In light of the divergent views on baptism and Communion, a brief examination on the biblical data is in order.

A BIBLICAL EXAMINATION OF THE ORDINANCE OF BAPTISM

Of the many issues related to water baptism, some have been discussed elsewhere;[67] the rest will be briefly sketched here.

The Command to Be Baptized

The basis for baptism is the Great Commission of Christ:

> All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. (Matt. 28:18–20)

Not only did Jesus command it, but His disciples practiced it; Peter repeated at Pentecost when the church was born: “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38; cf. 10:47). Paul, the great proclaimer of the mystery of the church (Eph. 3:3–5), was directed by Ananias: “Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name” (Acts 22:16). Contrary to the ultradispensationalists who deny that baptism applies to New Testament believers after Acts 13, even those who were baptized by John the Baptist were rebaptized in Jesus’ name (19:1–6). In obedience to Christ, water baptism was practiced throughout the New Testament.[68]

The Candidate for Baptism

The debate over who should be baptized falls into two basic categories: Pedobaptists (lit.: “child-baptizers”) argue that infants should be baptized, while Anabaptists (lit.: “rebaptizers”) rebaptize those already baptized in infancy; following them, those in the modern Baptistic tradition insist on baptizing only those children or adults who are old enough to (independently) believe.

Consider the following arguments offered for infant baptism (followed by responses).

That Baptism Is Like Old Testament Circumcision (Performed on Infants)

Proponents of infant baptism appeal to verses such as Colossians 2:11–12:

> In whom [Christ] also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. (
> kjv
>)

They reason that if baptism is New Testament circumcision, and if circumcision was performed on infants, then baptism should be done on infants too.

In response, this falls far short of proof that the New Testament teaches infant baptism.

First, the text says nothing about baptizing infants. Any conclusion to the contrary is strictly a speculative inference.

Second, only males were circumcised in the Old Testament. Proponents of infant baptism obviously baptize females as well, so not only is this a weak argument from analogy but also an inconsistent one.

Third, this text (like numerous other New Testament passages) mentions "faith" as the means by which one is saved (cf. Eph. 2:8). Faith is the only means of salvation;[69] and infants are not old enough to believe (have faith).[70]

That There Were Many Household Baptisms in the New Testament

Four times the New Testament mentions whole households being baptized.[71] Whole families usually include infants or small children. Therefore, it seems reasonable to conclude that these are examples of infant baptism.

In reply, several facts stand out.

First, nowhere does the text say any infants were baptized; this is a supposition. *Second*, there is evidence in these passages that there were no infants involved. In the Philippian jailor's case, everyone who was baptized had ***believed***, since Paul said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:31).[72] Luke continues: "He rejoiced, having believed in God ***with all his household***" (v. 34 nkjv; cf. 18:8). Also, Paul baptized the "household of Stephanas" (1 Cor. 1:16), in which it's clear there were no infants, for we read later, "The household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the ***service of the saints***" (16:15); infants are not old enough to serve.

Third, Lydia was clearly a woman of means (having her own household); being a single, virtuous women, she had no children; and, being a woman of commerce, she undoubtedly had servants. Accordingly, her "household" would have been only adults. Here again, all that supports infant baptism is an argument from silence—the text (Acts 16:15) says nothing about infants being baptized.

Not only are there no solid biblical reasons to baptize infants, there are also many strong reasons for not doing so, such as the following.

Every Instance of New Testament Baptism Is of an Adult

As just demonstrated, there is not a single case of Jesus or His disciples baptizing an infant. With Jesus' love for and emphasis on little children (cf. Matt. 18:1–6), surely there would be a command or example of an infant baptism if it were what Jesus had commissioned. There are a considerable number of baptisms in the New Testament,[73] and in all cases, only adults are said to have been baptized.

Belief Is a Condition for Being Baptized, and Infants Cannot Believe

Perhaps the most fundamental reason for not baptizing infants is that they are not yet capable of believing, and belief in Christ is a condition for being saved.[74] Repeatedly, the New Testament affirms the essence of what Paul declared:

"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). Jesus taught, "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but ***whoever does not believe stands condemned already*** because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."[75] Infants are not yet sufficiently developed to make a conscious decision to accept the gift of God's salvation (Rom. 6:23), and there is no salvation by proxy—everyone is responsible for his own sin (Ezek. 18:20) and his own decisions (Rom. 14:12). Baptism is for those who are able to believe.[76]

Baptism Is an Outward Symbol of an Inner Reality

Baptism is a symbolic representation of salvation, an outward sign of what happens inwardly when we are saved: ***"We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life"*** (Rom. 6:4). We cannot outwardly symbolize what we have not inwardly experienced, so baptism should ***follow*** salvation (not precede it). We wear the wedding ring ***after*** we're married.

The Mode of Baptism

The mode of baptism is another hotly debated topic. Those in the Baptistic tradition insist that immersion alone is acceptable, symbolizing Christ's death and resurrection. Others claim that sprinkling or pouring are appropriate, since they too symbolize acts of salvation, such as the sprinkling of blood on our souls or the pouring of the Holy Spirit on our lives.
Among the many arguments offered for pouring or sprinkling water as an appropriate way to baptize, the following are noteworthy.

That Baptism Is Symbolized by Pouring in Acts 1–2

Jesus said, “John baptized with water, but … you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:5). When this was fulfilled, the Spirit descended on them (2:3), and Peter said it was a fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy, “I will ***pour out*** my Spirit on all people” (2:17). As such, baptism was symbolized by pouring.

Response

Immersionists reply by noting that the early believers were also ***immersed*** in the Spirit, since Luke says the room was “filled” with the Spirit’s presence (2:4). Hence, the Spirit being poured out until they were all covered by His manifestation is best symbolized by immersion. Further, they were put “into” the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13), which is an experience of immersion.

That Salvation Is Symbolized by Sprinkling

“Sprinkling” was a common figure of salvific speech under both covenants.[77] “Jesus [is] the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel” (Heb. 12:24). Since baptism is a symbol of salvation, and salvation is described as sprinkling, then sprinkling with water is an appropriate symbol of salvation.

Response

While salvation is sometimes symbolized by sprinkling, immersionists reply with two arguments. One, water baptism never uses this symbol in the New Testament, and two, death and resurrection are at the heart of the gospel (1 Cor. 15:3–5). The best way to symbolize all of this is by immersion: burial with Christ and rising up in the newness of life (Rom. 6:4).

That Isaiah Speaks of Sprinkling Many Nations

Isaiah said of Messiah: “So will he sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what they were not told, they will see, and

what they have not heard, they will understand" (Isa. 52:15). This is the very passage the Ethiopian eunuch was reading when he said to Philip, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" (Acts 8:36). His words possibly were prompted by Isaiah's reference to the messianic sprinkling of many nations; if so, his baptism by sprinkling follows naturally from the context.

Response

This is probably a mistranslation of the Hebrew word (***nazah***, in Isa. 52) rendered "sprinkle" by the King James Version. Even the ***New King James Version*** notes in the margin that ***nazah*** could be translated "startle" (or "make speechless," etc.), as many contemporary translations do. This better fits the context: "So shall he startle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him" (rsv; cf. asv, cev). Also, neither Luke (the author of Acts) nor the Ethiopian made any connection between this text and his baptism. Further, the eunuch "went down into" and "came up out of the water" (Acts 8:38–39), depicting immersion.

Those who favor *immersion* as the proper baptismal mode also offer many arguments from Scripture; the following is a summary.

That Jesus Was Baptized by Immersion

"As soon as Jesus was baptized [in the Jordan], he went up out of the water" (Matt. 3:16). To be in and then come up out of the water speaks of having been immersed. Why a river, if a cup of water would do? Why wade in, if all that was needed was a handful?

That John Baptized Where There Was Much Water

The Bible says, "John [the Baptist] also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were constantly coming to be baptized" (John 3:23). Why go to a place for an abundance of water, if far less was needed? The circumstance fits better with immersion as the mode.

That the Eunuch's Baptism Was by Immersion

> They came to some water and the eunuch [having received Christ] said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch *went down into the water* and Philip baptized him. When they *came up out of the water*, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. (
>
> Acts 8:36–39
>
>)

That Baptism Is Depicted As Burial

The New Testament describes baptism as "burial" and "resurrection" (cf. Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12). Burial and resurrection is going down into a grave and then coming up out of it—precisely what immersion depicts. Paul's words: "Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were ***baptized into his death***? We were therefore ***buried with him through baptism*** into death in order that, just as ***Christ was raised from the dead*** through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been ***united with him like this in his death***, we will certainly also be ***united with him in his resurrection***" (Rom. 6:3–5).

Thus, baptism by immersion is a perfect picture of Christ's death and resurrection for us, which is the heart of the gospel (1 Cor. 15:1–8).

That Early Church Baptismal Tanks Support Immersion

Unearthed baptismal tanks provide evidence that the nascent church practiced immersion. Some churches with the earliest of roots, such as the Eastern Orthodox, still baptize by immersion, and even as late as the Reformation, Martin Luther prescribed baptism by immersion. The overall arguments plainly favor immersion as the primary (if not exclusive) New Testament baptismal mode.[78]

VIEWS ON THE LORD'S SUPPER

The second ordinance of the local church is Communion (or the Lord's Supper).[79] As noted earlier, while Protestants are virtually unanimous in believing Communion is a prescribed ordinance, they are divided over its nature, frequency of observation, and effects. Thus, we'll examine the New Testament texts.

There are five basic ways to understand what Jesus meant when He said, "This is My body.…":

(1) transubstantially/physically (Roman Catholic);
(2) really/actually (Eastern Orthodox);[80]
(3) consubstantially/permeationally (Lutheran);
(4) spiritually/dynamically (Reformed);
(5) symbolically/memorially (Zwinglian/Baptist).

The Roman Catholic View of Communion

The official Catholic view—transubstantiation—affirms that the elements of bread and wine are transformed, under priestly administration, into the actual physical body and blood of Jesus (see above). This sacrament is not only a cause of grace but a bloodless reenactment of Christ's sacrificial death, which is efficacious for the forgiveness of venial (non-mortal) sins.[81]

The Lutheran View of Communion

The Lutheran position is known as consubstantiation; Martin Luther believed that Christ's actual body is in and under the elements, penetrating in the same

way that fire penetrates metal.[82] He rejected Catholic transubstantiation, stating that "it is not that the bread and wine have become Christ's body and blood, but that we now have the body and blood in addition to the bread and wine" (in Erickson, ***CT***, 1117). Thus Lutheran theology rejects the idea of the mass as a sacrifice (Luther, ***BC***, 140, in ibid.). Lutherans believe Christ is present not transformationally but ***permeationally***—i.e., He penetrates and permeates the bread and the wine.

The Lutheran view differs from the Catholic view in several respects.

First, while Christ's body and blood are believed to be physically present, there is no change of the bread and wine into Christ's body and blood; His body and blood ***coexist*** and are ***concurrently*** present with the elements. Luther used the illustration of an iron bar heated in fire. The iron does not cease to exist; fire penetrates it and exists in, with, and under it.

Second, Luther rejected sacerdotalism, insisting that priestly action is in no sense responsible for Christ's physical presence in the elements; this comes through the action of God. Nonetheless, Luther did accept the idea of ***manducation***; that is, he took Jesus' statement "Take, eat; this is My body" (Matt. 26:26 nkjv) in a literal sense.

Third, like Roman Catholics, Lutherans believe that the event is a sacrament, i.e., a means of grace by which we receive real spiritual benefit, namely, forgiveness of sins and confirmation of faith.

The Reformed View of Communion

The Reformed view of the Lord's Supper is that the bread and the wine ***spiritually*** contain the body and blood of Christ; He is found in the sacrament in a ***spiritual, dynamic*** sense rather than through ***physical*** or ***bodily*** presence. John Calvin used the sun as an illustration: "The sun remains in the heavens, yet its warmth and light are present on earth. So the radiance of the Spirit conveys to us the communion of Christ's flesh and blood" (***ICR***, cited in Erickson, ***CT***). However, while the elements ***signify*** the body and blood of Christ, they also ***seal*** the believer with assurances of God's promises; real objective spiritual benefits come not from the elements but from Christ, in large part depending on the participant's faith and receptivity.

The Memorial View of Communion

Following the view expressed by Reformation leader Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531), the memorial (symbolic) view of the Lord's Supper states that the Communion service is primarily a commemoration of Christ's death on the cross, following His words "Do this in ***remembrance*** of me" (Luke 22:19). Adherents include those of the Anabaptist tradition, modern Baptist and other Baptistic groups, and Congregational and Independent churches. These often prefer to use the term ***ordinance*** rather than "sacrament" when referring to the Eucharist.

Symbolically, the value of the elements lies simply in receiving by faith the benefits of Christ's death. Like a sermon, the event proclaims His death, except that (unlike a sermon) Communion is a visual reminder. Since Jesus was there in bodily form when the Eucharist was instituted, it is absurd to claim that the elements He held in His hand—bread and wine—were His physical body and blood.

AN EVALUATION OF THE VARIOUS VIEWS

There are two main points regarding these views that call for evaluation:

(1) the presence of Christ and
(2) the efficacy of the ordinance.

The Presence of Christ

The Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Lutheran views all claim that Christ is bodily present; the Reformed view maintains that He is spiritually present. Christ being physically present in the Communion event has serious problems.

As noted earlier, the Roman Catholic view is unfounded because

(1) ***it is not necessary to take these words of Christ physically*** (since Jesus often spoke in metaphors and figures of speech);
(2) ***it is not plausible to take these words of Christ physically*** (since vividness is no proof of physicality—these words are often used in a nonphysical way, and the Church Fathers were by no means unanimous in support of the Catholic interpretation);
(3) ***it is not possible to take a physical view*** (otherwise, we must believe, for instance, that Christ was holding His own physical body in His own physical hands);
(4) ***it is idolatrous to take a physical view*** (since Catholics worship the host, which is not God);
(5) ***it undermines belief in the Resurrection to take a physical view*** (since if the senses cannot be trusted during communion with Christ, how can they be trusted when the disciples saw, heard, and touched Christ after He arose?)[83]

The Lutheran view fairs little better.
For one thing, how can Christ physically be in two places at the same time, since His corporeal form was beside the elements He was holding?
Further, how could two material substances (body and blood) be simultaneously in the same place (as Lutherans hold)?
In addition, Paul's account of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11) says absolutely nothing about Christ's presence in the elements. Rather, he presents the event as one to remember and to proclaim the Lord's death.
In response to the Reformed view that Christ is spiritually present, this cannot be referring to Christ's omnipresence as God, for in that sense He is everywhere. Nor can it mean He is spiritually present in His human nature, for in that sense He is presently in heaven, not on earth, "till he comes" (1 Cor. 11:26 nkjv). Nor can it mean that He is automatically there in a spiritual way to bless those present, for only those who participate by faith in a worthy manner (cf. v. 27) have this experience; those who do not are judged (v. 29). Hence, in contrast to the Reformed view, the Communion elements as such ***symbolize*** (which is effective whether one accepts them or not), and the experience of Christ's

spiritual presence is dependent on the recipient, as affirmed by the Zwinglian/Baptist memorial view.

The Efficacy of the Ordinance

Another issue is that of ***sacrament*** versus ***ordinance***. The views claiming Jesus is present in the elements[84] are sacramental; they hold that the Communion elements are a special means of grace.

There are at least two significant difficulties with this position. For one thing, it is contrary to the claim of the passage that the event is essentially memorial and proclamational: "Do this in ***remembrance*** of me" and "you ***proclaim*** the Lord's death" (1 Cor. 11:24, 26). For another, if the ritual itself has spiritual efficacy, then why did some who partook become sick or even die (v. 30) rather than being spiritually edified by it? There was nothing automatic about the ordinance's effect: Those who responded in faith were edified, and those who did not were not. Communion's efficacy did not depend on the elements or the ritual but on the faith and reception of the participant.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR THE LORD'S SUPPER

Scripture is clear as to the basic nature of Communion. Just before His crucifixion and after the Passover meal with His disciples,

> While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (
> Matt. 26:26–28
>).

Paul added more details:

I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.

Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. (1 Cor. 11:23–31)

The Communion event can be summarized as follows.

An Outline of the Biblical Data on Communion

I. *The Names of Communion*

A. The Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 11:20).

B. The Lord’s Table (10:21).

C. Communion (10:16).

D. Eucharist (“Thanksgiving,” 11:24).

II. *The Elements of Communion*

A. Bread (“This is my body,” 11:24).

B. The Cup (wine: “This cup is … my blood,” 11:25).

C. Cup of blessing (10:16).

D. Cup of the Lord (10:21).

III. *The Participants in Communion*

A. Believers (“My brethren,” 11:33).

B. Those who “examine” themselves (11:27–28).

IV. *The Location of Communion*

A. “When you come together in one place” (11:20 nkjv).

B. “When you come together as a church” (11:18).

V. *The Frequency of Communion*

A. The early church: daily (Acts 2:46).

B. The later church: weekly (Acts 20:7).

C. Any church: “As often” as you do it (1 Cor. 11:26).

VI. *The Meaning: It is a …*

A. Remembrance service (“Do this in remembrance of me,” 11:24).

B. Communion service (“Is it not the communion of the body [and blood] of Christ?” [10:16 kjv]; “It is a spiritual participation in the blood of Christ symbolized in the cup.”)[85]

C. Covenantal service (“This cup is the new covenant in my blood,” 11:25; cf. Matt. 26:28).

D. Fellowship service (“When you come together as a church,” 11:18; “Wait for one another,” 11:33 nkjv).

E. Thanksgiving service (“When He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body,’ ”11:24 nkjv).

F. Proclamation service (“As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death,” 11:26 nkjv).

G. Anticipation service (“As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes,” 11:26 nkjv).

It is incredible that something so brief (three verses in Matthew) and simple as “eat this bread” and “drink this cup” in remembrance of Jesus could be the subject of endless discussion and dispute down through the years. Yet it has been. Nevertheless, given all the foregoing discussion, the Zwinglian position seems closest to the biblical presentation, since it views the elements as symbols

that signify (“set forth”) two basic aims: (1) to help believers “remember” Christ’s death, and (2) to “proclaim” it until He returns. The effect on the participant, whether good or bad, comes from his faith and manner of participation.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR COMMUNION

With the exception of ultradispensationalists like Bullinger, there is virtually universal agreement in Christendom that the Lord’s Supper (Communion) is an event that the church should celebrate. There is also agreement on the basic elements to be used and with what they are associated, namely, the body and blood of Christ; we listed the various views in their differing theological traditions because not everyone agrees on the Eucharist’s exact meaning. Likewise, virtually all agree baptism should be administered and that with water

Early Church Fathers

From the earliest days after the apostles, there is abundant support for the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, beginning in subapostolic times.

The Didache (c. 120–150)

Concerning baptism, baptise thus: Having first rehearsed all these things, “baptise, in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” in running water; but if thou hast no running water, baptise in other water, and if thou canst not in cold, then in warm. But if thou hast neither, pour water three times on the head “in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” And before the baptism let the baptiser and him who is to be baptised fast, and any others who are able. And thou shalt bid him who is to be baptised to fast one or two days before. (7.1–3)

Hold Eucharist thus: First concerning the Cup, “We give thanks to thee, our Father, for the Holy Vine of David thy child, which, thou didst make known to us through Jesus thy child; to thee be glory for ever.” And concerning the broken Bread: “We give thee thanks, our Father, for the life and knowledge which thou didst make known to us through Jesus thy Child. To thee be glory for ever. As this broken bread was scattered upon the mountains, but was brought together and became one, so let thy Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into thy Kingdom, for thine is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ for ever.” But let none eat or drink of your

Eucharist except those who have been baptised in the Lord's Name. For concerning this also did the Lord say, "Give not that which is holy to the dogs" (9.1–5).

Ignatius (d. c. 110)

Ye appear to me to live not after the manner of men, but according to Jesus Christ, who died for us, in order that, by believing in His death, ye may by baptism be made partakers of His resurrection. (*EIT*, 2.133)

I have confidence of you in the Lord, that ye will be of no other mind. Wherefore I write boldly to your love, which is worthy of God, and exhort you to have but one faith, and one kind of preaching, and one Eucharist. For there is one flesh of the Lord Jesus Christ; and His blood which was shed for us is one; one loaf also is broken to all [the communicants], and one cup is distributed among them all: there is but one altar for the whole Church, and one bishop, with the presbytery and deacons, my fellow-servants.

Since, also, there is but one unbegotten Being, God, even the Father; and one only-begotten Son, God, the Word and man; and one Comforter, the Spirit of truth; and also one preaching, and one faith, and one baptism; and one Church which the holy apostles established from one end of the earth to the other by the blood of Christ, and by their own sweat and toil; it behooves you also, therefore, as "a peculiar people, and a holy nation," to perform all things with harmony in Christ. (*EIP*, 5.161)

If there is one God of the universe, the Father of Christ, "of whom are all things"; and one Lord Jesus Christ, our [Lord], "by whom are all things"; and also one Holy Spirit, who wrought in Moses, and in the prophets and apostles; and also one baptism, which is administered that we should have fellowship with the death of the Lord; and also one elect Church, there ought likewise to be but one faith in respect to Christ. For "there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is through all, and in all" (ibid., 1.223).

Justin Martyr (c. 100–c. 165)

As many as are persuaded and believe that what we teach and say is true, and undertake to be able to live accordingly, are instructed to pray and to entreat God with fasting, for the remission of their sins that are past, we pray and fast with them. Then they are brought by us where there is water, and are regenerated in the same manner in which we were ourselves regenerated. For, in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe, and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, they then receive the washing with water. (*FAJ*, 61.336)

What is the use of that baptism which cleanses the flesh and body alone? Baptize the

soul from wrath and from covetousness, from envy, and from hatred; and, lo! the body is pure. For this is the symbolic significance of unleavened bread, that you do not commit the old deeds of wicked leaven. (*DJ*, 14.377)

Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)

In like manner he also who retains unchangeable in his heart the rule of the truth which he received by means of baptism, will doubtless recognize the names, the expressions, and the parables taken from the Scriptures. (*AH*, 1.9.4)

Tertullian (c. 155–c. 225)

Let not that “He Himself baptized not” trouble any. For into whom should He baptize? Into repentance? Of what use, then, do you make His forerunner? Into remission of sins, which He used to give by a word? Into Himself, whom by humility He was concealing? Into the Holy Spirit, who had not yet descended from the Father? Into the Church, which His apostles had not yet founded? (*OB*, 11)

Origen (c. 185–c. 254)

Matthew alone adds the words “to repentance,” teaching that the benefit of baptism is connected with the intention of the baptized person; to him who repents it is salutary, but to him who comes to it without repentance it will turn to greater condemnation. (*COGJ*, 6.17)

Constitutions of the Holy Apostles (c. fourth century)

If he afterward repents, and turns from his error, then, as we receive the heathen, when they wish to repent, into the Church indeed to hear the word, but do not receive them to communion until they have received the seal of baptism, and are made complete Christians; so do we also permit such as these to enter only to hear, until they show the fruit of repentance, that by hearing the word they may not utterly and irrecoverably perish. But let them not be admitted to communion in prayer. (2.39)

Medieval Fathers

During the Middle Ages the ordinances of baptism and Communion continued to be stressed. Indeed, some leaders carried their significance to an extreme that eventuated in the later pronouncement of the unbiblical doctrine of transubstantiation.

Ambrose (339–397)

"It is not doubtful that sin is forgiven by means of baptism, but in baptism the operation is that of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (***OHS***, 3.18.138).

Augustine (354–430)

For whatever unbaptized persons die confessing Christ, this confession is of the same efficacy for the remission of sins as if they were washed in the sacred font of baptism. For He who said, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God," made also an exception in their favor, in that other sentence where He no less absolutely said, "Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven"; and in another place, "Whosoever will lose his life for my sake, shall find it" (*CG*, 13.7.534).

Our Lord Himself, and apostolic practice, have handed down to us a few rites in place of many, and these at once very easy to perform, most majestic in their significance, and most sacred in the observance; such, for example, as the sacrament of baptism, and the celebration of the body and blood of the Lord. And as soon as anyone looks upon these observances he knows to what they refer, and so reveres them not in carnal bondage, but in spiritual freedom. (*OCD*, 3.9.13)

"He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him" shows what it is in reality, and not sacramentally, to eat His body and drink His blood; for this is to dwell in Christ, that He also may dwell in us. So that it is as if He said, He that dwelleth not in me, and in whom I do not dwell, let him not say or think that he eateth my body or drinketh my blood. (op. cit., 21.25.998)

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)

"Christ's merit avails baptized children for the gaining of Happiness, though they have no merits of their own; because by Baptism they are made members of Christ" (***ST***, 2a.5.7.2).

Just as Adam's sin is transmitted to all who are born of Adam corporally, so is the grace of Christ transmitted to all that are begotten of Him spiritually, by faith and Baptism: and this, not only unto the removal of sin of their first parent, but also unto the removal of actual sins, and the obtaining of glory. (ibid., 2a.81.3.3)

The Council of Trent (1545–1563)

Since Christ our Redeemer declared that to be truly His own body which He offered under the form of bread, it has, therefore, always been a firm belief in the Church of God, and this holy council now declares it anew, that by the consecration of the bread and wine a change is brought about of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord, and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of His blood. This change the holy Catholic Church properly and appropriately calls transubstantiation. (in Saucy, *CGP*, 221)

Reformation Teachers

Martin Luther (1483–1546)

God wonderfully preserved his Gospel in the Church, which now from the pulpits is taught to the people, word by word. In like manner, it is a special great work of God, that the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper, have remained and cleaved to the hearts of those who were ordained to receive them in the midst of Popedom. (*Three Treatises*, 220)

John Calvin (1509–1564)

Our two sacraments present us with a clearer exhibition of Christ, in proportion to the

nearer view of him which men have enjoyed since he was really manifested by the Father in the manner in which he had been promised. For baptism testifies to us our purgation and ablution; the Eucharistic supper testifies to our redemption. (*CICR*, 188)

What, then, someone will say, do you apply the same rule to the water by which we are baptized, and the bread and wine under which the Lord's Supper is exhibited? I answer that in the sacraments of divine appointment, two things are to be considered: the substance of the corporeal thing which is set before us, and the form which has been impressed upon it by the Word of God, and in which its whole force lies. In as far, then, as the bread, wine, and water, which are presented to our view in the sacraments, retain their substance. (ibid., 4.19.7)

Post-Reformation Theologians

Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531)

The transubstantiation of the bread has long been disputed. Some argue that we take the body and blood of Christ as they hung on the cross; others that we take the resurrection body. The Word of God shows us that all these opinions are erroneous. (in Bromiley, *ZB*, 186)

A sacrament is the sign of a holy thing. When I say: The sacrament of the Lord's body, I am simply referring to that bread which is the symbol of the body of Christ who was put to death for our sakes. The papists all know perfectly well that the word sacrament means a sign and nothing more, for this is the sense in which it has always been used by Christian doctors. (in ibid., 188)

In our native tongue the word [*sacrament*] suggests something that has power to take away sin and to make us holy. But this is a serious perversion. For only Jesus Christ and no external thing can take away the sins of us Christians and make us holy. (in ibid., 131)

These most friendly elements and signs, water and wine and bread, have been given to us in order that by the outward signs we may know the grace and loving-kindness of the New Testament, that we are no longer under the Law—the shedding of blood has therefore been abrogated by the blood of Christ—but under grace. (in ibid., 132)

In this matter of baptism—if I may be pardoned for saying it—I can only conclude that all the doctors have been in error from the time of the apostles … for [they] have ascribed to the water a power which it does not have and the holy apostles did not teach. (in ibid., 130)

Jacob Arminius (1560–1609)

They [Roman Catholics] are opposed to the signs or tokens of grace in several ways: by multiplying them, by contaminating baptism with various additions, by mutilating the Lord's Supper of its second part [the cup,] and by changing it into a private mass. Those heresies which infringe upon our Duty to God and Christ as they principally relate to divine worship, and have idolatry united with them, may be appropriately referred to the second cause of the refusal of the reformed churches. (*D*, 22.17.4)

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758)

None ought to be admitted to the communion and privileges of members of the visible church of Christ in complete standing, but such as are in profession, and in the eye of the church's Christian judgment, godly or gracious persons. (*WJE*, 3.2.1)

Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892)

Baptism and the Lord's Supper become spiritually helpful, not from any virtue in them, or in him who does administer them, but only by the blessing of Christ, and the working of the Spirit in those who by faith receive them. (*PC*, 74)

Baptism is an ordinance of the New Testament, instituted by Jesus Christ, to be to the person baptized a sign of his fellowship with him, in his death, and burial, and resurrection, of his being engrafted into him, of remission of sins, and of his giving up himself to God through Jesus Christ, to live and walk in newness of life.…

Baptism is to be administered to all those who actually profess repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and to none other. (ibid., 75–76)

The Lord's Supper is an ordinance of the New Testament, instituted by Jesus Christ; wherein, by giving and receiving bread and wine, according to his appointment, his death is shown forth, and the worthy receivers are, not after a corporeal and carnal manner, but by faith, made partakers of his body and blood, with all his benefits, to their spiritual nourishment, and growth in grace. (ibid., 80)

John Wesley (1703–1791)

Jesus took the bread … after they had eaten the Passover.… "This bread is," that is,

signifies or represents my body, according to the style of the sacred writers [
Gen. 40:12
;
Ex. 12:11
;
Gal. 4:24
]. Now, Christ substituting the Holy Communion for the Passover, follows the style of the Old Testament, and uses the same expressions the Jews were wont to use in celebrating the Passover. (*CGM*, 26.26)

“If any eat of this bread”—That is, believe in me: “he shall live for ever”—in other words, he that believeth to the end shall be saved. My flesh, which I will give you—this whole discourse concerning his flesh and blood refers directly to his passion, and but remotely, if at all, to the Lord’s Supper. (*CGJ*, 6.51)

“And he took bread”—namely, some time after, when supper was ended, wherein they had eaten the paschal lamb. “This is my body”—as he had just now celebrated the paschal supper, which was called the Passover, so in like figurative language, he calls this bread his body. And this circumstance of itself was sufficient to prevent any mistake, as if this bread was his real body, any more than the paschal lamb was really the Passover. (*CGL*, 22.19)

The Schleitheim Confession of Faith (1527)

Baptism shall be given to all those who have been taught repentance and the amendment of life and [who] believe truly that their sins are taken away through Christ, and to all those who desire to walk in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and be buried with Him in death, so that they might rise with Him; to all those who with such an understanding themselves desire and request it from us; hereby is excluded all infant baptism, the greatest and first abomination of the pope. For this you have the reasons and the testimony of the writings and the practice of the apostles (
Matt. 28:19
;
Mark 16:6
;
Acts 2:38
;
8:36
;
16:31–33
;
19:4
). We wish simply yet resolutely and with assurance to hold to the same. (1)

Concerning the breaking of bread, we have become one and agree thus: all those who desire to break the one bread in remembrance of the broken body of Christ and all those who wish to drink of one drink in remembrance of the shed blood of Christ, they

must beforehand be united in the one body of Christ, that is the congregation of God, whose head is Christ, and that by baptism. (3)

The Dordrecht Confession of Faith (1632)

Concerning baptism we confess that penitent believers, who, through faith, regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost, are made one with God, and are written in heaven, must, upon such Scriptural confession of faith, and renewing of life, be baptized with water, in the most worthy name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, according to the command of Christ, and the teaching, example, and practice of the apostles, to the burying of their sins, and thus be incorporated into the communion of the saints; henceforth to learn to observe all things which the Son of God has taught, left, and commanded His disciples. (VII)

We also confess and observe the breaking of bread, or Supper, as the Lord Christ Jesus before His suffering instituted it with bread and wine, and observed and ate with His apostles, commanding them to observe it in remembrance of Him; which they accordingly taught and practiced in the church, and commanded that it should be kept in remembrance of the suffering and death of the Lord; and that His precious body was broken, and His blood shed, for us and all mankind, as also the fruits hereof, namely, redemption and eternal salvation, which He purchased thereby, showing such great love toward us sinful men; whereby we are admonished to the utmost, to love and forgive one another and our neighbor, as He has done unto us, and to be mindful to maintain and live up to the unity and fellowship which we have with God and one another, which is signified to us by this breaking of bread. (IX)

James Strong (1822–1894)

The Romanist regards the ordinances as actually conferring grace and producing holiness. Instead of being the external manifestation of a preceding union with Christ, they are the physical means of constituting and maintaining this union. With the Romanist, in this particular, sacramentalists of every name substantially agree. The Papal Church holds to seven sacraments or ordinances.... The ordinances prescribed in the N.T., however, are two and only two (Baptism and the Lord's Supper). (*ST*, 3.7.2.280)

The analogy of the ordinance of the Lord's Supper also leads to the conclusion that baptism is to be observed as an authoritative memorial of Christ and his truth until the time of his second coming. (ibid., 3.7.2.1.285)

Charles Hodge (1797–1878)

Peter Lombard is the first who enumerated the seven sacraments as held by the Romanists. He gives no reason for fixing on the number seven; but that which was already on hand in the traditional sanctity, attributed to that number.... Romanists have not even any plausible ground for their appeal to common consent in support of their doctrine on this subject. (*ST*, 3.20.496)

CONCLUSION

When all the evidence is surveyed and weighed, it seems the biblical view is most closely approximated by the Zwinglian position on the number, nature, and effects of the Lord's Supper. There are only two ordinances: water baptism and Communion; with this most segments of Christendom are in agreement. Those who confess Christ are to be baptized, and the New Testament mode seems to have been immersion. Other modes were later and exceptional rather than original and primary.

Further, it best accords with Scripture and sound reason to conclude that the ordinances are not sacraments, either as a cause or means (vehicle) of grace, but symbols that, if properly observed in obedient faith, can occasion blessings in one's life. The symbols do not themselves bring grace; rather, they are a reminder and proclaimer of Christ's sacrificial death and, in the case of baptism, His resurrection.

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CHAPTER SIX

THE MINISTRY OF THE VISIBLE CHURCH (SPIRITUAL GIFTS)

As we have seen, the authority for the visible church's ministry was in the apostles' doctrine (Acts 2:42), the church having been built on their foundation (Eph. 2:20). In addition to their doctrinal authority, the living apostles seemed to be focused on establishing local churches (cf. Acts 14:23), gifting its ministers (2 Tim. 1:6), and receiving revelations from God.[1] When these roles ceased and the apostles eventually died, the basic doctrinal authority was left in the apostolic writings of the New Testament; the functional authority rested in the local church itself, led by elders and assisted by deacons.[2] A local church looked to elder leadership[3] for guidance in the use of their gifts for ministry.

Further, while there was a plurality of elders and apostles, there was no hierarchy among them; no one apostle had authority over other apostles. Peter used the "keys" to open the door of God's spiritual kingdom to both Jews (Acts 2) and Gentiles (Acts 10), and though he was one of the chief apostles (Gal. 2:9), his prominence seems gradually to have waned in significance after Paul's conversion (Acts 9) and commission to the Gentiles (Acts 13). Initially

mentioned over fifty times in Luke's record, Peter vanishes entirely after a role in the gathering of apostles and elders to Jerusalem.[4]

That Peter had no unique enduring authority is clear from several factors.

First, again, Jesus gave the same authority to bind and loose to all the apostles (Matt. 16:19; cf. 18:18).

Second, Peter was not even in charge of the Acts 15 gathering; James summed up the proceedings.

Third, Peter was only ***one*** of the church's "pillars" (Gal. 2:9).

Fourth, he was only ***one*** of the "apostles" on whom the church was built (Eph. 2:20).

Fifth, he was rebuked by the apostle Paul, an action hardly befitting another of lesser status (Gal. 2:11).

Sixth, Peter introduces himself as only an "apostle" in his writings (1 Peter 1:1; 2 Peter 1:2), even though they are called General Epistles. If he alone had authority over the church, he should have asserted this in a general epistle.

Seventh, he acknowledged Paul's special role in the church (Gal. 1–2).

Eighth, and finally, even Paul's commission to missionary service was not done by Peter but by "the [local] church that was at Antioch" (Acts 13:1–3 nkjv).

Hence, the Roman Catholic view that makes Peter primary and infallible in official teaching on faith and practice is without New Testament foundation. The early local churches were independent self-governing bodies under the headship of Christ, with the leadership of their own elders as approved by their congregations.[5]

THE GIFTS OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

In order for visible churches to accomplish their internal and external missions, they must be gifted for the task. This they are, through gifts that God gives each member to edify the whole (1 Cor. 12, 14). Paul told the Ephesians,

> *To each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it*.... "When he [Christ] ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men." (... He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) It was he who *gave* some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the

faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (
Eph. 4:7–8
,
10–13
)

Some observations are obvious; for instance, “pastor and teacher” clearly is a gift to help fulfill the internal mission of edifying believers, while “evangelists” help to accomplish the external mission of evangelization. However, within the church today there are markedly divergent views on the existence and function of the various spiritual gifts.

THE VIEW THAT *ALL* OF THE GIFTS EXIST TODAY

In 1 Corinthians Paul lists many more gifts that existed in the early New Testament church.[6] Many Christians (e.g., charismatics) believe that all these gifts are still in existence today, and hence, they should all be sought and exercised by believers today. John Wimber (1934–1997), father of the “signs and wonders movement,” claimed that all these gifts still exist:

Today we see hundreds of people healed every month in Vineyard Christian Fellowship services. Many more are healed as we pray for them in hospitals, on the streets, and in homes. The blind see; the lame walk; the deaf hear. Cancer is disappearing. (*PE*, 55)

Some even say that people are being raised from the dead. One author told of a group singing and praying for a dead person:

Nothing happened during the first few songs, but by the sixth song the man began to move his toes. When we sang the seventh and eighth songs, that brother woke up, looked around and smiled.… He just opened his mouth and said, “Jesus has brought me back to life!” (Tari, *LMW*, 70).

Wimber insisted that “miracles and healings of all kinds and classes should be received gladly.… They should be expected as part of the normal Christian life.”[7] Wimber maintained that all kinds of miraculous healings are still occurring, even resurrection from the dead (op. cit., 38, 62).

Peter Wagner (b. 1930) of Fuller Theological Seminary contends that “the great future breakthrough to the Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims will be accompanied with signs and wonders in the New Testament style” (ibid., 44). So ***are*** the sign gifts being manifest today? Do we possess the powers to perform the signs and wonders done by the early-church apostles?

A List of All the Gifts in the New Testament

Combining the gifts mentioned in Paul’s epistles yields a list of twenty in all (unless pastor and and teacher are combined—cf. Eph. 4:11):

	1 Corinthians 12, 14	**Romans 12**	**Ephesians 4**[8]
(1)	Apostles		Apostles
(2)	Prophets	Prophecy	Prophets
(3)	Evangelists		
(4)	Pastors		
(5)	Teachers	Teaching	Teachers
(6)	Exhortation		
(7)	Leading		
(8)	Serving		

(9)	Giving
(10)	Mercy
(11)	Miracles
(12)	Healings
(13)	Helps
(14)	Administration
(15)	Tongues
(16)	Interpretation
(17)	Faith
(18)	Knowledge
(19)	Wisdom
(20)	Discernment

Reasons Offered for These Gifts All Existing Today

Varying reasons are given by different charismatics, but combining them yields several primary arguments.[9]

The Argument That Jesus Does Not Change

Some charismatics maintain that because Jesus does not change, there has been no change in His gift of tongues to believers. The writer to the Hebrews says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (13:8); hence, the gifts He gave to the early church are still in operation today.

Response

While Jesus does not change, His plan and purpose for different times does. For example, He no longer requires animal sacrifices; because Jesus fulfilled the Mosaic law, we no longer have to be conscientious about not eating ceremonially

unclean meat (cf. Mark 7:19; Acts 10:9–15).

The Argument That the New Testament Nowhere Indicates That Any Gifts Have Passed Away

The contention here is that, for instance, 1 Corinthians 13:8—which says, "whether there are tongues, they will cease" (nkjv)—is referring to a change that will occur after death, not at the end of the apostolic period. Paul also says, "***Now*** we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; ***then*** we shall see face to face. ***Now*** I know in part; ***then*** I shall know fully, even as I am fully known" (v. 12). The "now and "then" refer to this life and the next life, not to the first century compared to the second century and following.

Response

While it may be granted that this text is not referring to tongues being replaced by the "perfect" (complete) canon of Scripture in the first century;[10] nonetheless, there are other reasons to believe that the gift of tongues no longer exists.[11] This very text (v. 8) indicates that tongues would pass away; this is implied in the phrase "whether there are tongues, they will cease," which is written in the Greek middle voice[12] and can be translated, "They will cease ***of their own accord***." In general, they will cease sometime before we get to heaven. In particular, they will last as long as the other revelatory gifts (see v. 12), which all sections of Christendom agree ended with the apostles.

The Argument That Many Persons Today Possess the Gift of Tongues

That many today seem to have the gift of tongues is said to be living proof that tongues still exist. Hence, any interpretation of verses to the contrary must be wrong, by virtue of being contrary to experience.

Response

Two observations are made on this point.
First, experience should not be used to interpret the Bible; the Bible should be used to interpret our experience.[13]
Second, there are other ways to interpret the current tongues phenomena than to equate it with the unique supernatural gift of speaking in a known language foreign to the speaker (such as in the New Testament—Acts 2:5–10). For instance, it may be explainable as a natural phenomenon or as the misinterpretation of a spiritual experience. Ater all, tongues, for instance, are found among pagan religions, and no orthodox Christian would take this to mean they must have come from God.[14]

The Argument That the New Testament Books Are Written for Believers[15]

The New Testament, in which the gift of tongues is found throughout,[16] was written for believers. There is no indication that this gift ever ceased to exist (cf. Rom. 8:26).

Response

All of the Bible is ***for*** us today, but not all the Bible was written ***to*** us. Paul said, "Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). However, he is clearly speaking of the Old Testament here, and again, we know that some things in it are no longer binding on believers today. Hence, even though tongues are mentioned in the New Testament, it is possible that tongues are no longer for us. Other gifts from the early New Testament period have passed away, such as apostleship—one had to be an eyewitness of the resurrected Christ in order to be an apostle,[17] and Christ's post-resurrection appearances were only to the "eyewitnesses" (1 Cor. 15:1–9).
Since apostles existed only in the New Testament (Acts 1:22) and since there

were supernatural sign gifts given to apostles (2 Cor. 12:12), it follows that these sign gifts ceased with the apostles in the first century. There is no evidence that anyone since the time of the apostles has had special powers to instantaneously and irrevocably cure incurable diseases, raise the dead, heal a whole city of sick people, and speak in real but unlearned languages.

THE VIEW THAT *NONE* OF THE GIFTS EXISTS TODAY

On the opposite end of the gift spectrum is the position set forth by Gene Getz (b. 1932), who believes that all these gifts listed in the New Testament were temporary and have passed away. His reasoning is as follows:

First, "the number and kinds of gifts varied significantly from church to church in the New Testament World" (***SFC***, 155). Of the different lists, 1 Corinthians 12:8–10, 23 names seventeen; Romans 12:6–8 names seven; Ephesians 4:11 names five; and 1 Peter 4:11 names two. "Therefore, as [contemporary] Christians, we must be careful not to total the gift lists in the New Testament and conclude that it is God's will for this total list to be present in every [contemporary] church" (ibid., 156).

Second, "the passages where gifts are referred to most extensively are written to correct the improper use of spiritual gifts" (ibid.). The Corinthians, for example, were using their gifts to build themselves up, not the body. They were also giving attention to the lesser gifts rather than the greater ones.

Third, "nowhere in the Bible does it say we are, as individuals, to search for or to discover our spiritual gifts" (ibid., 158); the body as a whole (the Greek is plural) is told to "desire earnestly the greater gifts" (1 Cor. 12:31 asv). Since God had only given some to be apostles, etc. (v. 29), God clearly was not commanding each individual to seek the gift of apostleship. Indeed, God sovereignly gave gifts as He willed (v. 11; Heb. 2:3).

Fourth, "the Scriptures emphasize that there is a more excellent way than an emphasis on the gifts of the Spirit" (***SFC***, 160). After telling the Corinthian church to seek the higher gifts, Paul went on to say, "I will show you the most excellent way" (1 Cor. 12:31). He urged them to do away with "childish things" (13:11 nkjv). They were to have as their priority ***love***, the only thing that would endure after tongues and prophecy ceased.

Fifth, “when local church leaders were to be appointed, Paul did not instruct Timothy and Titus to look for spiritual gifts: rather, he instructed them to look for spiritual qualifications and maturity. Paul said nothing about selecting these men [elders] on the basis of the spiritual gifts that related to these functions.” In short, nowhere does the Bible say that we are “as individuals to search for or try to discover our spiritual gifts before we can function in the body of Christ” (ibid., 160–62).
Sixth, “body [church] function is not dependent on spiritual gifts, but rather on biblical teaching and a love and concern for one another” (ibid., 162). There is no need for any of these gifts today, argues Getz; they were supernatural gifts needed to found the church, not to sustain it.
In these arguments, no specific response will be given except to note that the cessationist position (below) opposes them.

THE VIEW THAT *SOME* OF THE GIFTS EXIST TODAY (CESSATIONISM)

A third view is that some of the gifts still exist, while others have passed away. Those that have passed away are often called “sign” gifts, since they were supernatural; such were the “signs of an apostle” (2 Cor. 12:12 nkjv).
Those who hold this view are called cessationists, since they believe that some gifts given to the early New Testament church have subsequently ceased to exist. The reason given is that such gifts were needed only to establish the church, not to continue it; hence, once they served their foundational purpose, they vanished. As sign gifts, they were outward signs (miracles) of the new message given by revelation to the apostles:

> This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him [the apostles]. *God also testified to it [the message] by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit* distributed according to his will. (
> Heb. 2:3–4
>)

Many arguments can be given for the cessation of the supernatural sign gifts; the most important ones include the following.

The Sign Gift of Apostleship Passed Away

Because apostleship no longer exists, at least one of the sign gifts is no longer in operation. Again, the New Testament affirms that to be an apostle one had to be an eyewitness of the resurrected Christ; accordingly, ***apostle*** in this unique, foundational sense of the twelve apostles and Paul[18] no longer exists, since only persons living in the first part of the first century could have been an eyewitness.

Other Sign Gifts Associated With Apostles Also Passed Away

Paul said there were "signs of an apostle" (2 Cor. 12:12 nkjv); these included the gifts of healing, evangelism, and raising the dead (Matt. 10:6), as well as tongues and giving the Holy Spirit (Acts 8, 10, 19). If everyone had these gifts, they would not have been unique to an apostle. As just shown, the gift of apostleship has passed away, and since certain other gifts (such as miracles, healings, and prophecy) were "sign" gifts of an apostle, they also must have passed away with the apostles.

Tongues As an Apostolic Sign Gift Passed Away

Mark says of tongues, "These signs will follow those who believe" (16:17 nkjv), and Paul added, "Tongues, then, are a ***sign***, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is for believers, not for unbelievers" (1 Cor. 14:22).[19] ***Only the apostles received and could give these sign gifts***, which is why they were called the "signs of an apostle." Indeed, only the apostles spoke in tongues at

Pentecost,[20] and Stephen, who had the gifts of evangelism and healing, could not receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (and, thereby, tongues) except by "the laying on of the apostles' hands" (Acts 8:18). Likewise, Cornelius and the Gentiles received the gift of tongues only after the apostles came (10:44–46), and the Ephesians received the gift of tongues only "when Paul placed his hands on them [and] the Holy Spirit came on them" (19:6).

Other gifts were given in the same way. Paul told Timothy: "For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands" (2 Tim. 1:6). Paul told the Romans, whom he had never seen, "I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong" (Rom. 1:11).

Unlike the Modern Tongues Phenomena, Apostolic Tongues Were a Real Language[21]

Clearly, at Pentecost, people heard the apostles praying in their languages:

> Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because *each one heard them speaking in his own language*. Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that *each of us hears them in his own native language*?" (
>
> Acts 2:5–8
>
>).

Peter said that what had happened to Cornelius (in Acts 10) was the same thing that happened on the Day of Pentecost:

> As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them *as he had come on us at the beginning*. Then I remembered what the Lord had said: "John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (
>
> 11:15–16
>
>).

Hence, there is no reason to dispute that the only other passage mentioning tongues in Acts was also the same thing (Acts 19)—a real language the speaker

did not know but was supernaturally given by God.[22]
The general phenomena of tongue-speaking today is not a real language but a spiritual gibberish. Linguists have tested it and found that it has no linguistic pattern, such as a real language has. For instance, Dr. Massey, president of a large seminary in Lagos, Nigeria, following research on tribal tongue-speaking, reports the same phenomena among pagan religions; surely God is not giving a miraculous confirmation of paganism.
What is more, many people in North America are taught to speak in these "tongues," being asked to repeat certain letters or words to "prime the pump." One charismatic pastor pondering this was led to search the Scriptures on the matter, and, as a result, he and his church ceased expressing themselves in alleged "tongues" and "prophecies."[23] If the general charismatic phenomena were miraculous, people wouldn't have to be taught to do it, nor, if it is truly of God, would pagan religions also have the same experience. It is reasonable to conclude that today's general tongues phenomena is not a supernatural gift to speak in a foreign language that a speaker has never spoken, such as was done on the Day of Pentecost and in subsequent events (Acts 2; 10; 19).

The Special Gift of Healing As Practiced by the Apostles Has Ceased

The cessation of the apostolic healing gift is clear from several arguments. Even the apostles themselves ceased to practice it in the latter New Testament period, for it is not in the lists from that time,[24] and the apostles had close associates whom they apparently were not able to heal (cf. 1 Tim. 5:23; 2 Tim. 4:20). Further, the latter New Testament implies that it was a past event, saying by a.d. 68–69 that their message had already been confirmed by miracles (Heb. 2:3–4). No one alive today displays such gifts. Biblical miracles were unique, wrought by power no one now possesses.
First, they involved instantaneous cures. Jesus commanded the invalid to "get up! Pick up your mat and walk" and "***at once*** the man was cured" (John 5:8–9). He touched Peter's mother-in-law (Matt. 8:14–15) and immediately "she got up and began to wait on him." Peter, "taking [the man lame from birth] by the right

hand, he helped him up, and ***instantly*** the man's feet and ankles became strong" (Acts 3:7).

Second, they were always successful. When Jesus undertook the task of healing, no illness was too severe, no sickness had done too much damage, no affliction had too tight a grip on a victim. Jesus was ***always*** successful with all kinds of disease (e.g., Matt. 12:15; Acts 5:16) and even with the raising of the dead (e.g., John 11). This characteristic of the fingerprint of God bears repeating, because the acts of healing incurable organic diseases and of raising those who were physically dead are not easily emulated.

Third, the healings always lasted. In all of Jesus' healings there is not a single account of a relapse. Of course, eventually those healed all physically ***died***, as does every human (Rom. 5:12); only the final resurrection will "cure" ***that*** malady (John 5:5).

Fourth, the miracles always glorified God. God always has a purpose for performing a miracle; He is not arbitrary about what He does. There are two basic reasons for miracles: to manifest God's nature and to confirm His Word. Lazarus was raised in order that the people there "would see the glory of God" (John 11:40). Glory is the outward manifestation of God's inward character (cf. 1:14); glory is manifest excellence.

Moses' miracles in Egypt were "so that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers … has appeared to you" (Ex. 4:5). In Acts 2:22 Peter told the multitude that Jesus "was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know." One of the most succinct statements about miracles confirming Jesus' claim to have been sent from God was made by Nicodemus: "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him" (John 3:2).

In view of these standards, it is clear that no one alive possesses these kinds of powers to perform, on command, instantaneous cures of incurable sicknesses, with 100 percent success and with no relapses, and resurrecting the dead. The miraculous ***gift*** of healing has ceased, the temporary gift used to establish the church's foundation. Again, this does not mean the ***fact*** of miracles has ceased; God can perform a miracle anytime He chooses.

The Gift of Prophetic Foreknowledge Has Passed Away

Those who claim that the New Testament gift of prophecy is still in existence find it difficult to sustain its identity (its identicalness) with the ***infallible*** predictions made by biblical prophets. The Old Testament insisted that if one gave ***a*** false prophecy, then he was a false prophet (Deut. 18:22). Those who today attempt specific predictive prophecy sooner or later (usually sooner) make a false prediction. In the Old Testament era, anyone who did this was stoned—the very threat of which placed fear in the hearts of those who would try to be self-initiated prophets.[25]

Arguments for the Fallibility of New Testament Prophecy

In order to counter this (see Grudem, ***AMGT***), some have argued that even the gift of prophecy ***in the New Testament*** was only a gift of fallible prophecy. In other words, they believe that some of a New Testament prophet's utterances could be wrong. In support of this view they offer the following arguments:

(1) Agabus predicted that Paul would be bound and handed over to the Gentiles if he went to Jerusalem (Acts 21:10). That Agabus tried to no avail to persuade Paul not to go to Jerusalem is taken as proof that his prophecy was wrong.
(2) One prophet could interrupt another (1 Cor. 14:30) when he gave a prophecy. If it were really God speaking, the utterance could not be interrupted.
(3) The audience was to judge the prophecy being given ("weigh carefully what is said," v. 29). Why do this if it was believed to be infallible?
(4) There was no "Thus saith the Lord" with it, such as used by Old Testament prophets.

A Response to the Arguments for the Fallibility of New Testament Prophecy

First, Agabus's prophecy was not false: He predicted that "the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt [Paul] and will hand him over to the Gentiles" (Acts 21:11), and this is literally what happened. Soon thereafter we read that

“some Jews … stirred up the whole crowd and seized him.” And when “the Roman troops” came, “they stopped beating Paul.” Then they relinquished him to the commander, who “came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains” (vv. 27, 31–33). The prophecy was fulfilled as stated in the same chapter.

Second, that prophets could be interrupted does not mean their message was not from God; rather, it reveals that “the spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets” (1 Cor. 14:32). Ecstatic utterances were common among pagans at that time, and pagans are what the Corinthians once were. In occult prophecies, the one delivering the utterances was overpowered by the spirit giving the utterance; by contrast Paul is saying that if a revelation is truly from God, then the prophet will remain in conscious control of his mind and will. In short, if it is really of God, it can wait. Paul was saying, Take your turn, for “God is not a God of disorder but of peace” (v. 33).

Third, that New Testament believers were told to judge or weigh what was being offered as a prophecy does not imply that an actual prophetic utterance could be a false prophecy, but instead that false prophets could pretend to give true utterances. Jesus warned that “many false prophets will appear and deceive many people” (Matt. 24:11), and John urged Christians not to “believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). The issue wasn’t that a true prophet could give a false prophecy, but that there were false prophets.

Fourth, and finally, many Old Testament prophets did not preface with “Thus saith the Lord” or the like; the phrase is not essential. Some prophets before Christ simply said “I saw” [in a vision] or “the Lord showed me” (e.g., cf. Amos 7:1; 8:1). Others just authoritatively spoke without any formula; David did so in the Psalms, yet he also made it clear that the words came from God: “The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me; his word was on my tongue” (2 Sam. 23:2). Furthermore, when Agabus made his prediction he ***did*** indicate that it was from God: “The Holy Spirit says …” (Acts 21:11). There is no reason to believe that New Testament prophets exercised their gifts any differently than did Old Testament prophets.

Arguments Showing That the New Testament Gift of Prophecy Is Identical to the Old Testament Gift

There is a lack of any real support for distinguishing the Old Testament gift of prophecy from that in the New. In addition, there are many good arguments in favor of acknowledging New Testament prophecy as an infallible gift.

New Testament Prophets Were in Continuity With Their Old Testament Predecessors

The Old Testament predicted John the Baptist (Mal. 3:5); Jesus declared that John the Baptist was the greatest of the prophets (Matt. 11:11), thus placing him in line with the Old Testament seers. John the apostle spoke of "the prophecy of this book" that he wrote (Rev. 22:7 nkjv), and the angel from God that spoke to him placed him among "the prophets," such as the other "servants" God used in the Old Testament (v. 6); John also said of himself, "I am a fellow servant with … the prophets" (v. 9). From John the Baptist to John the apostle, New Testament prophets stood in continuity with Old Testament prophets. Their revelations from God were both authoritative and infallible, for everyone was forbidden to change it in any way (cf. 22:18–19).

New Testament Prophets Were Placed Along With Apostles As the Foundation of the Church

According to Ephesians 2:20, the church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone." That this is a reference to New Testament prophets is evident from two facts.

For one thing, the order of listing would have been "prophets and apostles" if Paul had been referring to Old Testament prophets (cf. 3:5).

For another, Paul affirms plainly that the Old Testament prophets did not understand "the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets" (ibid.); "the mystery … has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints" (Col. 1:26; cf. Rom. 16:25).

So the New Testament prophets, along with the apostles, were the means through which God revealed Himself to the New Testament church. The apostles' revelations were divinely authoritative and infallible (cf. 1 Cor. 14:37); thus, it

follows that the New Testament prophets gave equally authoritative and infallible messages. If they did not, then the church is built on a foundation of fallible prophecy (cf. Eph. 2:20). They established it, and, indeed, many of the New Testament books were not written by apostles—such as Mark, Luke, Acts, Hebrews, James, and Jude. If their prophetic utterances are not infallible, then their books are not infallible.[26]

New Testament Prophets Received Revelations From God

Paul describes what a New Testament prophet received as ***revelation*** from God (1 Cor. 14:29); this is the same word (both from Gk: ***apokalupsis***) used in the same book (2:10) to describe his own words from God. Indeed, Paul speaks of these as "words taught by the Spirit" (v. 13). The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth (John 16:13; 1 John 4:6), and the Spirit of truth cannot utter error—"it is impossible for God to lie" (Heb. 6:18; cf. Titus 1:2). When a New Testament prophet gave a revelation from God, it was just as infallible and without error as a revelation through an Old Testament prophet or a New Testament apostle. God cannot speak fallibly; if it was a revelation from God, it must have been infallible.[27]

New Testament Prophets Gave Predictive Prophecies

Foretelling the future was not unique to Old Testament prophets. For example, the New Testament prophet Agabus "through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world" (Acts 11:28); Luke adds that "this happened during the reign of Claudius." Again, when Agabus gave his prophecy about Paul, he declared, "The Holy Spirit says" (21:11), so he not only gave predictive prophecies, as Old Testament prophets did, but he also claimed the same divine authority. If the utterances of Old Testament prophets were infallible, then so were those of New Testament prophets (cf. Deut. 18:22).

Prophecy Is Given a High Status on the List of Gifts

In the New Testament gift listing, prophecy is placed alongside apostleship (1

Cor. 12:28–29) and “miraculous powers” (v. 10). Even though both prophecy and tongues were gifts through which God spoke, Paul listed prophecy above tongues (14:18) and urged the church as a whole to desire “especially the gift of prophecy” (v. 1), a gift by which one gives a “revelation” from God (v. 6). That Paul gives this exalted position to the New Testament gift of prophecy is further indication that it is neither fallible nor inferior to the Old Testament gift.

Both Old and New Testament prophecies were means by which the infallible word of God was given to the people of God. In brief, the prophet’s words were God’s words; what the prophet said, God said. As Peter noted, “Prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21; cf. 2 Sam. 23:2).[28]

It follows from this that either (1) those who claim the gift of prophecy today are uttering infallible truths on a par with those in the Bible or else (2) the New Testament gift of prophecy does not exist today. The “prophecies” given today are not infallible but are often false; thus, we conclude that the New Testament gift of prophecy no longer exists. What is being called “the gift of prophecy” is really no more than preaching; it is authoritative insofar as it is based on the Bible but is not inerrant because it comes from fallible human beings.[29]

Abiding Gifts[30]

Those who support the view that certain apostolic sign gifts have passed away usually hold that some gifts still remain. Those involving special revelation and other miracles were only needed in the original confirmation of the apostolic message (Heb. 2:3–4); that is, in laying the church’s foundation (Eph. 2:20). Gifts needed for the building of the superstructure, however, have not passed away. Ephesians 4, which illustrates this point, lists four gifts: apostle, prophet, evangelist, and pastor/teacher.

Apostle

As already mentioned, there are two senses of the word ***apostle***.[31] In the sense of the twelve apostles and Paul, who all had the signs of apostleship (2 Cor. 12:12 nkjv), the gift has passed away. But in the root sense of the word, as "one sent" (e.g., a missionary), apostles could still exist in the church. Certainly others in the first century, such as Barnabas (Acts 14:4, 14), Timothy, and Silvanus (1 Thess. 1:1; cf. 2:6) were "apostles" in this more general sense.[32]

Prophet

Likewise, the word ***prophet*** has two senses: foretelling (which foresees what will happen) and forthtelling (which proclaims the truth already known). According to the cessationist view, the former has passed away, being a special sign gift, while the latter remains. A prophet is also someone who brings God's message to the body of Christ for edification (1 Cor. 14:3–4), and in this sense there can still be prophets in the church today.

Evangelist

While all believers should "do the work of an evangelist" (2 Tim. 4:5), the special ***gift*** of evangelism is given only to some (e.g., see Acts 21:8; cf. 8:4–8, 26–40). Evangelists proclaim the ***euangelion*** (the gospel); today, they might be called church planters, though evangelism in terms of gospel proclamation certainly has an ongoing role in church growth as well.

Pastor/Teacher

These two, ***pastor*** and ***teacher***,[33] are grammatically connected.[34] That teachers are listed with pastors signifies that ***as*** pastors, one of their primary roles is feeding the flock of God. (cf. 1 Peter 5:1; Acts 20:28). Paul commanded Timothy,

> Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will

gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. (
2 Tim. 4:2–3
)

The risen and ascended Lord gave these gifts to His church in order to

prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (
Eph. 4:12–13
)

THE MINISTRY OF WOMEN IN THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

There are several views of the role of women in the contemporary church. Even though they differ functionally, it’s inarguable that women are equal with men by nature, by redemption, and by spiritual gifts.[35]

Women Are Equal With Men by Creation

Both men and women are created in God’s image: “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27). Jesus said,

Haven’t you read … that at the beginning the Creator “made them male and female,” and said, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh”? So they are no longer two, but one. (
Matt. 19:4–6
)

Paul reasoned, “As woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God” (1 Cor. 11:12).

Women Are Equal With Men by Redemption

The sexes are also equal because of their redemption (Gal. 3:28). There are no second-class citizens in God’s kingdom; redemptively, all are on the same spiritual level.[36]

Women Are Equally Gifted With Men for Ministry

There are no gender symbols on Scripture’s gift listings, such as “gift of teaching (M)” or “gift of helps (F).” ***All the gifts are for all the body*** (1 Cor. 12:4ff.). Women were told how to pray and prophesy (1 Cor. 11:5); Philip had four daughters with the gift of prophecy (Acts 21:9); Priscilla (along with her husband, Aquila) taught the eloquent preacher Apollos (18:24–26).

Women Are Functionally Superior to Men in Childbearing

According to Paul, women have a functional superiority in that only women bear children (1 Tim. 2:15). Every man since Adam has come by way of a woman (1 Cor. 11:12). This functional superiority in the bearing and nursing of children is part of woman’s created nature.

Women Should Not Usurp Authority Over Men in the Church

Just as a wife is to submit to the headship of her husband, even so the church should submit to the headship of Christ. Speaking of the manifestation of this on the local scene, Paul wrote: “The head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God” (1 Cor. 11:3). Hence, Paul exhorted that “a woman should learn in quietness and full submission” (1 Tim. 2:11);[37] this means that everything must be done “decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:40 nkjv), according to the pattern God established for the church.

Women Should Not Be Elders

While the ***ministry*** of women is unlimited—women having the same gifts for ministry that men have—the ***authority*** of women is limited in the New Testament church. This is not because women are naturally or redemptively inferior, but because they are functionally different; they have a different function in the family, and they have a different function in the church. Again, ***different*** does not mean inferior; it simply means that God has equipped men and women differently for different roles both in the home and in the church. As for administrative authority in the church, that God placed it in the hands of the elders[38] is evident from these facts.

First of all, there were no women among the twelve apostles (see Matt. 10:1–4), who were also elders by office (Acts 1:20; cf. 2 John 1), though women played an active role in the ministry of Jesus (cf. Luke 23:49) and the apostles (Rom. 16:1).

In addition, there are to be no women elders (bishops), for “a bishop then must be … the ***husband*** of one wife” (1 Tim. 3:2 nkjv).

Furthermore, elder is a position of authority, and the apostle said, “I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner” (1 Tim. 2:12–14). It is noteworthy that the reasons given for male church leadership are not cultural but (1) the order of creation and (2) the nature of the Fall.

Women Deaconesses?

The New Testament says nothing about women deacons, although the Greek word for ***deacon*** (***diakonon***, which means "servant") was used of Phoebe, a woman Paul used in the ministry (Rom. 16:1). Some believe that he speaks of deaconesses when he says that "in the same way, their wives[39] are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything" (1 Tim. 3:11). However, this seems more likely to refer to deacons' ***wives***, as often translated;[40] Paul goes on to say that "a deacon must be the ***husband*** of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well" (v. 12). Though there is no evidence that women were part of any board or group of deacons,[41] again, women had a significant ministry in the life of Christ and of the apostles (cf. Luke 8:3; Rom. 16:1, 7).[42] Nonetheless, women can be servants of Christ in full exercise of all the gifts in existence.

ANSWERING OBJECTIONS TO THE CESSATIONIST VIEW

A number of objections have been leveled against the view that not all gifts listed in the New Testament still exist today. Among these the following are worthy of consideration.

Objection One: Based on the Fact That Healings Still Occur

Some appeal to the present occurrence of miraculous healings as proof that the gift of healing is still in existence. However, this misses the point.
First, cessationists do not deny the ***fact*** of healings, but only that the special ***gift*** of healing, such as the apostles had, still exists. That God can and does perform healings anytime He wishes is not the point. The question is whether any human

being today still possesses the kind of miraculous healing power the apostles had.[43]

Second, not all healings that occur today are supernatural like those of the apostles. Some are psychosomatic. Others are providential acts of God employing the natural curative powers of the body. Some alleged healings are of demonic origin (Rev. 16:14). Others are merely magical tricks and not healings at all. All that glitters is not gold, and all that is unusual is not supernatural (see Geisler, ***SW***); all of these fall short of being a supernatural event such as Jesus and the apostles accomplished.[44]

Objection Two: Based on Paul's Desire That All Should Seek Tongues

Some charismatics have used Paul's wish that everyone speak in tongues as proof that the gift exists today. "I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified" (1 Cor. 14:5).

No such conclusion follows from this verse for many reasons.

First, even if it were a fulfillable wish for ***his*** day, it does not mean the gift is still in existence today.

Second, not all wishes are fulfillable. Paul also said he wished to go to hell for his Jewish brethren so they could be saved (Rom. 9:3), but this is impossible. Likewise, since God gave the gift of tongues only to some in the early church, Paul may have been expressing his unfulfillable desire that all have the same gifts he had. That only some were given the gift is clear from the text, which demands a negative answer, as indicated in the brackets: "Are all apostles? [No] Are all prophets? [No] Are all teachers? [No] Are all workers of miracles? [No] Have all the gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? [No]" (1 Cor. 12:29–30).

Third, even if Paul expressed a fulfillable desire for all to speak in tongues at that time, it does not follow that this was meant for believers later in the church age. Since the gift of apostleship was not intended for later, it makes no sense that the sign gifts of an apostle would be for the entire church age either (Acts 1:22).

Objection Three: Based on Paul's Command That All Seek the Gifts

"Covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet show I unto you a more excellent way" (1 Cor. 12:31 kjv). Some charismatics use this to argue that believers should speak in tongues today.

This conclusion also does not follow.

First, even if this were meant for today, tongues should not be sought by all for two reasons: (1) They were told to seek the "best gifts," but Paul said tongues were inferior to prophecy (1 Cor. 12:31 nkjv; 14:26–39), and tongues were listed last (v. 30); (2) only some were given the gift of tongues (ibid.), so it would have been futile for all to seek a gift God had not given to all.

Second, the command to seek the best gifts was to the congregation as a whole, not to each individual. The "you" is plural in Greek. Obviously, the gift of apostleship was higher, but all were not to seek it; only resurrection eyewitnesses qualified (Acts 1:22; 1 Cor. 9:1).

Third, here again, this begs the question, since it assumes that tongues are for today.

Objection Four: Based on the Assumption That These Were "Private Prayer Tongues"

Some have argued that 1 Corinthians is speaking about private tongues, not public tongues as on the Day of Pentecost. Hence, they were not a real language (like in Acts 2) and, as such, cannot be criticized for not measuring up to those standards, nor forbidden for all to utilize at a service.

Several arguments have been offered to support this assumption: (1) They were called "tongues of angels," which are unknown; (2) they were unintelligible (1 Cor. 14:9–11); (3) 1 Corinthians is much later than the book of Acts and is speaking of another kind of tongues, a private unknown tongue that serves as a believer's special prayer language.

In response, several facts stand out.

First, Paul's letter was not private but to the whole church at Corinth, and the rules he set down were binding on the local church.
Second, 1 Corinthians was not later than Acts. It was written by about a.d. 55–56 and Acts was not completed until about a.d. 62. As late as Acts 19, the kind of tongues that occurred in Acts 2 and 10 at the hands of the apostles was still occurring.
Third, reference to tongues in the latter part of Acts is the same as that which occurred at Pentecost, and they were a real language. Peter declared of the Cornelius event (Acts 10) that it was the same as Acts 2: "As I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, ***as on us at the beginning***" (11:15 kjv). The event at the beginning was clearly a known language, not a private prayer tongue:

When this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak *in his own language*.… Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak *in our tongues* the wonderful works of God. (
2:6
,
9–11
kjv
)

This is also supported by many other arguments.[45]

Fourth, nowhere does Scripture make a distinction between a later private unintelligible tongue and an earlier public one involving real language.
Fifth, all the rules set down for the exercise of tongues in the early church implied that the real gift of tongues was a real language. Most basic is that it had to be translatable (interpretable). Only a real language, which alone has intelligible linguistic patterns, is translatable.
Sixth, as to the language of angels, every instance of an angel speaking involves a real, understandable language (cf. Gen. 18; Jude 13; Luke 1). Besides, the phrase is probably a figure of speech meaning "eloquent."
Seventh, the biblical gift of tongues was a supernatural gift, but there is nothing miraculous about speaking in an unintelligible gibberish that one can be taught to do by repeating certain phrases over and over.

Eighth, again, it has been verified by research among pagans and primitive religions that tongue-speaking of the same unintelligible pattern is part of their experience. Since their religion is demonically inspired (1 Tim. 4:1; 1 Cor. 10:20), clearly this kind of tongue-speaking cannot be of God.
Ninth, and finally, while not all private prayer "tongues" need be demonic, neither need they be divine. Some can easily be a sincere but misguided attempt to identify a spiritual experience of trying to utter the unutterable that results in the unintelligible. On this experience one may easily have been (mis)taught to place the label of the biblical gift of tongues (see Babcox, ***SCR***).

THE PREEMINENT MINISTRY OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

Regardless of how many gifts exist in the church today, even when all the gifts did exist, Paul made it indisputable that edification and love were to take precedence over ecstatic gifts.

The Priority of Prophecy Over Tongues

The local church's primary internal purpose is edification, or the building up of believers:

To each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it … *to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up* until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and *become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ*. (

Eph. 4:7

,

12–13

)

With this in mind, speaking words of edification in a known language was to take precedence over all speaking in an unknown tongue. Paul said clearly: "In the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten

thousand words in a tongue" (1 Cor. 14:19). He added, "Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy" (v. 39 nkjv).

Everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. (vv. 3–4)

The Priority of Love Over All Things

Sandwiched between two chapters on ministry and the spiritual gifts is the great love chapter, 1 Corinthians 13, which Paul introduces with these words: "I will show you the most excellent way.… Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away" (12:31; 13:8). While it is debated just when tongues would expire, it is not debatable that they would cease and that love is superior. In short, ***"the fruit of the Spirit," which is, first of all, love (Gal. 5:22), is more important for ministry than spiritual gifts***. "Love builds up" (1 Cor. 8:1); it is the most edifying of all Christian graces. Indeed, in contrast to faith and hope, love is the only virtue that will last forever. "***Now*** these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love" (13:13). Even if there were no special gifts of the Spirit in existence today, Christian love exercised in the body of Christ could build it up for maturity.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR MINISTRY GIFTS IN THE CHURCH

The Early Fathers

Tertullian (c. 155–c. 225)

“The apostle most assuredly foretold that there were to be “spiritual gifts” in the church. Now, can you refuse to believe this, even if indubitable evidence on every point is forthcoming for your conviction?” (***TS***, 9).

Clement of Alexandria (150–c. 215)

The prophets are perfect in prophecy, the righteous in righteousness, and the martyrs in confession, and others in preaching, not that they are not sharers in the common virtues, but are proficient in those to which they are appointed. For what man in his senses would say that a prophet was not righteous? For what? did not righteous men like Abraham prophesy? … “But each has his own proper gift of God”—one in one way, another in another. But the apostles were perfected in all. (*S*, 21)

Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)

What shall I more say? It is not possible to name the number of the gifts which the Church, [scattered] throughout the whole world, has received from God, in the name of Jesus Christ, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and which she exerts day by day for the benefit of the Gentiles. (*AH*, 2.32.4)

After our Lord rose from the dead, [the apostles] were invested with power from on high when the Holy Spirit came down [upon them], were filled from all [His gifts], and had perfect knowledge: they departed to the ends of the earth, preaching the glad tidings of the good things [sent] from God to us, and proclaiming the peace of heaven to men, who indeed do all equally and individually possess the Gospel of God. Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome, and laying the foundations of the Church. (ibid., 3.1.1)

Origen (c. 185–c. 254)

I shall refer not only to His miracles, but, as is proper, to those also of the apostles of Jesus. For they could not without the help of miracles and wonders have prevailed on those who heard their new doctrines and new teachings to abandon their national usages, and to accept their instructions at the danger to themselves even of death. And there are still preserved among Christians traces of that Holy Spirit which appeared in the form of a dove. They expel evil spirits, and perform many cures, and foresee certain events, according to the will of the Logos.…

Many have been converted to Christianity as if against their will, some sort of spirit having suddenly transformed their minds from a hatred of the doctrine to a readiness to die in its defense, and having appeared to them either in a waking vision or a dream of the night. (*AC*, 46)

The Medieval Fathers

John Chrysostom (347–407)

"He set the apostles first who had all the gifts in themselves" (***EPC***, 1.32.2).

Now by saying this, he gently hinted that they were the cause of their own receiving the lesser gifts, and had it in their power, if they would, to receive the greater. For when he saith, "desire earnestly," he demands from them all diligence and desire for spiritual things.... As if he said, it is not one, or two, or three gifts that I point out to you, but one way which leadeth to all these: and not merely a way, but both "a more excellent way" and one that is open in common to all. For not as the gifts are vouchsafed, to some these, to others those, but not all to all; so also in this case: but it is an universal gift. Wherefore also he invites all to it. "Desire earnestly," saith he, "the better gifts and yet show I unto you a more excellent way;" meaning love towards our neighbor. (ibid., 32.5)

Ambrose (339–397)

He gave all gifts to his disciples, of whom he said: "in My name they shalt cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they shall drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall do well." So, then, he gave them all things, but there is no power of man exercised in these things, in which the grace of the divine gift operates. (*TBCR*, 1.8.35)

Augustine (354–430)

What tongue can tell, or what imagination can conceive, the reward He will bestow at the last, when we consider that for our comfort in this earthly journey He has given us so freely of His Spirit, that in the adversities of this life we may retain our confidence

in, and love for, Him whom as yet we see not; and that He has also given to each gifts suitable for the building up of His Church, that we may do what He points out as right to be done, not only without a murmur, but even with delight? (*OCD*, 1.15)

That the one incredibility of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ may be believed, we accumulate the testimonies of countless incredible miracles, but even so we do not bend the frightful obstinacy of these skeptics. But if they do not believe that these miracles were wrought by Christ's apostles to gain credence to their preaching of his resurrection and ascension, this one grand miracle suffices for us, that the whole world has believed without any miracles. (*CG*, 22.5)

Would the human mind have refused to listen to or believe in the resurrection of Christ's body and its ascension into heaven, and have scouted it as an impossibility, had not the divinity of the truth itself, or the truth of the divinity, and corroborating miraculous signs, proved that it could happen and had happened? … For the predictions of the prophets that had preceded the events were read, they were corroborated by powerful signs, and the truth was seen to be not contradictory to reason, but only different from customary ideas, so that at length the world embraced the faith it had furiously persecuted. (ibid., 22.7)

Men spoke in tongues which they did not know, through the Holy Spirit coming upon them … when it was needful that his coming should be made plain by visible signs, in order to show that the whole world, and all nations constituted with different tongues, should believe in Christ through the gift of the Holy Spirit, to fulfill that which is sung in the psalm, "there is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard; their sound is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world" (*OT*, 4.20).

Reformation Teachers

John Calvin (1509–1564)

[In] the Epistle to the Romans, and the first Epistle to the Corinthians, he [Paul] enumerates other offices, as powers, gifts of healing, interpretation, government, care of the poor (

Rom. 12:7

;

1 Cor. 12:28

). As to those which were temporary, I say nothing for it is not worthwhile to dwell upon them. But there are two of perpetual duration—government and care of the poor" (*ICR*, 4.3.8).

Christ was the giver of the Holy Spirit, and would declare this virtue by a visible miracle on the day on which he would send the Holy Spirit on the apostles, under the form of tongues of fire. (ibid., 4.15.8)

It pleased the Lord that those visible and admirable gifts of the Holy Spirit, which he then poured out upon his people, should be administered and distributed by his apostles by the laying on of hands.… Did this ministry, which the apostles then performed, still remain in the church, it would also behoove us to observe the laying on of hands: but since that gift has ceased to be conferred, to what end is the laying on of hands?

Assuredly the Holy Spirit is still present with the people of God; without his guidance and direction the church of God cannot subsist.… But those miraculous powers and manifest operations, which were distributed by the laying on of hands, have ceased. They were only for a time. For it was right that the new preaching of the gospel, the new kingdom of Christ, should be signalized and magnified by unwonted and unheard-of miracles. When the Lord ceased from these, he did not forthwith abandon his church, but intimated that the magnificence of his kingdom, and the dignity of his word, had been sufficiently manifested. (ibid., 4.19.6)

In the same way, also, the apostles laid their hands, agreeably to that time at which it pleased the Lord that the visible gifts of the Spirit should be dispensed in answer to their prayers; not that posterity might, as those apes do, mimic the empty and useless sign without the reality.… This they have no resemblance to the apostles, except it be in manifesting some absurd false zeal. (ibid., 4.19.7)

The gift of healing disappeared with the other miraculous powers which the Lord was pleased to give for a time, that it might render the new preaching of the gospel forever wonderful. Therefore, even were we to grant that anointing was a sacrament of those powers which were then administered by the hands of the apostles, it pertains not to us, to whom no such powers have been committed. (ibid., 4.19.18)

Post-Reformation Theologians

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758)

Christianity being established through so great a part of the known world by miracles, it was after that more easily continued by tradition; and by means of these extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost, the apostles and others were enabled to write the New Testament, to be an infallible and perpetual rule of faith and manners to the church. And these miracles recorded in those writings are a standing proof of the truth of Christianity to all ages. (*WJE*, 4.3.4)

Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892)

"They had received 'the powers of the world to come,' not miraculous gifts, which are denied us in these days, but all those powers with which the Holy Ghost endows a Christian" (***SSC***, 1.75.1.1).

Perhaps there shall be no miraculous gifts—for they will not be required; but yet there shall be such a miraculous amount of holiness, such an extraordinary fervor of prayer, such a real communion with God, and so much vital religion, and such a spread of the doctrines of the cross, that everyone will see that verily the Spirit is poured out like water, and the rains are descending from above. For that let us pray; let us continually labor for it, and seek it of God. (ibid., 1.30.3.2)

John Wesley (1703–1791)

Whether these gifts of the Holy Ghost were designed to remain in the Church throughout all ages, and whether or not they will be restored at the nearer approach of the "restitution of all things," are questions which it is not needful to decide. But it is needful to observe this, that, even in the infancy of the church, God divided them with a sparing hand. Were all even then prophets? Were all workers of miracles? Had all the gifts of healing? Did all speak with tongues? No, in no wise. Perhaps not one in a thousand. Probably none but the teachers in the church, and only some of them (1 Cor. 12:28–30). It was, therefore, for a more excellent purpose than this, that "they were all filled with the Holy Ghost" (*WJW*, 5.4.3).

CONCLUSION

The internal purpose of the local church is edification so that its members can do the work of the ministry; evangelism is also a prime mission. Not all spiritual gifts given to the early (first-century) church were permanent. Some, like the "signs of an apostle" (including tongues), were initially foundational but then passed away as the church was established on apostolic doctrine and replaced with the apostolic writings. Nonetheless, as Paul indicated, the gift(s) of pastor and teacher still exist today and are to be used for "edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son

of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:12–13 nkjv).

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CHAPTER SEVEN

THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE CHURCH TO THE STATE

Though there are many perspectives on the relationship of church and state, they all can be placed broadly in three categories. Two views represent opposite poles: (1) state over church and (2) church over state; the third attempts to promote (3) a cooperation between church and state. Three dominant models within these categories can be called, respectively, ***secularism, reconstructionism***, and ***Jeffersonianism***. Each will be examined and evaluated in the light of the biblical data.

SECULARISM: STATE OVER CHURCH

Of secularism's various forms, the most widespread in modern times has been Marxism, as manifested in the old Soviet Union and China; even though leadership would often claim a separation of church and state, in practice it is domination of church by state. On the North American scene, in the name of separating church and state, there has been a secularization of the state and an increasing isolation of the church from the state. In contrast to reconstructionism, in which the church imposes religion on the state, in

secularism the state ends up imposing irreligion on the state.

The Moral Basis for Secularism

In secularism the moral basis for government is reduced to situationalism, a secular humanist perspective that eschews all God-given moral absolutes. This view has been expressed in the ***Humanist Manifestos I and II***; John Dewey (1859–1952) and other influential Americans signed the first in 1933, declaring: "The nature of the universe depicted by modern science makes unacceptable any supernatural or cosmic guarantees of human value" (Kurtz, ***HM***, 8). Humanists later added, "Moral values derive their source from human experience. Ethics is autonomous and situational, needing no theological or ideological sanction" (ibid., 2.3.17).

One of the signatories of ***Humanist Manifesto II*** was Joseph Fletcher (1905–1991), author of ***Situation Ethics: The New Morality***, in which he argued that "only the end justifies the means: nothing else" (120). Fletcher maintained that all "decisions are made situationally, not prescriptively" (ibid., 134); he rejected all content-based ethical norms and insisted that we should unilaterally avoid absolutes (ibid., 43–44). In the name of this moral relativism, ***Humanist Manifesto II*** (1973) went on to approve of abortion, euthanasia, suicide, and total sexual license for consenting adults (Kurtz, ***HM***, 18–19).

According to this system of thought, there is no objective moral basis for government. Unlike Jeffersonianism, secularism has no God-given moral basis for civil rights; inalienable rights from the Creator are shed for the alienable rights of the creature. With secularism, rather than being ***based*** in moral law, civil law ***replaces*** moral law: What is morally right is what the constantly changing body politic decides is right, wherever it may be on the political spectrum—from monarchy to anarchy.[1]

The Moral Dilemmas of Secularism

There are numerous moral problems with the secularist viewpoint. Some of the more significant issues are noted here in contrast to the natural-law view of early America.

Secularism Is Contrary to Its Own Human Inclinations

Which of the ***Manifesto*** signatories was naturally inclined to believe that his mother should have killed him in her womb? Even the pagan Hippocratic Oath pledges: "I will neither give a deadly drug to anyone if asked for it, nor will I make a suggestion to this effect. Similarly I will not give to a woman an abortive remedy." That both our natural inclination ***and*** the great moral creeds are against taking an innocent life is ample testimony that the natural law is understood by all people.[2]

Seneca (c. second century), whose stoic philosophy allowed for abortion,[3] nevertheless lauded his mother for not aborting him (as cited by Noonan, ***MALHP***, 7n). However, because the natural law[4] teaches that we should do to others what we would have them do to us, the speculative rationalizations of the stoics were contrary to their own moral inclinations. The natural law is clear, but it must be read from our actual nature rather than from our theoretical notions.

Secularism Is Self-Defeating

Furthermore, the denial of any objective moral law as a proper basis of government is self-defeating. This is painfully evident in Joseph Fletcher's attempt to deny all moral absolutes; in his futile quest for moral relativism he insists that we should never use the word ***never*** … a statement that itself fails to avoid the word ***never*** (***SENM***, 43–44). In addition, the claim that we should always avoid the word ***always*** is equally self-destructive, and to insist that all is relative is tantamount to claiming that one is absolutely sure there are no absolutes. In each case the moral relativist defeats his own argument—wielding his sword to behead the monster of absolutism, he decapitates himself on the backswing.

There ***must*** be some natural law, or else moral judgments would not be

possible.[5] C.S. Lewis (1898–1963) insightfully made this point in his ***Abolition of Man***:

> This thing which I have called for convenience the Tao, and which others may call Natural Law … is not one among a series of possible systems of value. It is the sole source of all value judgments.... If it is rejected, all value is rejected. If any value is retained, it is retained. The effort to refute it and raise a new system of value in its place is self-contradictory. There never has been, and never will be, a radically new judgment of value in the history of the world. (56)

Professor Allan Bloom (b. 1930) makes a similar case for an absolute moral law in ***The Closing of the American Mind***, chiding the view that "there are no absolutes; freedom is absolute.… Of course the result is that … the argument justifying freedom disappears" (***CAM***, 28). As to the oft-repeated claim that the study of different cultures proves all values to be relative:

> All to the contrary, that is a philosophical premise that we now bring to our study of them. [Furthermore,] this premise is unproven and dogmatically asserted for what are largely political reasons. History and culture are interpreted in the light of it, and they are said to prove the premise.

Different opinions on values does not prove that value is relative: "To say it does so prove is as absurd as to say that the diversity of points of view expressed in a college bull session proves there is no truth" (ibid., 39). There ***are*** absolute values; absolute values are undeniable.

Secularism Is a Destructive "End Justifies Any Means" Ethic

By their own confession, secularists' situationalism embraces an "end justifies the means" moral approach, destructive on both a private and a public level. For example, this is particularly applicable in a capitalistic context, in which the profit motive dominates: Capitalism based on an antinomian ethic[6] is destructive to society, feeding on greed, producing poverty, and inciting revolution and war. Universal moral restraints, such as the natural law, are necessary to keep government in check; otherwise, money (rather than morality)

becomes the end—moral principles are sacrificed for monetary profit.

Secularism Provides No Secure Basis for Human Rights

Any attempt to ground human rights in human choice inevitably generates human wrongs. Note again these claims of secular humanists:

> The nature of the universe depicted by modern science makes unacceptable any supernatural or cosmic guarantees of human value.... Values derive their source from human experience. Ethics is autonomous and situational, needing no theological or ideological sanction. (Kurtz, *HM*, 8, 17)

Herein is no sufficient basis for human rights, for if, as Fletcher argued, "Only the end justifies the means: nothing else," then all "decisions are made situationally, not prescriptively" (***SENM***, 120, 134). Thus, there is no sanctity of human life based on purely human law—at least so-called "humanistic" law. Other forms of strictly man-based government—whether of the Nazi (fascist) right or of the Marxist (communist) left—have scarcely fared better, accounting for the slaughter of multimillions of human lives.

Secularism Provides No Real Basis for International Law

Since the law of the land is the final authority—since, allegedly, there is no moral law above and beyond a nation to judge its policies and actions—secularism offers no objective basis either for deciding issues between nations or for making moral judgments about a nation (or state). As such, tyranny, genocide, and other violations of human rights are uncondemnable, lacking any transcendent, overarching standard by which to evaluate them.

It is no accident that the "Father of International Law," Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), established his view on the foundation of natural law, for only on this basis can one find secure grounding for moral judgments between nations.

RECONSTRUCTIONISM: CHURCH OVER STATE

On the other end of the spectrum in the church/state debate is ***reconstructionism***, also known as ***theocracy***.[7] The Old Testament nation of Israel, for instance, was a true theocracy.[8] In direct opposition to secularism, theocratic reconstructionism affirms the church over the state; reconstructionists want to reconstruct civil government in a theocratic model.

The Mosaic Theocracy

"Theocracy," which comes from two Greek words (***theos***, "God," and ***arché***, "rule of"), is a form of government where God is the direct authority; He, as the Supreme Being, directly rules over a nation (or state). Through Moses, God proposed theocracy to Israel, whom He had just redeemed from Egypt, and they accepted:

"If you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." ...

The people all responded together, "We will do everything the Lord has said" (
Ex. 19:5–6
,
8
).

The Mosaic theocracy was a conditional and voluntary covenant: "***If*** you obey me fully and keep my covenant." Israel's affirmation made them God's willing subject, a classic case of church over state. Indeed, it was not simply God ***over*** government: God ***was*** the government. This is why, when Israel later said to Samuel, "You are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have" (1 Sam. 8:5), God responded, "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king" (v. 7).
Theocratically, as "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation," Israel was unique; as

the psalmist said, “He has revealed his word to Jacob, his laws and decrees to Israel. ***He has done this for no other nation***; they do not know his laws” (Ps. 147:19–20).

In this theocracy God not only ruled directly but also directly revealed His will. God used instruments like Moses through whom He spoke: “The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend” (Ex. 33:11). Likewise, God would use His theocratic nation as a special agent of His direct rule; just as He commanded the sun and moon to obey him (cf. Josh. 10) and plagues to come from His hand (cf. 2 Sam. 24), even so He used Israel to bring judgment on the Canaanites (cf. Josh. 6:21). Although some have tried, no other nation has had this theocratic arrangement regarding the execution of God’s judgment on the wicked (cf. Lev. 18).

Medieval Roman Catholicism’s Theocratic Issues

While Roman Catholicism has adapted to many different forms of government, during the Middle Ages, following Emperor Constantine (in 313), there was a decided tip in the direction of the union of church and state; in effect, Christianity became the favored state religion. And under Charlemagne (d. 814) the “Holy Roman Empire” was developed and expanded. Hence, while state government retained its monarchial form, the church became a dominant and official influence on the state.

As the old Roman empire was dying, Augustine’s ***City of God*** offered a system whereby the church provided for the state a means by which the City of God could establish a foundation for the City of Man. This proved to be fateful for religious freedom, as became evident in the later Augustine’s view on coercing heretics against their will to submit to the church.[9] The long history of church/state woes in the wake of this view, from that time through the Spanish Inquisition and beyond, is well documented and well known.

Islamic Theocracies

Some radical forms of Islam have set up theocratic states; contemporary Iran under the Ayatollah Khomeini (b. 1939) is one example. In this form of theocracy the state is dominated by a religious leader (or ruling religious faction); while there is a semblance of civil government, the religious hierarchy is undeniably dominant. The rule of the Taliban in Afghanistan was also a kind of theocracy.

These kinds of theocracy are part of Shiite Muslim belief, which imposes radical ***shari'a*** (Qur'anic law) upon society; Sunni Muslims often support a more detached relationship between religious and civil government. The cruelty, inhumanity, and terrorism generated by extremist Muslim beliefs (see Geisler and Saleeb, ***AI***, appendix 5) were vividly manifest in the attacks on the United States in September 2001.

Reformational State Churches: John Calvin and the Puritans

John Calvin did for Reformed Protestantism what Constantine did for Catholicism: He established a state church (in Geneva, Switzerland), though this establishment, a "rule of God," was not as drawn-out and intense. Calvin did rule with an iron hand, having the heretic Michael Servetus (1511–1553) burned at the stake for his divergent religious beliefs.

The Puritans in the early American Colonies followed Calvin's example. For instance, they persecuted Roger Williams (c. 1603–1683), founder of the American Baptists, and ran him out of Massachusetts into Rhode Island, which became a free state—that is, one without a state religion (which many colonies had).

The Names of the Movement

The church-over-state movement goes by many names, each depicting a different aspect of it. The most important variety in contemporary North America, flowing from the writings of R. J. Rushdoony (1916–2001), is

reconstructionism,[10] so-called because it endeavors to reconstruct society on a Reformed Christian basis. The movement is also dubbed ***Neo-Puritanism***, since it is a new form of Puritanism, and is also known as ***dominion theology***, due to its goal of taking dominion over the world for Christ. In some circles, especially charismatic ones, reconstructionism is labeled ***kingdom-now theology***, because its adherents maintain that they are, literally, setting up the kingdom now.

Governmentally, the name of this view is ***theonomy***, meaning "law of God,"[11] since it holds that governments should be subject to the Old Testament law of God.[12]

A more moderate form of the church-over-state paradigm could be called ***biblionomy***,[13] proponents of which include D. James Kennedy (b. 1930), Jay Grimstead (b. 1934), and David Barton (b. 1954). Many other Christian social-action groups, being influenced by one or more theonomist views, have (wittingly or unwittingly) adopted a biblionomist perspective; in their zeal to counteract the increased secularism of our society, they have backed into a kind of biblionomy by calling for a return to our country's Christian roots. America's Christian roots, however, were most prominently demonstrated in the Puritans, who were theonomists, who allowed no true religious freedom in their Massachusetts Colony, and who persecuted those with different beliefs.

The Roots of the Movement

Theonomists see their roots in the Old Testament but deny that their view entails a theocracy. Their more recent foundations in nationally binding divine law, as briefly discussed above, are in John Calvin (sixteenth century), the Puritans (seventeenth century), and in R. J. Rushdoony (twentieth century), an Armenian-American who penned the standard of the theonomist movement: ***Institutes of Biblical Law***.[14]

The Goals of the Movement

Christian theonomists plan to reconstruct society upon Christian essentials, desiring to live according to God's law as revealed in the Old Testament. Theonomists aim to Christianize both America and the world ("dominion theology"); they want to set up the millennial kingdom on earth (kingdom-now theology), at the end of which they believe Christ will return. Eschatologically, then, theonomists are postmillennialists.[15]

The Leaders of the Movement

Leaders of the theonomist movement have included R. J. Rushdoony, who headed the Chalcedon Foundation; Gary North (b. 1931), author of ***Dominion Covenant***, head of the Institute for Christian Economics and Geneva Ministries; the late Greg Bahnsen (1948–1995), who penned ***Theonomy in Christian Ethics***; David Chilton (1951–1997), author of ***Paradise Restored***; and Gary DeMar (b. 1952), director of the Institute for Christian Government and author of ***God and Government***. Others include Rus Walton (d. 1999), founder of the Plymouth Rock Foundation and author of ***One Nation Under God***; Herb Titus (b. 1937), who wrote ***America's Heritage: Constitutional Liberty***; and, although he disavows being a theonomist, Jay Grimstead, biblionomist director of the Coalition on Revival;[16] David Barton fits into this same category.[17] Many charismatics[18] and others[19] have been significantly influenced by theonomists and biblionomists and/or shown affinities with the overall movement.[20]

Basic Beliefs of Theonomists and Biblionomists

Theonomy emerged out of Reformed theology, which embraces five-point Calvinism.[21] Its founders believe that the Old Testament law[22] applies today, including capital punishment for, among other offenses, fornication, blasphemy, kidnapping, and disobedience (in children), though some followers have backed off these severe punishments. Again, Reformed reconstructionists are postmillennial in their eschatology, believing that Christ's return ***after*** the millennium[23] will be set up by the advance of Christianity in the world. They affirm that Jesus (in Matt. 28:18–20)[24] gave a cultural mandate to Christianize the world.

Biblionomy, the more moderate version of the state-over-church movement, has a wider theological orientation, including Calvinists, Arminians, charismatics, and others. Specifically, biblionomy is the belief that, while all Old Testament punishments may not apply today, nonetheless, God's biblical law (His special revelation in Scripture[25]) is His divinely prescribed mandate for all civil governments to follow. Biblionomy has some popular appeal because it has removed one of theonomy's more repugnant aspects, the insistence that there are over twenty sins for which capital punishment should be administered (see Bahnsen, ***TCE***). Also, eschatologically, biblionomists are not limited to postmillennialism.

The influence of theonomists and biblionomists far outweighs their numbers. While they do not sponsor a major American seminary, they have a widespread impact through their writings by way of organizations like the Coalition on Revival (COR), through conferences (often with charismatics), and by infiltrating non-reconstructionist social activist groups.

Critical Errors of Theonomists and Biblionomists

There are many errors embraced by leaders of the reconstructionist movement; we'll now briefly examine some of the more basic problems. Since they are treated elsewhere, we will here pass over the errors of allegorism, or

spiritualizing away prophecies made to Israel,[26] as well as the postmillennial optimism that we can Christianize the world,[27] and instead focus on fallacies relating to law and government.

Legalism

Fundamental to Reformed theonomists is their error of ***legalism***, the belief that we are sanctified by law-keeping—that adhering to Old Testament law is a means of our sanctification (salvation from sin's power in the present).[28]

First, this error is precisely why Paul wrote his epistle to the Galatians, in which he said:

I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? *After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort [in keeping the law]*? (

3:2–3

)

Second, again, Scripture makes it very clear that we are ***not*** under the Mosaic Law. Only Israel was given the law (Ex. 19:1–8), as the psalmist affirmed (147:19–20; cf. Deut. 4:32–34).

Third, Paul declared that Gentiles "do not have the law [of Moses]"but rather have the natural law "written on their hearts" (Rom. 2:14–15). He added later, "You [believers in Christ] are not under law, but under grace" (6:14).

Fourth, while Jesus did not do away with the law of Moses by ***destroying*** it (Matt. 5:17–18), He did do away with it by ***fulfilling*** it. As Paul proclaimed, "***Christ is the end of the law*** so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes" (Rom. 10:4).

Fifth, the apostle made it clear that Christians are not even under the Ten Commandments given to Moses:

If the ministry that brought death, which was *engraved in letters on stone*, came with glory … will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? … And if what was *fading away* came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts! … Only in Christ is it *taken away*. (

2 Cor. 3:7–8

,

,

Sixth, Paul couldn't be more straightforward: "Now that faith has come, ***we are no longer under the supervision of the law***" (Gal. 3:25). The purpose of the law was not to save or sanctify but to condemn; the gospel of Jesus Christ brings salvation.
Seventh, the writer of Hebrews declared that "when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a change of the law.… The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless" (7:12, 18).
Eighth, the whole purpose of the consultation with the apostles in Acts 15 was to decide whether "it is necessary to circumcise them [Gentile converts to Christianity], and to command them to ***keep the law of Moses***" (v. 5 nkjv).[29] The answer from the apostles was emphatic and terse: "We gave no such commandment" (v. 24 nkjv).
Ninth, and finally, nowhere does the Old Testament condemn non-Jews for not keeping the Mosaic Law. Of course, like any person in another country, non-Jews were bound by the local Jewish laws while living there (cf. Lev. 24:22; Num. 15:15–16), but ***never in all the moral condemnations of pagan countries were they ever judged by God for not keeping the Sabbath, for not being circumcised, or for not offering sacrifices in the Jerusalem temple***.[30]

Reconstructionism

Another serious error of theonomists (and of many biblionomists) is that of theological reconstructionism itself. ***Theological reconstructionism*** is defined here as ***the belief that God has ordained that every government in the world impose the moral law of God, as expressed in the Bible, as the law of the land***. This is not to be confused with the question of whether civil government should encourage morality by legislating (and enforcing its legislation) on the basis of universal moral principles, some of which, for instance, are found in the Ten Commandments.[31] The issue here is whether the Bible teaches theonomy, namely, that every government is obligated to prescribe, as the law of the land, that everyone live by Mosaic Law and enact capital punishment for noncapital crimes (like adultery, homosexuality, kidnapping, blasphemy, idolatry, etc.).

First, God never gave biblical law to the Gentiles as a divine basis for civil law. In fact, as we have seen, God never gave them the law of Moses as the moral standard by which they should live (see Ps. 147:19–20).
Second, theonomy is an unworkable ethical basis in a religiously pluralistic society. The reason for this is simple: There is no universal agreement on whose revelation should be the basis of civil law. Should it be the Bible, the Qur'an, the Analects, the Gita, the Vedas, the Book of Mormon? …
Third, theonomy politicizes the church's mission. It confuses the gospel mandate (Matt. 28:18–20) with the Creation mandate (Gen. 1:28). It confuses Christian government with moral government (1 Tim. 2:1–4). Theologically stated, theonomy confuses present spiritual kingdom (cf. Matt. 13) with future political kingdom (cf. Rev. 20).[32]
Fourth, and finally, theonomy stresses God's special revelation to the neglect of His general revelation (Rom. 1:19–20; 2:12–14), tending to downplay or even deny in practice the value of general revelation by claiming that it's unclear, being obscured by the effects of sin.[33] By contrast, the Word (the special revelation) declares that the general revelation is clearly seen (1:20), is written on the hearts of all unbelievers (2:15), is the grounds for their being without excuse (1:20), and is sufficient for them to eternally perish (2:12).[34]

JEFFERSONIANISM: CHURCH *AND* STATE (THE NATURAL-LAW VIEW)

There are many different attempts to preserve a system in which neither state dominates over church (as in secularism) nor church presides over state (as in theocracy and theonomy [reconstructionism]). While allowing freedom for other religions, some countries in this category have an official but nominal state religion (as in Britain) and others do not (as in Canada). Some systems allow the state (or province) to have an established religion (such as post-Revolution America), while others allow neither a national religion nor state-established religions (such as post-1947 America). The early American system allows for a fruitful Jeffersonianism in contrast with secularism and reconstructionism.

Government Is Based in Natural Law

Jeffersonianism, named for adherent Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826, third president of the United States), attempts to avoid the extremes of both secularism and reconstructionism. Against secularism, Jeffersonianism denies that there is no divinely given moral (natural) law as a basis for government; against reconstructionism, Jeffersonianism denies that any special revelation from God is the divinely prescribed basis for civil government. It also denies that any national church should be the established religion of the land, thus allowing religious freedom of belief for all groups. The following chart summarizes the difference between the three views:

Religion (Church) and Government (State): Three Views

	SECULARISM	JEFFERSONIANISM	RECONSTRUCTIONISM
Nature of State	Secular Gov't	Just Gov't	Religious Gov't
Church/State	Separation	Cooperation	Union
Nature of religious freedom	Freedom from all religions	Freedom for all religions	Freedom for a particular religion
Extent of religious freedom	For none	For all	For a preferred religion
Belief in God	Discouraged	Encouraged	Demanded
Basis of civil law	Human Experience	Natural law (general revelation)	Divine law (special revelation)
Example	Marxist China	Early	Iran

America[35]

Jeffersonianism is a means between the two extremes, secularism (which has no firm moral basis for government) and reconstructionism (which imposes a religious basis for government that chooses one religion and alienates all others). By basing civil government in "Nature's Law," which comes from "Nature's God,"[36] American morality was established without establishing any religion, except a broadly theistic (or deistic) belief in the Creator God, who gave these "unalienable rights," a belief that, according to God, is part of the general (or natural) revelation to all humankind (Rom. 1:19–20). African scholar John Mbiti (b. 1931), for one, has demonstrated that even preliterate ("pagan") people naturally have this belief in a High God.[37] Thus, by basing government in natural, universal, moral law, Jeffersonianism avoids antinomianism (secularism) on the one hand and state-mandated religion (reconstructionism) on the other. The following are some of Jeffersonianism's chief elements.

There Is a Natural Revelation Common to All Human Beings

God has two revelations; one in His world (general) and the other in His Word (special).[38] Divine law is a special revelation to believers; natural law is a general revelation to all persons. Natural law is described as that which human beings "do by nature," the law written on the hearts of all people (Rom. 2:14); those who disobey it go "contrary to nature" (11:24).

Belief in natural law did not begin with Christians: ***Natural law is also found in ancient Hindi, Chinese, Greek, and Roman writings that predate the time of Christ***. Even before Socrates (c. 470–399 b.c.), the Greek philosopher Heraclitus (c. 504/501–c. 444/441) believed in an unchanging ***Logos*** (Reason, Truth) behind the changing flux of human experience (***F***, 197–200, in Kirk and Raven, ***PP***, 188–89). Plato (427–347) held to moral absolutes (see ***R***, Books IV-VI), and

the stoics developed natural-law theories well before the first century.[39]
The concept of natural law likewise has a venerable history among great Christian thinkers. As did others before him, Augustine (354–430) held that God gave the Gentiles "the law of nature" (***OSL***, 48 in Schaff, ***NPNF***, Vol. 5), to which he referred as "the system of nature" (***OGM***, 203, 407, in ibid., Vol. 3); this law is "implanted by nature" in all people (op. cit.). Natural law is reflected in God's image within humanity; to be sure, the image has been marred by sin, but Augustine insisted that God's image "is not wholly blotted out" in unbelievers (in ibid., 5.103).[40] Thus he maintained that God was just in punishing unbelievers for not living in accordance with the natural law written on their hearts (***RFM***, 19.1 in ibid., 4.239).
Following Augustine's view, Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) declared that "natural law is nothing else than the rational creature's participation in eternal law" (***ST***, 91.2 in Pegis, ***BWSTA***, 750); law is "an ordinance of reason made for the common good" (in ibid., 747); it is the rule and measure of acts" (in ibid., 743). Eternal law is the divine reason by which God governs the universe (in ibid., 748), and natural law is the human participation in it. Natural law is the first principle governing human action, just as the laws of logic are the first principles governing human thought.[41]
Aquinas distinguished natural law, common to all people, from divine law, imposed only on believers. Natural law is directed toward man's temporal good; divine law is aimed toward his eternal good (in ibid., 753). Divine law is for the church; natural law is for all of society. The basis for human law is natural law.
The divine ingraining of natural law within all people was also upheld by John Calvin (1509–1564):

> That there exists in the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, some sense of Deity, we hold to be beyond dispute.... There is no nation so barbarous, no race so brutish, as not to be imbued with the conviction that there is a God. (*ICR*, 1.3.1)

This "sense of Deity is so naturally engraven on the human heart … that the very reprobate are forced to acknowledge it" (ibid., 1.4.4).

This innate knowledge of God includes a knowledge of His righteous law (see

Kantzer, ***JCTKGWG***, 1981). Calvin held that since "the Gentiles have the righteousness of the law naturally engraved on their minds, [so] we certainly cannot say that they are altogether blind as to the rule of life" (op. cit., 2.2.22). He called this moral awareness "natural law" (general revelation), which is "sufficient for their righteous condemnation" (ibid.) but not for their salvation.[42] By means of this natural law "the judgment of conscience" is able to distinguish between "the just and the unjust."[43] God's righteous nature "is engraved in characters so bright, so distinct, and so illustrious, that none, however dull and illiterate, can plead ignorance as their excuse" (ibid., 1.5.1).

The Natural Law Is Clear

Once again, Paul declared that natural law is "clearly seen" and "written on their hearts" (Rom. 1:20; 2:15). According to Calvin, the natural law is also specific:

> [It includes a sense of justice] implanted by nature in the hearts of men. [There] is imprinted on their hearts a discrimination and judgment, by which they distinguish between justice and injustice, honesty and dishonesty. [It is what makes them] ashamed of adultery and theft....
>
> [The natural law even governs] good faith in commercial transactions and contracts. [Even the heathen] prove their knowledge ... that adultery, theft, and murder are evils, and honesty is to be esteemed.... [Man's] natural knowledge of the law [is] that which states that one action is good and worthy of being followed, while another is to be shunned with horror. (*EPAR*, 48–49)

The Natural Law Is the Basis for Government

Richard Hooker (1553–1600) defended the natural-law view in England (see ***LEP***), where it was picked up by John Locke (1632–1704), who argued that good civil government is based in natural law.

> The law of Nature [teaches us that,] being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty or possessions; for men [are] all the

workmanship of one omnipotent and infinitely wise Maker. (*AE*, 2.6)

Jefferson expressed this same view in The Declaration of Independence:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

Jefferson believed these unalienable rights are rooted in the "Laws of Nature" that derive from "Nature's God." On the Jefferson Memorial in Washington, D.C., are inscribed these words he wrote: "God who gave us life gave us liberty. Can the liberties of a nation be secure when we have removed a conviction that these liberties are the gift of God?" Here again it is clear that Jefferson's America was based on the concept of God-given rights grounded in God-given moral rules (natural law). For Jefferson, natural law is not a humanly descriptive "is" but a divinely prescriptive "ought."

Arguments for Natural Law

Many have denied the existence of natural law, and others have simply tried to diminish its value. Nevertheless, there are excellent reasons for holding to the natural law as actual and binding.

The Argument From Divine Justice

It is evident from Paul's argument in Romans 1–2 that God's justice in condemning the unbelieving Gentiles was based on His having clearly revealed Himself through nature to all people (1:19) and having His law written on their hearts (2:15). It certainly would be contradictory to divine justice[44] to condemn people to eternal separation from God for not living according to a standard they

never had and never knew.[45] The existence of natural law (general revelation), therefore, is absolutely indispensable to the belief in divine justice.

The Argument From Social Need

Furthermore, society cannot function without some kind of common moral code that binds people together in a cultural unit. ***Every*** society has a moral cohesiveness; if it did not, then it would not be a society, and it would self-destruct. Even so, ***not*** every society accepts a single divine law (such as the Bible or the Qur'an); accordingly, there is an evident need for some kind of naturally available moral code to bind people together.

All great cultures, past and present, manifest a common moral law. C.S. Lewis collected quotations from these various societies and correlated them under various headings;[46] vastly different and separate cultures not only ***need*** such a moral cohesiveness but also have ***expressed*** it in their writings. This is ample testimony to the universal social need for natural moral principles by which conduct can be governed.

To argue that there is no adequate moral basis for society apart from (1) special revelation[47] or (2) human experience[48] runs contrary to the moral writings of the world's renowned cultures and is tantamount to saying these civilizations have not expressed discernable moral character. This is not only blatantly false, it is also contrary to the biblical teaching on common grace and general revelation.[49]

The Argument From International Law

Hugo Grotius (1583–1645) saw the obvious necessity of having a natural-law foundation for international affairs. Grotius believed this was important because he viewed it as a rational "method for arriving at a body of propositions underlying political arrangements and the provision of the positive [civil] laws" (in Sabine, ***HPT***, 425); his definition of law was "what[ever] God makes known

as his will" (***DIBP***, Vol. 2 in ***TT***, 8).[50]

Grotius was so convinced natural law stood on its own two feet that he declared, "What we have been saying regarding the priority of natural law would have a degree of validity even if we should concede … that there is no God, or that the affairs of men are of no concern to Him" (ibid., 13). The point is that, even apart from belief in God, natural law is necessary for ruling human societies. For his pioneering work in this area, Grotius earned the title "Father of International Law."

As human technology developed, the need for international affairs to have a natural-law foundation became even more apparent. The Nuremberg war-crimes trials after the Second World War are a classic case in point. Adolf Hitler engaged in horrifically cruel, barbarous, and inhumane actions by masterminding the murder of six million Jews and another six million from "undesired people groups"; ***emerging from the holocaust was collective recognition of a moral standard that transcends individual cultures and countries***. If Hitler's actions are judged from within the Nazi state, they are not immoral crimes but moral causes. Only if there is some overarching natural law —given to all cultures and binding upon all people—can we justify calling the Nazis cruel, barbarous, and inhumane.

Further, efforts to redress the Hitler horrors led to the human rights movement, related to which the United Nations drafted a "Universal Declaration of Human Rights." A. H. Robertson, spokesman for the European Convention on Human Rights, wrote:

> The perversion of democracy and the maintenance of the rule of law necessitated foundations … on which to base the defense of human personality against all tyrannies and against all forms of totalitarianism. Those foundations were effective protection of the rights of man and fundamental freedoms. (cited in Montgomery, *LAL*, 22)

The very concept of fundamental human rights transcending all states demands a moral law that is above and beyond all particular governments and religions; thus, the desire for a transnational moral code is a will-o'-the-wisp unless there is a natural law that transcends all governments.

The Argument From Common Moral Codes

C.S. Lewis demonstrated in his classic on natural law, ***The Abolition of Man***, that there are universal moral laws. If there were not, we would not be able to engage in moral disputes, to make moral judgments, or to discern the moral progress (or regress) of society—which we do. Nor would there be a common core of widely held moral codes, such as there are (see ***AM***, appendix), like commands to honor parents and commands not to steal, lie, and murder.

> The moment you say that one set of moral ideas can be better than another, you are, in fact, measuring them both by a standard, saying that one of them conforms to that standard more nearly than the other. But the standard that measures two things is something different from either. (*MC*, 25)

Again,

> [As an atheist] my argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. (ibid., 45)

Hence,

> It seems then we are forced to believe in a real Right and Wrong. First, human beings all over the earth have this curious idea that they ought to behave in a certain way. Second, they do not in fact behave in that way. The truth is, we believe in decency so much that we cannot bear to face the fact that we are breaking it, and consequently we try to shift the responsibility. (ibid., 21)

The Argument From Pluralistic Culture

The importance of a natural-law ethic is that it can be taken into the political world without showing favor to one religious group over another. Further, without an objective ethical basis for our actions there is no realistic alternative to antinomianism; government cannot function as needed without an objective ethical standard common to all who are part of the body politic. Thus, natural law is essential to viable government in our religiously pluralistic world.

ANSWERING OBJECTIONS TO THE NATURAL-LAW VIEW (JEFFERSONIANISM)

Objections from both extremes, secularism and reconstructionism, have been leveled against the natural-law view of government, some of which have been addressed in the process of the above discussion.

Objection One: That Natural Law Implies a Lawgiver (God), Which Involves Religion

Secularists argue that it is a violation of the First Amendment to impose a moral law based on a Moral Lawgiver (God).
In response, ***first***, foundational natural law is the view of the Declaration of Independence, our country's founding document. It is a twisted logic that pronounces our National Birth Certificate unconstitutional.
Second, establishing a national ***morality*** is not contrary to the First Amendment; establishing a national ***religion*** is.
Third, implicitly recognizing a Moral Lawgiver behind the moral law is neither establishing religion in general nor any religion in particular—that can only be done by mandating worship of God. Religion has to do with our duty to God; morality is concerned with our moral responsibility to fellow human beings. Government can and should make laws regarding the latter but not with respect to the former.

Objection Two: That There Is No Moral Law Agreed Upon by All

The secularist objection that there is no commonly acknowledged morality fails for many reasons.
First, the Bible says that there is, and that all persons are "without excuse" (Rom. 1:20) and will "perish" for not obeying it (2:12).
Second, again, that the moral creeds among most cultures are essentially the

same—and that there is a universal moral law—is illustrated in C.S. Lewis's ***Abolition of Man***. Lewis provided a noteworthy service in cataloging many of these expressions; interestingly, they look strikingly similar to the second tablet of the Ten Commandments.

Third, the universal moral law is written on the hearts of human beings (v. 15) and can be detected, not so much by our actions (which fall short of our own standards), but by our ***reactions*** when someone else's actions don't measure up to the moral law. Even those who say it's okay to lie, cheat, steal, and murder nevertheless show, by their reactions when they are affected, that they know these actions are wrong.

Objection Three: That Morality Cannot be Legislated

Secularists protest that to affirm moral laws behind government is to claim that morals can be legislated. However, everyone innately knows that this objection is wrong and misguided.

First, all laws legislate morality; ***every*** law pronounces one behavior right and another wrong. Morality deals with right and wrong; the question isn't ***whether*** morality is legislated, but, rather, ***which*** morality is the basis for legislation? The answer is ***the common morality***, the one engraved upon everyone's nature.

Second, even secularist objectors don't want to do away with laws that say child abuse, spousal battery, rape, and murder are wrong. To legislate against any of these is to legislate morality.

Objection Four: That Natural Revelation Is Unclear

Theonomists (reconstructionists) often argue that sin impairs man's ability to understand natural revelation. However, the defect is not in the revelation itself, but in man's refusal to accept it; according to Romans 1:19, natural revelation "is plain … because God has made it plain." The problem with unbelievers is not that they do not apprehend the truth, but that "the man without the Spirit [of God] does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. 2:14).

It is not that they do not ***perceive*** it, but that they do not ***receive*** it (Howe, ***CR***, 72); in fact, they suppress it (Rom. 1:18). God has clearly revealed Himself in nature and in the conscience, so unbelievers ***see*** the truth of natural revelation but also ***shun*** the truth it reveals to them (ibid.).[51] Rejecting the revealed truth is not unique to unbelievers who have God's general revelation; believers likewise do not always live according to the truth of God's special revelation.[52]
To claim that general revelation is inadequate because unbelievers have perverted it is to reject special revelation for the same reason. Peter, for example, tells us that "people distort [Paul's writings], as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction" (2 Peter 3:16). There is nothing God has revealed in Scripture that has not been subjected to the same kind of mangling as the moral truths He has revealed to everyone in His natural law. There is no defect with either of God's revelations—the problem isn't God's disclosure, but man's distortion of it.
The existence of hundreds of religious sects, all claiming that the Bible contains revelation from God, is ample testimony to the fact that even the supernatural revelation in Scripture is not immune to misuse. In fact, the misapplication of the natural law among the various human cultures is no greater than the misinterpretation of supernatural revelation among the various cults. Careful examination of both areas indicates that in spite of the clarity of both revelations, depraved human beings have found a way to deflect, divert, or demean God's commands. Biblical teaching has no edge on natural revelation in the matter of immunity from distortion.

Objection Five: That the Bible Is a Clearer Revelation Than Natural Law

Theonomists argue for the superiority of God's special revelation as a reason for prescribing the Bible as a basis of civil government.
In response, it should be noted that the Bible is certainly a more detailed and specific revelation ***and*** the only infallible written revelation we have.[53]
However, ***first***, this is not to say that God's (general) revelation in the natural law is not clear and sufficient to accomplish its purpose; it is (Rom. 1:19; 2:12), as

has already been shown.
Second, unlike the natural law, the Bible is not universally available to all human beings, and many deny that it is God's Word. The heart-written natural law is undeniable; people's codes and reactions reveal that they truly believe it.
Third, the "Bible" is a religious book and mandates ***more*** than a moral code. Legislating it creates vulnerability to the charge that religion itself is being established.
Fourth, the question can rightly be asked by adherents to other religions: which "Bible" should be mandated?[54] The Jewish Bible? The Christian Bible? The Muslim Bible? In a pluralistic society no single religious book will be accepted by everyone as a foundation for all people.
Fifth, and finally, even if the Christian Bible were chosen, which overall interpretation of it would be accepted? Theonomists hold that it should be the Reformed/Calvinist view, but here there is much less common ground than general revelation. Even theonomists engage in heated debates over whether certain Old Testament laws, such as those against wearing garments with mixed fiber, still apply today.[55] (Think of what applying this law would do for Christians in the clothing industry!)

CHURCH AND STATE: SUMMING UP THE ISSUES

Now that the three main church/state perspectives have been explained and discussed, we can draw some conclusions, many of which are reflected in the contrasts revealed on the above chart.[56] In short, Jeffersonianism avoids the extremes of secularism and reconstructionism on all the issues.
First, on the nature of the state, the natural-law view avoids both a purely secular government and a religiously dominated government in favor of a morally just government.
Second, with regard to the relation of church and state, the early American position opts for cooperation between church and state, not a radical separation between or union of the two.
Third, while secularism insists on freedom from all religion and

reconstructionism on freedom for a particular religion, Jeffersonianism maintains freedom for all religions.

Fourth, with respect to belief in God, the natural-law view again occupies important middle ground: rather than requiring it (as theonomy does) or discouraging it (as secularism does), Jeffersonianism encourages it without demanding it.

Fifth, and finally, instead of basing civil law in changing human experience (secularism) or in divine law (reconstructionism), state government is to be grounded in the natural law common to all human beings.

The Relationship Between Mosaic Law and Natural Law

While there isn't identity[57] between the Mosaic Law and the natural law, there is similarity in their moral obligations. This is to be expected, since both general and special revelation come from the same Moral Lawgiver, whose moral nature does not change.[58] However, since the Mosaic Law had national, civil, ceremonial, and theocratic dimensions not found in other nations, there are also significant dissimilarities between the two. For example, nine of the Ten Commandments are repeated in the New Testament; there is no command to observe the Sabbath (Saturday) as a day of rest. Likewise, different penalties are now attached to disobeying certain statutes; for example, in the Old Testament era persons were stoned for adultery, but in the New Testament age they are excommunicated from the church, with restoration granted upon repentance (1 Cor. 5:5; cf. 2 Cor. 2:5–8). While the basic moral principles in Old Testament (Mosaic) law and New Testament (church) law are the same,[59] context and consequences differ significantly.

This helps to explain the apparent equivocation by Christians on support for publicly displaying and promoting the Ten Commandments. The ***basic moral principles*** embedded in them apply not only to the New Testament church but to society as well. Certainly, the second table of the law (i.e., the commands that address our duty to other humans)[60] is found also in the natural law, which is

the basis for good civil government. The ***specific Christian responsibilities*** in the Commandments, though, applied pointedly to Israel and not to society—government should not be legislating duty to God. In this area, the best that civil government can do is encourage freedom of expression without government sponsorship.

This seems to be precisely the original intent of the First Amendment, for the Free Exercise Clause[61] in effect encouraged religion, and the Establishment Clause[62] erected a protective barrier between ***federal*** (national) government and ***states'*** rights to have their own religion. Of course, since the aforementioned ***Everson v. Board of Education*** (1947), the states no longer have this right; that Supreme Court decision helped move the U.S. closer to a secularist separation of church and state (with state being preeminent) rather than furthering the original cooperation between them. Nevertheless, our country's founders' words and actions support this interpretation of their original view on church/state relations; Jefferson himself, and other presidents, helped effect laws that paid missionaries to do evangelistic work among Native Americans,[63] and the Northwest Ordinance (1787) encouraged religion in schools (see Article III). Indeed, both prayer and Bible reading were common in American schools from the very beginning (in the 1640s) until the early 1960s, when the Supreme Court ruled them unconstitutional.

The Relationship Between Biblical Law and Natural Law

The Bible (special revelation) does not contradict the natural law (general revelation) but rather complements and supplements it.[64] After all, as we have seen, the same God whose moral nature is reflected to all people in the natural law (through His world) has expressed His moral character in commands to believers in the Bible (through His Word).

God's basic moral principles do not change any more than His nature does—both are eternal. However, this is ***not*** to say that believers today are bound to live according to Old Testament law: Paul tells us clearly that "you are not under law,

but under grace" (Rom. 6:14). Before Jesus came to fulfill the law,[65] having the law (of Moses) was the Jews' advantage over the Gentiles (3:1–2; 2:14); Paul stressed that what "was engraved in letters on stone" has faded away (2 Cor. 3:7);[66] Christ did this "by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations" (Eph. 2:15); now that He has come, "we are no longer under the supervision of the law" (Gal. 3:25).

Hebrews says clearly that "the law was given to the people" of Israel (7:11), that there was "a change of the law" (v. 12) by which "the former regulation is set aside" (v. 18). As noted before, the Old Testament never condemned Gentiles for not keeping the law of Moses (cf. Ps. 147:19–20); God measured them by the truths within the general revelation.[67]

That the law of Moses was given only to Israel is not to say that Christians have no law: We have the natural law, we have the divine law of the New Testament, and we also have much to learn from what God revealed to Israel (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11). Nevertheless, that moral principles embodied in the Old Testament[68] are restated in the New Testament does not mean we are under the Mosaic Law any more than we are under the statutes of Illinois when we violate a traffic law in Texas (see Aldrich, ***HFG***, chapter 7). Just as each state codifies legislation differently—though the laws are ***based*** on the same ultimate principles—so the revealed moral code for the church is not the same as that for Israel.

Consider the moral duty to honor parents. When this principle is stated for Israel in the Old Testament, it is given with the promise that they will live long in the land the Lord would give them (the Promised Land—Ex. 20:12). However, when in the New Testament Paul directs believers to honor parents, the attached promise has nothing to say about living long in the land the Lord would give Israel but simply promises "long life on the earth" (Eph. 6:3).[69]

While the Christian is not under the law of Moses, he is under the "law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). For instance, the Christian businessman is bound not only by the natural law, which he shares with unbelievers, but also by a divine law that he does not have in common with them. This special (biblical) revelation places some greater obligations on the believer; these deserve careful attention that the limits of this present topic do not allow, but we will note two observations.

First, the Christian's greater duties are based upon the moral principles that are the same in both Old and New Testaments insofar as they reflect God's unchanging character. Jesus Christ did not come to destroy the law but to fulfill it (Matt. 5:17–18), and the "new commandment" He gave that we love one another (1 John 2:8 nkjv) was actually the "old commandment" they had "from the beginning" (v. 7 nkjv). Christ set this very example, saying (and then doing), "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13; cf. v. 15). Therefore, the natural law is only the believer's minimal duty; New Testament divine law is his maximal duty. Natural law demands that we act justly; divine law commands that we act sacrificially as well.
Second, the Christian's greater responsibility extends to his dealings with others. For example, while natural law forbids that we rob the poor, divine law adds that we must help the poor (Mark 10:21). It is not enough that we do not exploit the economically oppressed; we must also try to deliver them.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR THE RELATIONSHIP OF CHURCH AND STATE

There is ample support among the Church Fathers for distinguishing between church and state. Further, the idea that the church is a kind of theocracy[70] or earthly kingdom did not come into practice until after Emperor Constantine (c. 274–337) began to join the dying Roman empire to the spiritual force of the church.

Early Church Fathers

Before the Middle Ages, it was not uncommon to find support of Christian respect for the state in distinction from Christian duties to the church. The church has not replaced the state, and Christians, while obedient to the state, would not allow the state to replace the church.

Mathetes (c. 130)

Every foreign land is to them [believers] as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers. They marry, as do all [others]; they beget children; but they do not destroy their offspring. They have a common table, but not a common bed. They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time surpass the laws by their lives. (*ED*, 5)

Polycarp (fl. second century)

"We are taught to give all due honor (which entails no injury upon ourselves) to the powers and authorities … ordained of God" (***MP***, 10).

Theophilus (c. 130–190)

I will rather honor the king [than your gods], not, indeed, worshipping him, but praying for him. But God, the living and true God, I worship, knowing that the king is made by Him.... Accordingly, honor the king, be subject to him, and pray for him with loyal mind; for if you do this, you do the will of God. (*TA*, 1.11)

Melito of Sardis (fl. second century)

My opinion is this: that in "this" way a kingdom may be governed in peace—when the sovereign [earthly ruler] is acquainted with the God of truth, and is held by fear of Him from doing wrong to those who are his subjects, and judges everything with equity, as one who knows that he himself also will be judged before God; while, at the same time, those who are under his rule are withheld by the fear of God from doing wrong to their sovereign, and are restrained by the same fear from doing wrong to one another. By this knowledge of God and fear of Him all evil may be removed from the realm. For, if the sovereign abstain from doing wrong to those who are under his rule, and they abstain from doing wrong to him and to each other, it is evident that the whole country will dwell in peace. (in *RSTC*, 1)

Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)

As therefore the devil lied at the beginning, so did he also in the end, when he said [to Jesus], “All these are delivered unto me, and to whomsoever I will I give them” [Matt. 4]. For it is not he who has appointed the kingdoms of this world, but God; for “the heart of the king is in the hand of God.” And the Word also says by Solomon, “By me kings do reign, and princes administer justice. By me chiefs are raised up, and by me kings rule the earth.” Paul the apostle also says upon this same subject: “Be ye subject to all the higher powers; for there is no power but of God: now those which are have been ordained of God.” And again, in reference to them [earthly rulers] he says, “For he beareth not the sword in vain; for he is the minister of God, the avenger for wrath to him who does evil.”

Now, that he spake these words, not in regard to angelical powers, nor of invisible rulers … but of those of actual human authorities, [he shows when] he says, “For this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God’s ministers, doing service for this very thing.” This also the Lord confirmed, when He did not do what He was tempted to by the devil; but He gave directions that tribute should be paid to the tax-gatherers for Himself and Peter; because “they are the ministers of God, serving for this very thing” (*AH*, 5.24).

Tertullian (c. 155–c. 225)

Examine, then, and see if He be not the dispenser of kingdoms, who is Lord at once of the world which is ruled, and of man himself who rules; if He has not ordained the changes of dynasties, with their appointed seasons, who was before all time, and made the world a body of times; if the rise and the fall of states are not the work of Him, under whose sovereignty the human race once existed without states at all. (*A*, 1.26)

Constitutions of the Holy Apostles (c. fourth century)

Be ye subject to all royal power and dominion in things which are pleasing to God, as to the ministers of God, and the punishers of the ungodly. Render all the fear that is due to them, all offerings, all customs, all honor, gifts, and taxes. For this is God’s command, that you owe nothing to any one but the pledge of love, which God has commanded by Christ. (4.13)

Medieval Fathers

Despite the overall ***union*** between church and state in the later Roman empire, many medieval theologians recognized the basic ***distinction*** between church and state and the respective responsibilities of Christians to each.

Augustine

In this world, therefore, the dominion of good men is profitable, not so much for themselves as for human affairs. But the dominion of bad men is hurtful chiefly to themselves who rule, for they destroy their own souls by greater license in wickedness; while those who are put under them in service are not hurt except by their own iniquity. For to the just all the evils imposed on them by unjust rulers are not the punishment of crime, but the test of virtue. (*CG*, 4.3)

Thomas Aquinas

The common good of the state cannot flourish unless the citizens be virtuous, at least those whose business it is to govern. But it is enough for the good of the community that the other citizens be so far virtuous that they obey the commands of their rulers. (*ST*, 2a.92.1.3)

He who is placed over a community is empowered to dispense in a human law that rests upon his authority, so that, when the law fails in its application to persons or circumstances, he may allow the precept of the law not to be observed. (ibid., 2a.97.4)

Concerning the right ordering of rulers in a state or nation … all should take some share in the government: for this form of constitution ensures peace among the people, commends itself to all, and is most enduring.… This is the best form of polity, being partly kingdom, since there is one at the head of all; partly aristocracy, in so far as a number of persons are set in authority; partly democracy, i.e., government by the people, in so far as the rulers can be chosen from the people, and the people have the right to choose their rulers.

Such was the form of government established by the Divine Law. For Moses and his successors governed the people in such a way that each of them was ruler over all; so that there was a kind of kingdom. Moreover, seventy-two men were chosen, who were elders in virtue (

Deut. 1:15

) … so that there was an element of aristocracy. But it was a democratical government in so far as the rulers were chosen from all the people (

Ex. 18:21
) ... and, again, in so far as they were chosen by the people (
Deut. 1:13
).... Consequently it is evident that the ordering of the rulers was well provided for by the Law. (ibid., 2a.105.1)

Reformation Teachers

John Calvin

Unfortunately, some Reformers were not averse to using the state to establish the church. John Calvin set up a theocracy (or theonomy) of his own in Geneva, Switzerland, which, as mentioned earlier, even used civil government to execute a heretic (Servetus) by burning him alive.
Calvin wrote:

This civil government is designed, as long as we live in this world, to cherish and support the external worship of God, to preserve the pure doctrine of religion, to defend the constitution of the Church, to regulate our lives in a manner requisite for the society of men, to form our manners to civil justice, to promote concord with each other, and to establish general peace and tranquility. (*CICR*, 203)

The Dordrecht Confession of Faith

Other Reformers, antecedent to modern Baptist and Independent churches, were more conscious of any unholy alliance with government. In fact, they often found themselves being politically persecuted for their faith, sometimes under the heavy influence of other Protestant groups. The emphasized words show their reservations about unlimited submission to civil government:

We believe and confess that God has ordained power and authority, and set them to punish the evil, and protect the good, to govern the world, and maintain countries and cities, with their subjects, in good order and regulation; and that we, therefore, may not despise, revile, or resist the same, but must acknowledge and honor them as the ministers of God, and be subject and obedient unto them, yea, ready for all good works, *especially in that which is not contrary to the law, will, and commandment of God*; also faithfully pay custom, tribute, and taxes, and to render unto them their dues, even also as the Son of God taught and practiced, and commanded His disciples to do; that

we, moreover, must constantly and earnestly pray to the Lord for them and their welfare, and for the prosperity of the country, that we may dwell under its protection, earn our livelihood, and lead a quiet, peaceable life, with all godliness and honesty; and, furthermore, that the Lord would recompense unto them, here, and afterwards in eternity, all benefits, liberty, and favor which we enjoy here under their praiseworthy administration. (XII)

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PART TWO

LAST THINGS

(ESCHATOLOGY)

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE INTERMEDIATE STATE AND THE RESURRECTION

Before we address the resurrection of humankind, we must consider the state between death and resurrection, which has become a theological battleground. On the one pole is a view called extreme preterism,[1] which claims there is no such state and that resurrection occurs immediately at death. On the other end of the spectrum are proponents of "soul sleep," who claim the dead are not conscious between death and resurrection. In this chapter we will examine—biblically, theologically, and historically—the traditional view[2] of a conscious soul, temporarily separated from its body, awaiting its reunion at the resurrection when Christ returns.[3]

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR THE SOUL'S CONSCIOUS SURVIVAL IN THE INTERMEDIATE STATE

Since death is the entry to life after death, we must first investigate what the Bible teaches about the nature of death. This, of course, depends on the nature of the soul/body relationship, which has already been treated; we demonstrated earlier that the soul is distinct and separable from the body.[4]

The Nature of Death

The Bible describes death as the moment the soul leaves the body. For instance, Genesis 35:18 (kjv) says of Rachel that "her soul was in departing, (for she died)." Likewise, James teaches, "The body without the spirit is dead" (2:26). Since soul is the principle of life that animates a body,[5] it follows that when the soul leaves the body, the body is dead.

The State Between Death and Resurrection

Numerous biblical passages teach that the soul survives death in a disembodied state. Among these are the following.

Genesis 25:8 kjv

The Lord told Abram[6] that he would "be ***gathered to his people.***"[7] He would be buried in a specified cave—"old … and full of years." The italicized phrase means more than merely "go to the grave":

(1) The body returns to dust—the ***soul*** is "gathered to" a person's loved ones.[8]
(2) God said he was going to a place of "peace."
(3) Jesus called where he was going "Abraham's bosom" (Luke 16:22 nkjv), a

place of conscious bliss.

(4) "Gathered to" implies a get-together of spirits, not merely a disintegration of the body (as would be the case with solely "going to the grave").

(5) This also happened at Jacob's moment of death; Jacob was still in his bed at that time, so the words of Genesis 49:33 could not refer to the burial of his body: "When Jacob had finished giving instructions to his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed, breathed his last and was gathered to his people."[9]

Genesis 35:18

"It came to pass, as ***her soul was in departing, (for she died)*** that she [Rachel] called his name Benoni: but his father called him Benjamin" (kjv). The implication is that her soul was leaving for somewhere else; otherwise, the narrative would have said that her soul was dying or being destroyed.

Again, the act of the soul leaving the body is called ***death***. This moment of ***actual*** death is to be distinguished from ***legal*** (or ***medical***) death, which is determined by the measure of organic function. A person may or may not be actually dead in the absence of observable measurements.

So-called "near-death experiences" (NDE's)—where the soul allegedly leaves the body, has an apparent encounter with the other world, and then returns to its body here—are not real-death experiences. When the soul actually does leave the body, a person is dead, and if his soul returns, he is resurrected. Many people who claim such experiences have encountered figures and teachings contrary to Scripture, and God would not (indeed, cannot[10]) perform a miracle (e.g., resurrection) that would confirm anything contrary to His Word. Hence, we conclude that such experiences are either purely psychological or demonic.[11]

Job 19:25–26

Job said, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that ***in my flesh I shall see God***" (nkjv). While this text refers to bodily (physical) resurrection, it also

encompasses immortality after death. There is no hint of the soul's nonexistence or unconsciousness between death and resurrection, only assurance that Job will live eternally because of his Redeemer.

Psalm 16:10–11

"You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the path of life; ***you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand***." Here David speaks of conscious joy in God's presence after death; however, Christ's resurrection, which he envisions ("Holy One," cf. Acts 2:26–27), did not take place for another millennium. Indeed, the final resurrection is described elsewhere as occurring in the last days (John 11:24; cf. Dan. 12:2). Accordingly, the soul must be in conscious bliss ***before*** being reunited with the body for it to have "eternal" bliss in His presence after death.

Ecclesiastes 3:21

Solomon wrote, "Who knows if the spirit of man rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?" The implication is that while the spirit of a beast perishes with its body, nonetheless, the human spirit survives death (see Eccl. 12:5–7, next).[12]

Ecclesiastes 12:5–7

"***Man goes to his eternal home*** and mourners go about the streets. Remember him—before … the dust returns to the ground it came from, and ***the spirit returns to God who gave it***."[13] Here again, the spirit exists after death in God's presence and lives on with Him forever; only the body returns to the ground from which it came (Gen. 2:7; cf. Ps. 104:29).

Matthew 17:3

"Moses and Elijah ***appeared*** to them [Peter, James, and John], ***talking*** with Him [Jesus]" (nkjv). The scene here is the Mount of Transfiguration, where Moses and Elijah, whose bodies had been dead for centuries, appeared and were speaking; they were in spiritual, disembodied form ***and*** conscious.

Matthew 22:31–32

"About the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you? 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? ***He is not the God of the dead but of the living***." Since Abraham was not yet resurrected but was said to be "living," Jesus must mean that his soul is alive between death and resurrection.

Luke 16:22–24

"The beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. ***And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom***" (nkjv). This passage depicts not only the conscious bliss of saved, disembodied souls but also the conscious woe of the unsaved.[14] Note that real names (like ***Lazarus***) are never used in parables, and parables are usually introduced as such by name (e.g., cf. Matt. 13:3).

Luke 23:43

"Jesus said to him [the repentant thief], " 'Assuredly, I say to you, ***today you will be with Me in Paradise***' " (nkjv). The man's body was in the grave later that same day, but his soul was with Christ in paradise, which Paul described (in 2 Cor. 12:1–4) as a place of astonishing, inexpressible bliss—the "third heaven," in the very presence of God.

There is no justification for the Watchtower's (Jehovah's Witnesses') mistranslation of this verse to read, "I tell you today, you will be with me in Paradise [after the resurrection]."[15] Virtually all standard translations reject this

rendering, and for good reasons:

(1) It makes better sense that the promise of Jesus was fulfilled that same day, rather than in the distant future.
(2) "Today" (Gk: ***sémeron***) is used eleven times in Luke and nine times in Acts, signifying the fulfillment of God's plan ***in the present***.[16]
(3) Same-day fulfillment fits with another saying of Jesus from the cross —"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit"—which implies conscious bliss with the Father.
(4) Same-day fulfillment is consistent with Jesus' reference to an intermediate state immediately after death in Luke 16:22–24.

Luke 23:46

"Jesus called out with a loud voice, '***Father, into your hands I commit my spirit***.' When he had said this, he breathed his last." Again, Jesus' words not only imply that He was conscious between death and resurrection, but also that He would be with the Father in heaven (cf. 24:44; 2 Cor. 12:2, 4).

John 19:30

"Jesus said, 'It is finished.' With that, he bowed his head and ***gave up his spirit.***" Here again, Jesus surrendered His spirit to the Father, implying that He would consciously be with Him. This assertion is also supported by His saying that He would be with the Father when He died (cf. 14:12).

Acts 7:56, 59

Stephen said, " 'I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.' … And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, 'Lord Jesus, ***receive my spirit***' " (nkjv). This shows that the ***spirit*** (1) is separate from the body, (2) survives death, and (3) will be with the Lord. Observe that, ***at the moment of Stephen's death***, the Lord was standing in

heaven to welcome his spirit.

1 Corinthians 5:5

"Deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his ***spirit may be saved*** in the day of the Lord Jesus" (nkjv). Here, in distinction from the flesh, Paul speaks of the human spirit, which survives death and can be "saved," teaching again that humans can survive in a disembodied state.

2 Corinthians 5:1–3, 8

We know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked.... We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be *absent from the body and to be present with the Lord*. (
nkjv
)

Despite questions about whether the "habitation" from heaven (the heavenly body) is a reference to an interim body or to the resurrection body,[17] at least three facts are evident:

(1) There is something spiritual (immaterial) that survives death.[18]
(2) For believers, this spiritual something (spirit/soul) consciously survives in a place of bliss ("with the Lord").
(3) Until it receives another body, the spirit/soul is somehow "naked" or incomplete (v. 3).

Philippians 1:21

"To live is Christ, and ***to die is gain***" (nkjv). There is no reasonable sense in

which death can be gain if a person is annihilated (snuffed out of existence) or separated from consciousness at death; in annihilation, death is loss—not only the loss of life but also the loss of existence.[19] It is the ultimate category mistake to affirm that nothing is better than something. Nothing is nothing, so it cannot be better than anything.

Philippians 1:23–24

"I am hard pressed between the two [life and death], having a desire to ***depart and be with Christ***, which is far better. Nevertheless to ***remain in the flesh*** is more needful for you" (nkjv). This passage leaves little doubt Paul taught that the spiritual man, apart from his "flesh," will survive death and "be with Christ" in a conscious state. Further, unconsciousness between death and resurrection can hardly be described as a "far better" condition; nonexistence is a state of nothingness.[20]

Hebrews 12:22–23

You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem … to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, *to the spirits of just men made perfect*. (nkjv)

This reference is unquestionably to heaven and to a point ***before*** the final resurrection; just (righteous) human spirits are there in a perfect condition while their bodies are obviously still in the grave.

Revelation 6:9–10

When He [the Lamb] opened the fifth seal, *I [John] saw under the altar the souls of those who*

had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And *they cried out with a loud voice*, saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” (
nkjv
).

John calls these disembodied martyrs, whose bodies lie on earth, “souls” in heaven. In his vision they were not only conscious, they were praying and concerned about God’s plan on earth. Clearly, again, the soul (immaterial) consciously survives death apart from the body (material), for which it awaits reuniting at the resurrection.

Revelation 19:20

“The beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence.… ***These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone***” (nkjv). A thousand years later, they were still conscious, for “the devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet ***are***. And ***they will be tormented day and night forever and ever***” (20:10 nkjv).[21] In John’s vision, they were still conscious, and they will continue to be conscious eternally; persons who are not conscious cannot be tormented.

Revelation 20:4

John said, “***I saw [in heaven] the souls of those who had been beheaded*** for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God” (nkjv). This is probably the same group mentioned in Revelation 6:9; here too they are in a conscious, heavenly, and disembodied state.

Concluding Comments

The Bible teaches that between death and resurrection, the human soul/spirit survives consciously apart from its body. This is neither a state of annihilation[22] nor a state of unconscious "sleep";[23] this is an eternal state of conscious bliss for the saved[24] and conscious anguish for the lost.[25]

THE STATUS OF OLD TESTAMENT SAINTS BEFORE CHRIST

Some biblical scholars believe that the saints of the Old Testament went to a compartment of ***sheol***, the place of departed spirits, to await Christ's death and resurrection, and that they were then taken to heaven with Him at His ascension. Several arguments are offered for this view.

First, they point to Jesus' words in Luke 16 about a great wall or gulf fixed between heaven and hell (v. 26).

Second, Ephesians 4 declares that after His resurrection these souls went to heaven (v. 8). Since He was the "firstfruits" of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:23), they could not enter heaven before He did.

Third, they note that 1 Peter 3:19 tells of Christ speaking to the "spirits in prison" after his death. Thus, it is argued that while Old Testament saints were conscious between death and resurrection, they were not yet in heaven: They were in a state of conscious existence in ***sheol***, a holding place, until Christ finished His redemptive work and took them with Himself to heaven after His resurrection. This view was popularized by the ***Scofield Reference Bible***'s note on Luke 16.

However, it seems best to agree with others who assert that Old Testament saints went directly to heaven between death and resurrection. This is supported by many passages.

First, in Luke 16 Jesus was not speaking of a "wall" between two sections of ***sheol*** (***hades***). The "great gulf" was between heaven and hell. Only the unsaved man in this story went to hades; the saved person (Lazarus) was in "Abraham's bosom" (heaven).

Second, Ephesians 4 does not refer to taking Old Testament saints into heaven,

but taking the forces of evil captive by virtue of Christ's death and resurrection. There is no sense in which "leading captivity captive" can refer to the liberation from sin that all saints will experience in heaven. The background of the passage is Psalm 68, which refers to David defeating enemies, taking them captive, and distributing the spoils of the battle to the victors.

Third, 1 Peter 3:19 is about Christ announcing the victory of His death and resurrection to the fallen spirit world that was defeated by His actions. There is no reference to leading saved spirits out of a compartment in hades and taking them to heaven.

Fourth, the uniform teaching of Scripture is that Old Testament saints went directly to heaven as spirits, awaiting the resurrection of their bodies when Christ returns. He is the first to go to heaven in a body (1 Cor. 15:22), but He is not the first departed spirit to go there.[26]

Fifth, other Old Testament passages (cited above) support this same view (particularly Eccl. 3:21; 12:5–7).

Sixth, and finally, despite the later insertion in the Apostles' Creed that Jesus descended "into hell," it is not found in the original Apostles' Creed (see Bettenson, ***DCC***, chapter 2), and even when it does appear, there is no assertion that Jesus went there to take Old Testament saints to heaven.

In short, there is no biblical or early extrabiblical evidence that the spirits of Old Testament saints after death went anywhere except heaven between death and resurrection. There, with New Testament saints (Heb. 12:23), they await the resurrection of their bodies (1 Thess. 4:13–17).

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE SOUL'S CONSCIOUS SURVIVAL IN THE INTERMEDIATE STATE

Several doctrines form the basis for soul survival. While some are related to the nature of human beings, others relate to the nature of God; soul survival (through the intermediate state, between death and resurrection) has both a necessary and sufficient condition[27] in God's nature[28] and will.[29]

Soul Survival Is Rooted in God's Omnipotence

God is all-powerful,[30] and, as such, He can do anything that is not impossible to do. It is not impossible for someone who can create a soul to also sustain its existence after death, for God is not only the originating cause of all that exists,[31] He is also the sustaining cause.[32] Thus, the ***necessary*** condition for the soul's conscious survival has been met in God's omnipotence.

Soul Survival Is Rooted in God's Omnibenevolence

However, simply that God ***can*** cause the soul to survive does not mean He ***will*** —there must also be a sufficient cause for His doing so. This is rooted in His good will; that is, based on His infinite goodness,[33] God wills (purposes) to keep the soul alive after death. It is because of His mercies that we are not consumed (Lam. 3:22), and by His will "all things hold together" (Col. 1:17). In heaven the presently disembodied souls around the throne sing, "You created all things, and by your will they were created and ***have their being***" (Rev. 4:11; cf. Acts 17:28). In short, the soul will consciously survive death because God can sustain it and also desires to sustain it. Without these two roots in God's nature—omnipotence and omnibenevolence—there would be no conscious survival of the soul.

Soul Survival Is Rooted in God's Image

There is also an anthropological reason for soul survival: human beings are made in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). Since we are made by God[34] and made like

God,[35] God annihilating His image would be an act of God against God, an attack of God on His own reflection. Granted that God freely chose to make creatures in His image,[36] it follows reasonably that He would want to preserve them.

ANSWERING OBJECTIONS AGAINST CONSCIOUS SURVIVAL

Many arguments have been offered against the biblical teaching that the soul exists in a conscious state between death and resurrection.

Objection One: Based on Biblical Descriptions of Death As "Sleep"

Jesus said, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up" (John 11:11). Paul used the same word of departed loved ones: "According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep" (1 Thess. 4:15). Doesn't "sleep" imply a state of unconsciousness?

Response to Objection One

This view should be rejected for several reasons.

First, as shown above,[37] the soul is conscious after death.

Second, only the body dies,[38] so only the body can be raised. Jesus referred to the resurrection of the ***body*** as awakening it from sleep (John 5:28–29; cf. 11:11, 14).

Third, regarding what Jesus said, being "asleep" and being "dead" were the same thing (cf. John 11:11, 14); the body is dead, the soul is not.
Fourth, "sleep" is an appropriate figure of speech about death, since they share the same posture; both are temporary, and both are followed by awaking and standing up again.
Therefore, these texts do not support the concept of the soul losing consciousness at death.

Objection Two: Based on the Analogy With Animals

Higher forms of animals have a soul, since the same Hebrew word for ***soul*** (***nephesh***) is used of animals, as is the word ***spirit*** (***ruach***; cf. Eccl. 3:21).[39] If animal souls do not survive death, why should we not assume the same is true of human beings?

Response to Objection Two

There are significant differences between human souls and animal souls.
First, humans are made in God's image (Gen. 1:27) and rule over animals (v. 28).

Second, humans will be resurrected,[40] while there is no evidence that animals will be.

Third, the Bible affirms clearly that the human soul is conscious after death,[41] but the animal soul is not (see Eccl. 3:21).
In light of these substantial discrepancies, the analogy breaks down.

Objection Three: Based on 2 Corinthians 5:1

“Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.” In this passage, Paul seems to say that a person receives his resurrection body immediately at death. If so, then there would be no intermediate state involving a conscious, disembodied soul. This Pauline assertion gives no indication of any time lapse between death and receiving this permanent resurrection body.

Response to Objection Three

There are at least two other possible interpretations of this passage that do not negate an intermediate disembodied state. The interim-body view is held by those who allege that an intermediate spiritual body is provided at death; therein, the soul is never disembodied (e.g., see Chafer, ***ST***, 2.506–07). Others point out that Paul does not pointedly affirm that the body is received at the instant of death but merely anticipates the final resurrection state. This latter view fits better with Paul’s statement about the ultimate resurrection body in 1 Corinthians 15:42–44.[42]

The interim-body view conflicts with the other scriptural references to a disembodied state between death and resurrection. Thus, in 2 Corinthians 5:1, rather than implying that the soul is unconscious or that an intermediate body is given, Paul is likely teaching that after death comes the ultimate anticipation of the permanent resurrection body. This also fits with his earlier assertion that “this mortal must put on immortality” (v. 53 nkjv).

Objection Four: Based on the Hylomorphic View of the Soul/Body

We maintained earlier[43] that man is a hylomorphic (lit.: “form/matter”) unity of soul and body; as such, it would seem to follow that a soul cannot survive

without a body. If embodiment is a necessary vehicle for the soul, how could it survive alone?

Response to Objection Four

If soul and body were identical, then one could not survive without the other. However, ***soul and body are a unity, not an identity***; this is one of the major problems with anthropological monism.[44] The soul is to the body what thought (immaterial) is to words on paper (material)—thought, expressed through words, remains even when the paper perishes.

The Bible teaches that the soul survives when the body dies.[45] Yes, the soul is incomplete without the body, and it awaits the resurrection when it will again be complete (2 Cor. 5:1), but survival as a naked soul is not impossible. Both God and angels are pure spirit (John 4:24; Heb. 1:14), yet they exist without a body. Also, between His death and resurrection, Christ existed without His body. Hence, the objection fails.

Objection Five: Based on Arguments for Anthropological Monism

The basic arguments from Scripture for anthropological monism (a soul/body ***identity***) are from the nature of human beings and from supposed oneness of soul and body. It is argued that humans have only one nature—a human nature (cf. Acts 17:26)—and that this nature is shared equally by all human beings. Therefore, soul and body must be one nature and not two natures.

Response to Objection Five

These data can be interpreted another way, namely, as hylomorphism, a

form/matter unity rather than identity. For example, there is a unity between a pattern and a garment, but the two are not identical, and the former survives when the latter perishes. Further, it is true that we have one nature, but it has two dimensions, as was shown above. The two cannot be identical, because one is material and the other is immaterial; one is perishable and the other will not perish.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR THE SOUL'S CONSCIOUS SURVIVAL IN THE INTERMEDIATE STATE

The Early Fathers

Since the Fathers' ultimate focus was on the completed state of Christ's resurrection, they said less about the intermediate state. Nonetheless, they were clear that it is one of conscious existence in a disembodied soul.

Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)

[The body] dies and is decomposed, but not the soul or the spirit. For to die is to lose vital power, and to become henceforth breathless, inanimate, and devoid of motion, and to melt away into those [component parts] from which also it derived the commencement of [its] substance. But this event happens neither to the soul, for it is the breath of life; nor to the spirit, for the spirit is simple and not composite, so that it cannot be decomposed, and is itself the life of those who receive it. (*AH*, 5.7.1)

As the Lord "went away in the midst of the shadow of death," where the souls of the dead were, yet afterwards arose in the body, and after the resurrection was taken up into heaven, it is manifest that the souls of His disciples also … shall go away into the invisible place allotted to them by God, and there remain until the resurrection, awaiting that event; then receiving their bodies, and rising in their entirety, that is, bodily, just as the Lord arose, they shall come thus into the presence of God. (ibid., 5.31.2)

Clement of Rome (c. first century a.d.)

It is better that a man should acknowledge his transgressions than that he should harden his heart, as the hearts of those were hardened who stirred up sedition against Moses the servant of God, and whose condemnation was made manifest [unto all]. For they went down alive into Hades, and death swallowed them up. (*FECC*, 51)

Ignatius (d. c. 110)

Entice the wild beasts, that they may become my tomb, and may leave nothing of my body; so that when I have fallen asleep [in death], I may not be found troublesome to anyone. Then shall I be a true disciple of Jesus Christ, when the world shall not see so much as my body. (*EIR*, 4)

Justin Martyr (c. 100–c. 165)

Since sensation remains to all who have ever lived, and eternal punishment is laid up (i.e., for the wicked), see that ye neglect not to be convinced, and to hold as your belief, that these things are true. (*FA*, 18)

The wicked in the same bodies [will be] united again to their spirits which are now to undergo everlasting punishment; and not only, as Plato said, for a period of a thousand years. (ibid., 8)

Athenagoras (fl. second century)

We are persuaded that when we are removed from the present life we shall live another life, better than the present one, and heavenly, not earthly (since we shall abide near God, and with God, free from all change or suffering in the soul, not as flesh, even though we shall have flesh, but as heavenly spirit), or, falling with the rest, a worse one and in fire; for God has not made us as sheep or beasts of burden, a mere by-work, and that we should perish and be annihilated. (*PC*, 31)

Origen (c. 185–c. 254)

The apostolic teaching is that the soul, having a substance and life of its own, shall, after its departure from the world, be rewarded according to its deserts, being destined to obtain either an inheritance of eternal life and blessedness, if its actions shall have procured this for it, or to be delivered up to eternal fire and punishments, if the guilt of its crimes shall have brought it down to this: and also, that there is to be a time of resurrection from the dead, when this body, which now is "sown in corruption, shall rise in incorruption," and that which "is sown in dishonor will rise in glory" (*DP*, preface).

Third-Century Catacomb Epitaph

"Alexander is not dead, but lives among the stars, and his body rests in this tomb" (cited in Schaff, ***CC***, 7.86).

Methodius (c. 260–311)

It is the flesh which dies; the soul is immortal. So, then, if the soul be immortal, and the body be the corpse, those who say that there is a resurrection, but not of the flesh, deny any resurrection; because it is not that which remains standing but that which has fallen and been laid down that is set up; according to that which is written, "Does not he who falls rise again, and he who turns aside return?" (*DR*, 1.7).

Medieval Fathers

John of Damascus (676–754)

Again [God said] to Moses, I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob: God is not the God of the dead (that is, those who are dead and will be no more), but of the living, whose souls indeed live in His hand, but whose bodies will again come to life through the resurrection. (*EEOF*, 4.27)

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)

“It was for the soul’s good that it was united to a body.… Nevertheless, it is possible for it to exist apart from the body” (***ST***, 1.89.1).

Reformation Leaders

Martin Luther (1483–1546)

“In the interim [between death and resurrection], the soul does not sleep but is awake and enjoys the vision of angels and of God, and has converse with them” (***LW***, 25.32).

John Calvin (1509–1564)

How groveling an error it is to convert a spirit, formed after the image of God, into an evanescent breath, which animates the body only during this fading life, and to reduce the temple of the Holy Spirit to nothing; in short, to rob of the badge of immortality that part of ourselves in which the divinity is most refulgent and the marks of immortality conspicuous, so as to make the condition of the body better and more excellent than that of the soul. (*ICR*, 3.25.6)

[If] the soul [were not to] survive the body, how could it be present with the Lord on being separated from the body? But an apostle removes all doubt when he says that we go “to the spirits of just men made perfect” (
Heb. 12:23
).... And [if] the soul, when unclothed from the body, [were not to] retain its essence, and be capable of beatific glory, our Savior would not have said to the thief, “Today shalt thou be with me in paradise” (
Luke 23:43
). (ibid.)

Post-Reformation Teachers

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1648)

The bodies of men, after death, return to dust, and see corruption: but their souls, which neither die nor sleep, having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them: the souls of the righteous, being then made perfect in holiness, are received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies. And the souls of the wicked are cast into hell, where they remain in torment and outer darkness, reserved to the judgment of the great day. (32.1)

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758)

The souls of true saints, when they leave their bodies at death go to be with Christ.… They are not reserved in some abode distinct from the highest heaven; a place of rest, which they are kept in till the day of judgment as some imagine … but they go directly to heaven itself. ("FSDO" in *WJE*, 3)

Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892)

The light of nature is sufficient to tell us that the soul is immortal, so that the infidel who doubts it is a worse fool even than a heathen, for he, before revelation was given, had discovered it—there are some faint glimmerings in men of reason which teach that the soul is something so wonderful that it must endure forever. (*SSC*, 66)

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR THE RESURRECTION OF THE HUMAN BODY

While the intermediate state means conscious bliss for believers and conscious woe for unbelievers,[46] it still contains an incompletion. Human beings were created in an embodied state, and during the interim they are in a "naked" condition, the soul awaiting reunion with the body (2 Cor. 5:1–4). Indeed, as shown earlier,[47] the "image of God" includes the body (Gen. 1:27; 9:6; Heb.

1:3), and, unlike the platonic view, the Bible pronounces material things “good” (Gen. 1:31). The second person of the Godhead assumed a body Himself; thus, belief in the resurrection of the human physical body is perfectly in line with both Scripture’s affirmation of it as “good” and its inclusion in God’s image.
There is overwhelming biblical support for the bodily resurrection of all human beings. That there would be two resurrections—one of the saved (the just) and the other of the unsaved (the unjust)—is implied even in the Old Testament. An angel told Daniel that in the last days “multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: [1] some to everlasting life, [2] others to shame and everlasting contempt” (Dan. 12:2). Jesus reaffirmed the same when He declared, “A time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—[1] those who have done good will rise to live, and [2] those who have done evil will rise to be condemned” (John 5:28–29).[48] In each of these passages where both resurrections are mentioned, the order is the same: The saved are raised, then the unsaved are later raised.
In addition, Paul wrote:

> Since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But *each in his own turn*: Christ, the firstfruits; then, [1] when he comes, those who belong to him. [2] Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. (1 Cor. 15:21–26)

This text maintains the same sequence. After Christ’s return,[49] there is the resurrection of “those who belong to him.” Then He reigns until “the last enemy is destroyed,” namely, “death,” which includes the resurrection of the lost. The two resurrections will be separated by a thousand years—Christ’s millennial reign—as confirmed by John:

> I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. *They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection*. Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but *they will be priests of God and*

of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years. (
Rev. 20:4–6
)

Several facts, explicit or implicit, are evident in regard to this text.
First, there will be two resurrections: one (of the righteous) at the beginning and the other (of the unrighteous) at the end of the thousand years (millennium).[50]
Second, both are physical resurrections.
Third, during the thousand years, those who were raised in the first resurrection will reign with Christ.
Fourth, resurrection means the body will again "come to life." Since the soul does not die, it is the body that will be raised.
Fifth, and finally, those who are part of the second resurrection (after the thousand years) will also experience "the second death," which is eternal separation from God (vv. 14–15).[51]

The Resurrection of *Believers*

Two resurrections of human beings are named in Scripture, and both are physical in nature: the resurrection of the just and the resurrection of the unjust. These resurrections are separated by a thousand years (the millennium): the resurrection of believers comes before, and the resurrection of unbelievers comes after.
Several biblical passages speak of two resurrections, and one gives the span of time between them.[52] The hope of believers' resurrection comes from the earliest times.

Genesis 22:2–5

God said [to Abraham], "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the

mountains I will tell you about."

Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about.

On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then *we* will come back to you."

Abraham could be sure Isaac would return with him after the sacrifice *only* if he believed God would resurrect Isaac. According to Hebrews, this is exactly what Abraham believed: "Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death" (
11:19
).

Job 19:25–26

"I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet ***in my flesh*** I will see God." While some translations (e.g., asv) render this verse "without my flesh," it seems best to follow the traditional rendering (e.g., kjv, niv); even "from my flesh" (e.g., rsv, nasb, nab) implies he will be in his resurrection body when he sees the Redeemer. While the Hebrew word ***min*** often means "without," it is used in the sense of "within" in Job 36:25. Further, when used in connection with "to see" (***hazah***), ***min*** takes on the meaning of "from within" or "from the vantage point of," which again implies being in the resurrection body.
Job's belief in the final resurrection is further implied in that while God restored ***all his possessions twofold*** after his suffering, he was only given ***the same number of children*** (42:13; cf. 1:2). This indicates that Job never really lost the others, that he would be reunited with them in the resurrection.

Psalm 16:10–11

David declared:

You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the path of life; *you will fill me with joy in your presence*, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

Peter said of David's prophecy (Acts 2:31) that "seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body [Gk: ***sarx***] see decay." The belief that the resurrection involved a physical body of "flesh" (***sarx***) is unmistakable.

Psalm 17:15

"In righteousness I will see your face; when ***I awake***, I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness."

With death being viewed as "sleep,"[53] resurrection is pictured as awakening from the "sleep" of death. Further, the psalmist clearly believed He would see God face-to-face in the Beatific Vision (cf. 1 Cor. 13:12; Rev. 22:4), which will occur in heaven after the resurrection of the just.[54]

Isaiah 26:19

"***Your dead will live; their bodies will rise***. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy. Your dew is like the dew of the morning; ***the earth will give birth to her dead***." The italicized phrases are unmistakable references to a literal, physical resurrection.

Isaiah 53:8–10

He [Messiah] was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.

This text speaks plainly of the Messiah's death as indicated by phrases like "assigned a grave with the wicked," "a lamb to the slaughter" (53:7), "cut off from the land of the living," and "the Lord makes his life a guilt offering." Again, ***"He will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand."*** To be alive to experience this, His body would have to be resurrected.

Daniel 12:2

"Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt." Since it is the body that returns to the dust and will awake to either everlasting life or everlasting contempt, this obviously refers to the physical resurrection of both the saved and the lost. Jews not only believed that humans were created from the dust (Gen. 2:7) and would return to dust (Eccl. 12:7), but also that at the final resurrection they would be reconstituted from the dust. If everlasting life includes the body and comes after the body has turned into dust, then a physical resurrection is inarguably in view.

The Wisdom of Solomon 3:7–8

While not made up of canonical writings,[55] even the extrabiblical intertestamental literature[56] speaks of a physical resurrection. For instance, "in the time of their visitation [the departed souls of the righteous] (v. 1) will shine forth" (be restored) and that "they will govern nations and rule over peoples."

2 Maccabees 7:11

This passage tells of a courageous Jewish believer who suffered his tongue and hands to be cut off, saying, "I got these from Heaven, and because of his laws I disdain them, and from him I hope to get them back again [at the resurrection]."

4 Esdras 7:32

According to this text, when the Messiah comes “the earth shall give up those who are asleep in it, and the dust those who rest there in silence.” Death is described here as a time: “We shall be kept in rest until those times come when you [God] will renew the creation” (v. 75).

2 Baruch 49:2; 50:2

To the question “In what shape will those live who live in Thy day?” the answer is unequivocal affirmation of the material resurrection:

> The earth shall then assuredly restore the dead [which it now receives, in order to preserve them]. It shall make no change in their form, but as it has received, so shall it restore them, and as I delivered them to it, so also shall it raise them.

The New Testament is a Jewish book, and, unsurprisingly, it contains continued Judeo-Christian affirmation to the physical resurrection.

Matthew 22:30

“***At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage***; they will be like the angels in heaven.” The Sadducees’ query about the resurrection —regarding whether a woman married seven times on earth would be married to one of her husbands in eternity—highlights not only the Jewish belief in a physical resurrection (cf. Acts 23:8) but also Jesus’ own affirmation of it. They conceived of the resurrection body as being so physical that it was meaningful to ask which of her husbands she would be joined to in heaven.

John 5:28–29

Jesus said, “A time is coming when ***all who are in their graves*** will hear [the Son of Man’s] voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.”[57] Everyone who has died will be physically resurrected in the future.

John 11:23–26

Jesus said to [Martha], *"Your brother will rise again."* Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live [eternally], even though he [physically] dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."

This passage not only reaffirms Jewish belief in a "last day" physical resurrection, it again reiterates Jesus' affirmation; His demonstration of the power to be able to do it was then shown in raising Lazarus from the dead.

1 Corinthians 15:21–26

Since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so *in Christ all will be made alive*. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.... He must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

Paul's words affirm that all persons will rise from the dead because Christ did, as He Himself said: "Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. ***Because I live, you also will live***" (John 14:19).

1 Thessalonians 4:13–17

Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and *the dead in Christ will rise first*. After

that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

When Christ returns,[58] all believers will be raised. Physical death is temporary; the body will awaken from it at the final resurrection.

2 Timothy 2:17–18

Paul said certain heretics claimed that believers had already been resurrected: "Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have wandered away from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some." Paul is speaking here of the resurrection of believers; to deny that this is yet a future event is heretical.

Revelation 20:4–6

I saw the souls of those who … had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark.… They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead
[59]
did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.
[60]
) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection.
[61]
The second death
[62]
has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

The Nature of the Believer's Resurrection Body

The believer's resurrection body will have several notable characteristics. For starters, since it will be like Christ's (cf. Phil. 3:21), we can use His body as an example.

Numerical Identity

There are many lines of evidence to support the resurrection body being numerically[63] identical to the pre-resurrection body.

First, the empty tomb says the body that vacated it is the same one that occupied it.[64]

Second, the crucifixion scars on the resurrection body show that it was the same one that died (John 20:27; Luke 24:40).

Third, that the resurrection body has "flesh and bones" (Luke 24:39) reveals that it was the same body of flesh in which Jesus was incarnated (John 1:14) and in which He continually lives (1 John 4:2).

Fourth, that Jesus ate food in His resurrection body supports it being the same physical body He had before He died (Luke 24:42).

Fifth, and finally, the resurrection body is tangible (Matt. 28:9; cf. John 20:27).

Being numerically the same body does not mean Christ's body had all the same particles;[65] even now the basic cells of our pre-resurrection bodies change every seven years and yet they comprise the same body. However, if there were ***not*** numerical identity between the pre- and post-resurrection bodies, the Resurrection would have been a failure; if what died had not risen again, God would have lost the battle over death to Satan.

Materiality

As the above evidence shows, the believer's resurrection body is physical.

First, it is said to be a resurrection out from "among the dead" (Luke 24:5), which is, of course, the grave. Since only physical bodies are buried, the resurrection will be of the physical body that died.

Second, the body raised is the one "sown" in death (1 Cor. 15:42).

Third, rather than replacing the mortal body, the immortal resurrection body is

“put on” over it. We will be raised in our physical bodies.
Fourth, the word ***body*** (Gk: ***soma***), in regard to the resurrection body (cf. v. 44), always means a physical body when used of an individual human being (see Gundry, ***SNT***).
Fifth, and finally, Jesus, “by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body” (Phil. 3:21; cf. 1 John 3:2–3).
Unfortuately, some noted evangelicals have denied the numerical identity and essential materiality of the resurrection body. George Ladd of Fuller Seminary wrote: “One body is buried; another body springs forth.” If one were watching the body of Jesus at the moment of resurrection, “all he would have seen was the sudden and inexplicable disappearance of the body of Jesus.” And Christ’s appearances were not in the same body that died, but were of Him “who was with them but invisible [but] made himself visible to their physical senses.”[66] Likewise, Murray Harris of Trinity Seminary affirmed that at the moment of the Resurrection Jesus was “changed into a spiritual mode of being,”[67] which in “his essential state was one of invisibility and therefore immateriality”[68] with the “ability to materialize at will.” Thus, “the new body is qualitatively and numerically distinct from the old body.” Further, “the believer’s resurrection body will come from heaven, not from the grave.”[69]
In an embarrassing example of placing fraternity over orthodoxy, Wayne Grudem, Murray Harris’s former colleague, affirmed Harris’s view on the Resurrection was orthodox,[70] even though Harris claimed that believers get their resurrection body at the moment of death,[71] while their dead bodies continue rotting in the grave, never to be resurrected (cf. John 5:28–29). Even Harris later recanted this view after being examined by a panel headed up by Millard Erickson, who had called this view a “heresy.”[72]

Immortality

The resurrection body is not a mere physical body, it is a ***supernatural*** physical body, spiritually powered, literally ***Spirit-dominated*** (1 Cor. 15:44). Just as the Rock that followed Israel in the wilderness[73] was a literal rock out of which came literal water (10:4) with a supernatural[74] source, even so the resurrected believer will be physically embodied and spiritually vital. As Paul calls the new body "incorruptible" and "immortal" (15:53 kjv), the "change" (v. 51) will not be from a material body to an immaterial body but from a perishable physical body to an imperishable physical body.

Glory, Mobility, and Agility

The resurrection body also has characteristics such as glory, mobility, and agility. It is called a "glorious body" (Phil. 3:21), which assumes that a kind of radiance comes from it, perhaps like with Jesus' body on the Mount of Transfiguration (cf. Matt. 17). It will have supernatural powers enabling it to move through space (Acts 1:10–11) and perhaps through other material things (cf. John 20:19). Since Jesus could eat in His resurrection body, assumably we will be able to do so as well. However, since the resurrection body is supernaturally powered (1 Cor. 15:44), we will eat not for nourishment but for pleasure and celebration (cf. Matt. 26:29).

In regard to the resurrection body, it is a serious error to hold that Jesus was not resurrected in an immortal and glorified body, but rather that He only received it later, at His ascension. Millard Erickson (b. 1932) writes:

> The body that he [Jesus] had at the point of resurrection was yet to undergo a more complete transformation at the point of the ascension. It was yet to become a "spiritual body." … We might say, then, that the Easter event was something of a resuscitation, such as that of Lazarus, rather than a true resurrection, as will be the case for us. Jesus' postresurrection body may well have been like the body with which Lazarus came out of the tomb—Lazarus could still (and presumably did again) die. If this was the case with Jesus, he may have needed to eat to remain alive. (*CT*, 777)

Speaking of Christ's ascension, Erickson adds,

> At that time Jesus underwent the remainder of the metamorphosis begun with the resurrection of his body. The significance of the ascension is that Jesus left behind the conditions associated with life on this earth. (778)

Supposedly, then, Jesus was raised mortal and did not receive a glorified, immortal body until His ascension.

In response, there are several notable problems with this view.
First, if Jesus was not raised immortal, then His resurrection was not a victory over death, as the Bible proclaims it to be (1 Cor. 15:55).
Second, this theory opposes Philippians 3:21, which declares that our resurrection body will be like His glorious body.
Third, it contradicts Paul's pledge that we will be raised to an immortal and incorruptible body, just as Christ our "firstfruits" was (1 Cor. 15:20, 53).
Fourth, it is contrary to 1 Peter 1:11, which speaks of "the sufferings of Christ [death] and the glories that would follow [resurrection]" (cf. Acts 26:23).
Fifth, Christ's victory over death is one of glory (1 Cor. 2:8).
Sixth, Paul said flatly, "The resurrection of the dead … is sown in dishonor, it is ***raised in glory***" (15:42–43).
Seventh, and finally, Christ's resurrection body possessed characteristics of a glorified body, like the ability to appear and disappear (Luke 24:31) and even enter rooms that had closed doors (John 20:19). Neither was the blinding radiance of His ascended body unique to His post-ascension state; as mentioned earlier, this had occurred, for instance, at the Transfiguration (Matt. 17:2).

The Timing of the Believer's Resurrection

Since believers will be resurrected at Christ's second coming,[75] and since no one knows the time of His return (cf. Matt. 24:36; Acts 1:5), no one knows when the resurrection of believers will take place. ***This*** much is known: There will be two resurrections—of the just and the unjust—and they will be separated by a thousand-year reign of Christ.[76]

The Resurrection of *Unbelievers*

Death will be reversed for all human beings. Everyone, saved and unsaved, will be restored in their pre-resurrection body and made undying (immortal).
The above references make it evident that the second resurrection is of unbelievers. Again, this is called variously (among other things) the resurrection "to shame and everlasting contempt" (Dan. 12:2); the resurrection of "those who have done evil" and will "rise to be condemned" (John 5:29); and the resurrection of "the rest of the dead" (Rev. 20:5). Whatever the name, it is clearly (1) a second resurrection, (2) after the resurrection of believers, and (3) the resurrection of those who are lost forever.[77] Of this, John wrote, "Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:14–15).

The Timing of the Unbeliever's Resurrection

As already established, the second resurrection is separated from the first resurrection by a thousand years, during which believers will reign with Christ (vv. 4–6). An intervening time period between the two resurrections is both allowed and implied in other texts.[78]
First, the resurrection of believers is out from "among the dead" (Col. 1:18), implying that other dead bodies are left in the graves when it occurs.
Second, John speaks of the period of both resurrections as an "hour" (i.e., a long period of time), yet the first resurrection takes only "the twinkling of an eye" (1 Cor. 15:52). Thus, the remainder of the "hour" must transpire before the second resurrection.
Third, John states emphatically (six times) that there will be a thousand years between the "first resurrection" and the second one when "the rest of the dead" are raised (cf. Rev. 20:3–6).

The Nature of the Unbeliever's Resurrection Body

Although the word ***immortal*** is not used of the unbeliever's resurrection body—since ***immortal*** contains connotations of a positive quality of eternal life reserved for only the saved[79]—nevertheless, there are many reasons to believe that the unsaved also will possess physical bodies that will live on forever.

First, the second resurrection is listed several times in connection with the first resurrection, which is indubitably a resurrection into a never-dying physical body. Since those on both sides of this issue agree that the second resurrection is physical, it follows that it too is into a never-dying body.

Second, in Revelation 20:5 the lost are designated as "the rest of the dead" who will "come to life,"[80] the same term used of those in the first resurrection (cf. vv. 4–5), believers, who physically will come out from among the dead.

Third, Jesus said that both soul and body of unbelievers would be punished in hell (Matt. 10:28). Since the same word[81] is used of both soul and body in regard to hell, since hell is "forever" (Matt. 25:41; cf. 2 Thess. 1:7–9), and since we know that the soul will not be annihilated,[82] the unbeliever's body will live eternally as well.

Fourth, and finally, since the body is part of God's image (Gen. 1:27), even in unbelievers (Gen. 9:6; James 3:9), were God ***not*** to resurrect it forever, He would in effect be conceding victory over it to the devil. However, His Word declares that Christ will reign until He has defeated death (1 Cor. 15:26), and unless physical death is reversed for all people, death will not be completely defeated. Accordingly, marred and lost as God's image may be in unbelievers,[83] even their bodies will be restored to life so that they can remain in their chosen destiny.[84]

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE RESURRECTION OF THE HUMAN BODY

As with our conscious survival after death,[85] the resurrection of all human beings is rooted in both God's nature and ours. This includes God's omnipotence, omnibenevolence, omnisapience, and our being created in His image.

God's Omnipotence As the Basis for Bodily Resurrection

Once again, resurrection is rooted in God's power. If God can do anything that is possible,[86] then He can raise the dead. If He can create life—and He did[87]—then He can restore it. God's omnipotence is a necessary condition for our physical resurrection.

God's Omnibenevolence As the Basis for Bodily Resurrection

Another cornerstone for the doctrine of the final resurrection is God's omnibenevolence.[88] That God has the power to resurrect the dead does not assure that it will happen; unless God is also all-good, we have no real basis for believing there is hope for a decayed corpse. What is it in God's nature that prompts Him to want to restore His wayward creatures? Were it not for His mercy, His justice would allow the punishment of death to go unreversed.[89] Thanks be to God's omnibenevolence, for on its foundation He is moved to redeem us in both soul and body.

The Omnisapience of God As the Basis for Bodily Resurrection

God's wisdom[90] is manifest in Christ's resurrection, for while sin brought death (Rom. 5:12), His sacrificial death reverses the curse to bring us life.[91] Jesus overcame the devil's victory (of inflicting death on all humankind—Heb. 2:14) by His resurrection (1 Cor. 15:55); as we have seen, in the Cross, Satan struck at the bait of Christ's humanity and was caught on the hook of His deity.[92] Without a ***physical*** resurrection, the devil would be the winner and God the loser, for he would have brought physical death, and God would not have reversed it by bringing physical life. Anything short of a material reconstruction of the body would spell failure for God's creative purpose, as correctly noted by Robert Gundry (b. 1935): "Anything less … undercuts Paul's ultimate intention that redeemed man possess a physical means of concrete activity for eternal service and worship of God in a restored creation" (***SBT***, 182). Thus, as Paul affirmed, "None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (2:8). But they did crucify Him, and God, in His infinite wisdom, allowed it in order to defeat sin and restore His creation (Rev. 21–22).[93]

Our Creation in God's Image As the Basis for Bodily Resurrection

The doctrine of humans created in God's image is also at the basis of the final resurrection. As was shown earlier, that image included the body;[94] hence, unless physical resurrection occurs, there is no full restoration in the image of God. Since His purpose in creation included humans made in His image, we reasonably conclude that He will work to restore it. To do less would be for God to forsake the completion of His own image, for Him not to be concerned about what is His. Because this is contrary to God—because perfection is rooted in His very nature[95]—the creation of humans in God's image (including their physical dimension) is a basic biblical truth in which the final resurrection is based.

ANSWERING OBJECTIONS TO PHYSICAL RESURRECTION

Many objections have been leveled at the historical orthodox belief that all human beings will be resurrected in the same physical body in which they died. We will examine the basic arguments to sharpen our focus on this doctrine.

Objection One: Based on Paul's Calling It a Spiritual Body

One passage often cited is 1 Corinthians 15:44, where Paul refers to the resurrection body as a "spiritual body" in contrast to the pre-resurrection body, which is a "natural body."

Response to Objection One

A "spiritual" body is one dominated by the spirit, not one devoid of matter; the Greek word ***pneumatikos*** (***spiritual***) means a body directed by the Spirit, as opposed to one under the dominion of the flesh. ***Spiritual*** here does not mean "immaterial" but "immortal, imperishable":[96] "That which belongs to the supernatural order of being is described as ***pneumatikos***: accordingly, the resurrection body is a ***soma pneumatikos*** [supernatural body]."[97]
Paul used the same word earlier to refer to the "spiritual rock" that followed Israel in the wilderness from which they received "spiritual drink" (10:4); the Old Testament (cf. Ex. 17; Num. 20) reveals that it was a physical rock from which they got literal water. Further, when Paul spoke about "the spiritual man" (1 Cor. 2:15), he obviously did not mean an invisible, immaterial person with no corporeal body.

Objection Two: Based on Christ's Ability to Make Himself Appear

It is also argued that Christ's resurrection body was essentially immaterial and invisible and, therefore, not an object observable in our history. The New Testament repeatedly stresses that it could appear,[98] which implies that it was invisible before it appeared;[99] each time the text says "he appeared" or "he let himself be seen." Grammatically, the action rests on He who appears, not on the one who sees Him appear. This, supposedly, suggests that Jesus was essentially invisible and, hence, could be seen[100] only when He chose to be (during His resurrection appearances).

Response to Objection Two

This argument fails for several reasons.

First of all, the phrase "he let himself be seen" (***ophthé***)[101] simply means that Jesus took the initiative to show Himself to the disciples, ***not that He was essentially immaterial***. The same form ("He [they] appeared") is used in the Greek Old Testament (2 Chron. 25:21), in the Apocrypha (1 Macc. 4:6),[102] and in the New Testament (Acts 7:26) of human beings appearing in physical bodies.

In addition, the same event is also described in the ***active*** mood: Paul said, "Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" (1 Cor. 9:1). If the resurrection body can be seen by the naked eye, then it is not invisible.

Furthermore, that the same basic word ***appeared*** (***ophthé***) refers to a natural event is supported by standard Greek lexicons. The ***Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*** points out that the word is used "of persons who appear in a natural way."[103] ***The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*** notes that appearances "occur in a reality which can be perceived by the natural

senses."[104] ***Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*** notes that ***appeared*** means "He could be seen by human eyes, the appearances were not just visions."[105]

Finally, when Jesus did appear, the event is described by the word ***horaô*** ("to see"). Although ***horaô*** is sometimes used of seeing invisible realities (cf. Luke 1:22; 24:23), it often means "to see by the naked eye."[106] For example, John uses ***horaô*** of seeing Jesus in His earthly body before the Resurrection (6:36; 14:9; 19:35) and also of seeing Him in His resurrection body (20:18, 25, 29). Since the same word for body (***soma***) is used of Jesus before and after the Resurrection (cf. 1 Cor. 15:44; Phil. 3:21), and since the same word for its appearing (***horaô***) is also used of both, there is no reason to believe that the resurrection body is not the same literal, physical body.

Objection Three: Based on the Fact That Jesus Could Disappear

Luke writes of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, "Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he ***disappeared*** from their sight" (Luke 24:31). Jesus also disappeared from the disciples on other occasions (e.g., v. 51; Acts 1:9). If Jesus could disappear suddenly, then His body must have been able to go into an immaterial mode of existence.

Response to Objection Three

This reasoning fails; that Jesus "disappeared" doesn't demonstrate His body's immateriality any more than it proves that Philip's pre-resurrection body immaterialized simply because the Holy Spirit quickly transported him some distance away (Acts 8:39). Jesus could have been transported to another place, or He could have stepped into another dimension in His physical body.

Also, that Jesus appeared repeatedly in the same physical body for some forty

days (1:3) to over five hundred different people (1 Cor. 15:6) on twelve different occasions is indisputable evidence that He rose bodily and continued in the same physical body thereafter, including His ascension (Acts 1:10–11).

Objection Four: Based on Resurrection Appearances Being Called Visions

The contention that resurrection appearances are called visions is also used to support the immaterial view of the resurrection body.[107] Luke, for instance, records that women at the tomb "had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive" (24:23); likewise, Paul's experience with Christ on the Damascus Road[108] is called a vision (Acts 26:19). Immaterialists insist that visions are always of invisible, unseen realities, not of physical, material objects.

Response to Objection Four

First, Luke 24:23 does not refer to seeing the resurrected Christ, but to seeing a vision of angels. The Gospels nowhere speak of a resurrection appearance of Christ as a vision, and neither does Paul in his 1 Corinthians 15 list.[109]
Second, all post-resurrection encounters with Christ in the Gospels are later described as literal appearances (15:5–8), not as mere visions.
Third, the difference between a vision and a physical appearance is significant. Visions are of invisible, spiritual realities, such as God and angels. Appearances are of physical entities that can be seen with the naked eye.
Fourth, the only time the word ***vision*** appears to be used of a post-resurrection appearance is in connection with Paul's experience en route to Damascus. Even here, though, Paul possibly does not refer to Christ's appearance, but rather to the vision God later gave Ananias,[110] to commission Paul for ministry to the Gentiles (Acts 22:10, 15; cf. 9:10–15).
Fifth, and finally, even if there ***is*** some overlap of meaning between visions and

appearances, the fact that every appearance is clearly one of Christ in the same physical body in which He died would only allow that the word ***vision*** could sometimes refer to the same reality. It would not prove that Christ did not have a physical resurrection body.

Objection Five: Based on Jesus' Walking Through Doors

Many critics of the physical resurrection point to Jesus walking through closed doors to allege that His body could not have been material. This is inferred from John 20:19, which reads: "On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' "

Response to Objection Five

A careful reading of this text reveals that it does not actually say Jesus passed through a closed door—it says that even though the doors were closed, Jesus came in. There are natural ways He could have entered without walking through the door. He could have knocked and someone opened it. He could have come in through another opening. He could have disengaged the lock, as the angels did to take Peter out of prison (Acts 12:10). And, of course, Jesus could have performed a miracle to walk through the door in His physical body; this would be no problem, for He who could walk on water (cf. John 6:16–20). Walking on water no more proved that Jesus' pre-resurrection body was immaterial than Peter's walk on water proved that his body dematerialized for a moment and then quickly rematerialized (cf. Matt. 14:29).

At any rate, according to modern physics it is not an impossibility for a material object to pass through a door: it is only statistically improbable. Physical objects are mostly empty space, and what is necessary for one physical object to pass through another is the right alignment of the particles in the two physical objects —not a difficulty for the One who created the body (cf. John 1:3).

Objection Six: Based on the Irretrievability of the Body's Particles

Following the Socinians,[111] some critics insist that a physical resurrection body would imply "a crassly materialistic view of resurrection, according to which the scattered fragments of decomposed corpses were to be reassembled" (Harris, ***RI***, 126).

Response to Objection Six

First of all, within the parameters of the orthodox view, it is unnecessary to believe that the same particles will be restored;[112] even common sense dictates that a body can be the same physical body without having the same physical particles.[113] The observable fact that bodies eat food and give off waste products (as well as get heavier or lighter) is sufficient evidence of this; if I gain or lose several pounds, we do not say my body is no longer material or no longer my body.

Furthermore, regardless, an omnipotent God could certainly bring all of the scattered particles of one's body together again at the final resurrection. As for those particles shared at one time or another by two or more bodies, there is no difficulty for God, Creator even of dust, to supply the missing particles.

Finally, again, it is unnecessary to believe that God needs to reconstitute the exact particles of a pre-resurrection body. As mentioned, our pre-resurrection body remains physical, even though its exact physical molecules change (recycle) approximately every seven years. The resurrection body can be the same body as the present one while having new molecules.

Objection Seven: Based on "Flesh and Blood" Not Being Able to Enter the Kingdom

Paul said, “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 15:50), and from this some have reasoned that the resurrection body cannot be physical. As early as the second century, Irenaeus noted that this passage was being used by heretics in support of what he called their “very great error.”[114]

Response to Objection Seven

First, the very next phrase, omitted from the above quotation of 1 Corinthians 15:50, indicates clearly that Paul is speaking not of flesh as such but of ***corruptible*** flesh: ***“nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.”*** Paul is not saying the resurrection body will not have flesh, but that it will not have ***perishable*** flesh.

Second, in order to convince the frightened disciples He was not an immaterial spirit (Luke 24:37), Jesus emphatically said His resurrection body had flesh (v. 39).

Third, Peter directly said that the resurrection body would be the same body of ***flesh*** that went into the tomb and never saw corruption (Acts 2:31). Paul reaffirmed this (13:35), and John implies that it is against Christ to deny that He remains “in the flesh” after His resurrection (1 John 4:2; 2 John 7).

Fourth, and finally, “flesh and blood” in this context apparently means ***mortal*** flesh and blood, that is, a mere human being. Compare Jesus’ statement to Peter, who had just confessed that He is Messiah: “Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you” (Matt. 16:17 nkjv). Jesus could not have been referring to the mere substance of the body as such, which obviously couldn’t reveal His identity as the Son of God; rather, “the only correct and natural interpretation [of 1 Cor. 15:50] seems to be that ***man, as he now is***, a frail, earth-bound, perishable creature, ***cannot have a place in God’s glorious, heavenly kingdom***.”[115] There is nothing in this text that denies the physical nature of the resurrection body.

Objection Eight: Based on the Difference Between Resurrection and

Resuscitation

Opponents of physical resurrection also maintain that Jesus' body was not material because His resurrection was more than the mere resuscitation of a physical corpse. They argue that saying His body was the same physical body He had before He was raised is to reduce the Resurrection to resuscitation.

Response to Objection Eight

For one thing, Jesus' resurrection ***was*** more than a resuscitation. Resuscitated corpses die again; Jesus' resurrection body was immortal. He conquered death (Heb. 2:14; 1 Cor. 15:54–55), whereas merely resuscitated bodies will eventually be conquered by death, as in the story of Lazarus, who was raised by Jesus but eventually died again (cf. John 11). Jesus was the first to be raised in an immortal body, one that will never die again (1 Cor. 15:20). However, that Jesus was the first to be raised in an immortal body does not necessitate that His body was immaterial. The Resurrection was ***more*** than a reanimation of a material corpse, but not ***less***.

Further, it does not follow that because Jesus' resurrection body could not die, it could not be seen—what is immortal is not necessarily invisible. The re-created physical universe will last forever in its recreated state (Rev. 21:1–4), and yet it will be visible. The resurrection body differs from resuscitation not in that it's immaterial but in that it's immortal (1 Cor. 15:42, 53).

Objection Nine: Based on Jesus Appearing in a "Different Form"

Mark 16:12 declares that "Jesus appeared in a different form to two of them [His followers] while they were walking in the country." From this, some claim that after the Resurrection "we cannot rule out the possibility that the visible form of Jesus had altered in some mysterious way, delaying recognition of him." They suggest that "the expression 'he appeared in another form' in the Markan

appendix[116] encapsulates this" (Harris, ***RI***, 56).

Response to Objection Nine

First, there are significant questions about the authenticity of this text: Mark 16:9–20 is not in some of the oldest and best manuscripts.[117] In reconstructing the original texts from the known extant manuscripts, many scholars believe the older texts are more reliable, since they are closer to the originals.[118]
Second, even granting the passage's (and thus the verse's) authenticity, the event of which it is a summary (cf. Luke 24:13–32) says simply that "they were kept from recognizing him" (v. 16). The miraculous element was not in Jesus' body, but in what God did to the eyes of the disciples; recognition of Jesus was kept from them until their eyes were opened.
Third, at best Mark 16:12 is an obscure and isolated reference upon which it is unwise to base doctrinal pronouncement.
Fourth, and finally, whatever "another form" means, it certainly does not mean a form other than His physical, material body. On this very occasion Jesus ate physical food (Luke 24:30), an ability He soon thereafter gave as a proof that He was "flesh and bones" and not an immaterial "spirit" (vv. 38–43). "Another form" probably means that sometimes He appeared in the form of a gardener (cf. John 20), sometimes in the form of a traveler (cf. Luke 24), etc.

Objection Ten: Based on the Disciples Not Recognizing Jesus

Another objection to Christ being resurrected in the same physical body is that, if He was, why did the disciples often not recognize Him? Surely if He was in the same physical body He'd have had the same physical recognizability.

Response to Objection Ten

This contention misses the whole point: In every such passage, before the appearance was over, the disciples were so absolutely sure it was the same Jesus with whom they'd spent more than three years that they were converted overnight from scared, scattered skeptics to the world's greatest missionary force! True, there was occasional initial hesitancy in recognizing Him because of darkness, fear, unbelief, and anxiety, but this momentary doubt[119] was soon overshadowed by indubitable certainty of what was later called "infallible proofs" (Acts 1:3 nkjv) that it was the same Jesus in the same body, crucifixion scars and all (cf. Luke 24:40; John 20:27).

Objection Eleven: Based on Jesus Being Raised "in the Spirit"

According to Peter, Jesus was "put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit" (1 Peter 3:18 nkjv). Some have used these words to suggest that the resurrection body was not material flesh but immaterial "spirit."

Response to Objection Eleven

This interpretation is neither necessary nor consistent with the context of this passage and the rest of Scripture.

First of all, the passage can be translated "He was put to death in the body but made alive by the [Holy] Spirit" (niv); it is rendered with this same understanding in others as well.

What is more, in the New Testament the parallel between "death" and being "made alive" normally refers to bodily resurrection. For example, Paul declared that "Christ died and returned to life" (Rom. 14:9), and "He was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power" (2 Cor. 13:4).

Also, the context refers to the event as "the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 3:21), which is everywhere understood in the New Testament as a bodily

resurrection.
Finally, even if "spirit" does refer to Jesus' human spirit (rather than to the Holy Spirit), it cannot mean Jesus had no resurrection body; otherwise, the reference to His "body" (flesh) before His resurrection would mean He also had no human spirit. Hence, "flesh" in this context refers to His whole condition of humiliation before the Resurrection;[120] "spirit" refers to His unlimited power and imperishable life afterward (Schep, ***NRB***, 77).

Objection Twelve: Based on Christ Being a "Life-Giving Spirit" After the Resurrection

According to 1 Corinthians 15:45, Christ was made a "life-giving spirit" after being raised. Some have presented this passage as evidence that Jesus had no physical resurrection body.

Response to Objection Twelve

This conclusion does not follow for reasons similar to those given for the previous argument.
First, "life-giving spirit" does not speak of the ***nature*** of the resurrection body, but of the Resurrection's divine ***origin***. Jesus' physical body came back to life only by God's power (cf. Rom. 1:4); Paul is speaking about its spiritual ***source***, not its material ***substance***.
Second, if "spirit" did describe the nature of Christ's resurrection body, then Adam (with whom He is contrasted[121]) would not have had a soul, since he is described as "of the dust of the earth" (1 Cor. 15:47). Adam was "a living being" ("soul," Gen. 2:7).
Third, Christ's resurrection body is called a "spiritual body" (1 Cor. 15:44), which, as we have seen, is the same description used by Paul for food, drink, and a literal rock (10:3–4).
Fourth, the resurrection body is called a "body" (***soma***), which always means a

physical body when referring to an individual human (Gundry, ***SBT***, 168).
In brief, the resurrection body is called "spiritual" and "life-giving spirit" because its source is the spiritual realm, not because its substance is immaterial. Adam's natural body was "of the earth" (15:47), but just as the one from "earth" also has an immaterial soul, so the One from "heaven" also has a material body.

Objection Thirteen: Based on Our Being Like Angels in the Resurrection

Jesus said that in the final resurrection we "will be like the angels" (Matt. 22:30). Angels do not have physical bodies; they are spirits (cf. Heb. 1:14); thus, it is argued that when we are resurrected we will not have physical bodies.

Response to Objection Thirteen

This conclusion is unnecessary.
For one thing, the context is not about the nature of the resurrection body, but whether there will be marriage in heaven. Jesus replied that there will not; He said nothing here about people having immaterial bodies in heaven.
For another, Jesus saying that "at the resurrection … they will be like the angels in heaven" obviously means that, like angels, we "will neither marry nor be given in marriage." He said we would be like angels in that we would not marry, not in that we will be immaterial.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR THE RESURRECTION OF THE HUMAN BODY

The doctrine of the physical resurrection of all human beings is firmly grounded in church history. In countering gnosticism, the early Fathers even chose the strongest term to describe it—the resurrection of the ***flesh*** (Gk. ***sarx***), used four times in the New Testament (and once in the Apostles' Creed) to describe the

nature of the resurrection body.[122]

Early Church Fathers

With the exception of scattered unorthodox views (such as Origen's), the earliest Fathers affirmed that Jesus rose in the same body of flesh in which He was crucified.

The Apostles' Creed (c. 150)

The creed says, "I believe in the … resurrection of the flesh." That the Christian church has always confessed its belief in Christ's physical resurrection is expressed in this unmistakably clear phrase.

> We may say, therefore, that the entire early Church, in the West and in the East alike, publicly confessed belief in the resurrection of the flesh. In the Western creeds … this confessional formula has retained its place with hardly any exception. Up to the Reformation there is no exception at all. (Schep, *NRB*, 221)

Justin Martyr (c. 100–c. 165)

Converted philosopher Justin Martyr was one of the early church's great apologists. He not only uses the phrase "resurrection of the flesh," but he also designates it as referring to the flesh (body), not to the soul. He said plainly, "The resurrection is a resurrection of the ***flesh*** which dies" (***ORF*** in Roberts and Donaldson, ***ANF***, 1.298).[123] "He has even called the ***flesh*** to the resurrection, and promises to it everlasting life. For where He promises to save man, there He gives the promise to the ***flesh***" (ibid., 297).
Furthermore,

> When He had thus shown them that there is truly a resurrection of the *flesh*, wishing to show them this also, that it is not impossible for *flesh* to ascend into heaven … "He was taken up into heaven while they beheld," as He was in the flesh. (ibid., 298)

Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)

The Church [believes] in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and the sea, and all things that are in them: and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation … and [in] the resurrection from the dead, and ascension into heaven in the *flesh* of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord. (*AH*, 1.10.1 in ibid., 1.330)

Resurrecting the *flesh* is no problem for God. Since the Lord has power to infuse life into what He has fashioned, since the *flesh* is capable of being quickened, what remains to prevent its participation in incorruption, which is a blissful and never-ending life granted by God? (*AH*, 3.3 in ibid., 530)

Tertullian (c. 155–c. 225)

With regard to this rule of faith … you must know, that which prescribes the belief that there is one only God, and that He is none other than the Creator of the world, who produced all things out of nothing through His own Word, first of all sent forth … at last brought down by the Spirit and Power of the Father into the Virgin Mary, was made flesh in her womb … having been crucified, He rose again the third day … will come with glory to take the saints to the enjoyment of everlasting life and of the heavenly promises, and to condemn the wicked to everlasting fire, after the resurrection of both these classes shall have happened, together with the restoration of their *flesh*. (*PAH*, XIII in ibid., 3.249)

Athenagoras (fl. second century)

[That] His power is sufficient of the raising of dead bodies is shown by the creation of these *same bodies*. For if, when they did not exist, He made at their first formation the bodies of men, and *their original elements*, He will, when they are dissolved, in whatever manner that may take place, raise them again with equal ease: for this too, is equally possible to Him. (*RD*, 3 in ibid., 2.150)

Rufinus (345–410)

Rufinus, a Latin bishop, wrote “Commentary on the Apostles’ Creed,” in which he declared that even the lost particles of the dead body will be restored in the resurrection body. In another statement found in a preface to Pamphilus’s “Defense of Origen,” he emphasized the identity of Christ’s body and His flesh:

> We believe that it is *this very flesh* in which we are now living which will rise again, not one kind of flesh instead of another, nor another body than the body of *this flesh*.... It is an absurd invention of maliciousness to think that the human body is different from the *flesh*. (cited by Schep, *NRB*, 225)

Epiphanius (c. fourth century)

The Second Creed of Epiphanius, an enlargement of the Nicene Creed, affirmed:

> The Word became *flesh*, not undergoing any change nor converting Godhead into Manhood, [but] uniting into his own one holy perfection and Godhead.... The same suffered in the flesh; rose again; and went up to heaven in the *same body*, sat down gloriously at the right hand of the Father; is coming in the *same body* in glory to judge the quick and the dead. (*TCESF* in Schaff, *CC*, II.37)

Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 315–c. 387)

> Let no heretic ever persuade thee to speak evil of the Resurrection. For to this day the Manichees say that the resurrection of the Saviour was phantom-wise, and not real, not heeding Paul who says, *Who was made flesh of the seed of David according to flesh*; and again, *By the resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord from the dead*. (*CL*, XIV.21 in Schaff, *NPNF*, VII.99)

> The Faith which we rehearse contains in order the following: “AND [WE BELIEVE] IN ONE BAPTISM OF REPENTANCE FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS; AND IN ONE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH; AND IN THE *RESURRECTION OF THE FLESH*; AND IN ETERNAL LIFE.” (*CL*, XVIII.22 in ibid., 139)

Regarding Cyril’s reference to the resurrection body as “the very same body” we have before the final resurrection (XVIII.18 in ibid.), similar views were also held by Gregory of Nazianzen (c. 330–c. 389, a president of the Constantinople Council), Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–c. 395), and Basil the Great (c. 329–379).

Medieval Fathers

Augustine (354–430)

The earliest great Father of the Middle Ages was Augustine, bishop of Hippo, whose extensive and influential writings dominated the medieval church and continue to this day.

It is indubitable that the resurrection of Christ, and His ascension into heaven with the *flesh* in which He rose, is already preached and believed in the whole world. (*CG*, XXII.5 in Schaff, *NPNF*, II.482)

The *earthly body* of Christ was received up into heaven. Already both the learned and unlearned have believed in the resurrection of the *flesh* and its ascension to the heavenly places, while only a very few either of the educated or uneducated are still staggered by it. (ibid.)

Far be it from us to fear that the omnipotence of the Creator cannot, for the resuscitation and reanimation of our bodies, recall all the portions which have been consumed by beasts or fire, or have been dissolved into dust or ashes, or have decomposed into water, or even evaporated into the air. (XXII.20.498 in ibid.)

Anselm (1033–1109)

The future resurrection of the dead is clearly proved. For if man is to be perfectly restored, the restoration should make him such as he would have been had he never sinned.... Therefore, as man, had he not sinned, was to have been transferred with the *same body* to an immortal state, so when he shall be restored, it must properly be *with his own body as he lived in this world*. (*CDH*, II.III in *SABW*, 241)

I do not think mortality inheres in the essential nature of man, but only as corrupted. Since, had man never sinned, and had immortality been unchangeably confirmed, he would have been as really man: and, when the dying rise again, incorruptible, *they will be no less really men*. For, if mortality was an essential attribute of human nature, then he who was immortal could not be man. (II.XI, in ibid., 255–56)

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)

The soul does not take an airy or heavenly body, or a body of another organic constitution, but a human body composed of *flesh and bones* and the same members enjoyed at present. (*CT*, 153 in Gilby, *STAPT*, 764)

They have not believed in the resurrection of the body, and have strained to twist the words of Holy Scripture to mean a spiritual resurrection, a resurrection from sin through grace.…

That St. Paul believed in a bodily resurrection is clear.… To deny this, and *to affirm a purely spiritual resurrection, is against the Christian Faith*. (*SCG*, 79 in ibid., 662)

By conjunction to a soul numerically the same, *the man will be restored to matter numerically the same*. [Therefore,] although this corporeality yields to nothingness when the human body is corrupted, it cannot, for all that, be an obstacle to the body's rising with numerical identity.… [Hence,] it is clear that *man returns numerically the same both by reason of the permanence of the rational soul and by reason of the unity of matter*. (*SCG*, IV.81.6–7, 10)

Reformation Confessions

The Formula of Concord (1577)

This great Lutheran confession says, "We believe, teach and confess … the chief articles of our faith (of Creation, of Redemption, of Sanctification, and the Resurrection of the ***flesh***). (in Schaff, ***CC***, 3.98)

This same human nature of ours (that is his own work) Christ has redeemed, the same (inasmuch as it is his own work) he sanctifies, the *same [human nature] doth he raise from the dead*, and with great glory (as being his own) doth he crown it. (in ibid., 3.99)

The Saxon Visitation Articles (1592)

These articles, prepared by Aegidius Hunnius (1550–1603) and other Lutheran theologians in Saxony, declare:

By this personal union [of Christ's two natures], and the exaltation which followed it, Christ, according to the *flesh*, is placed at the right hand of God, and has received power in heaven and earth, and is made partaker of all the divine majesty, honor, power, and glory. (in ibid., 3.183)

The French Confession of Faith (1559)

This confession, prepared by John Calvin and his student Antoine de la Roche Chandieu (1534–1591) states:

> Although Jesus Christ, in rising from the dead, bestowed immortality upon *his body*, yet he did not take away from it the truth of *its nature*, and we so consider him in his divinity that we do not despoil him of his humanity. (in ibid., 368–69)

The Belgic Confession (1561)

This confession, composed in French for the churches in Flanders and the Netherlands, was adopted by the Reformed Synod at Emden (1571) and the Synod of Dort (1618–1619).

> Though he [Christ] hath by his resurrection given immortality to [humans], nevertheless he hath not changed the reality of his human nature; forasmuch as our salvation and resurrection also depend on the *reality of his body*. (in ibid., 404)

> Finally, we believe, according to the Word of God … that our Lord Jesus Christ will come from heaven, corporally and visibly, as he ascended, with great glory and majesty, to declare himself Judge of the quick and the dead.… For *all the dead shall be raised out of the earth, and their souls joined and united with their proper bodies, in which they formerly lived*. (in ibid., 433–34)

The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion (1571)

These articles of the Church of England were revised for the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States in 1801. They both declare,

> Christ did in truth *rise* again from death, and *took again his body, with flesh and bones*, and all things appertaining to the perfection of Man's nature; wherewith he ascended into Heaven, and there sitteth, until he return to judge all Men at the last day. (in ibid, 489)

Post-Reformation Confessions

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1648)

This confessional standard for orthodox Presbyterians affirms:

> [Christ] was crucified, and died; was buried, and remained under the power of death, *yet saw no corruption*. On the third day *he arose from the dead, with the same body in which he suffered; with which he ascended into heaven*, and there sitteth at the right hand of his Father. (in ibid., 620–21)

Declaration of the Congregational Union (1833)

Early Congregationalists and Baptists also held to the physical, material nature of the Resurrection. The Declaration of the Congregational Union of England and Wales speaks of Christ being "manifested in the ***flesh***" and, "after his death and resurrection, he ascended up into heaven." In addition, ***"The bodies of the dead will be raised again"*** (in ibid., 731–33).

The New Hampshire Baptist Confession (1833) likewise acknowledged the material nature of the resurrection body, speaking of ***raising "the dead from the grave"*** where the material corpse was buried (in ibid., 748). Other Anabaptist and Baptist groups also affirmed the literal physical nature of the resurrection body (see ibid., 749ff.).

Not until 1552 was the phrase "resurrection of the body" admitted to the Apostles' Creed as an alternate reading for "the resurrection of the flesh." Furthermore, even here "the terms ***flesh*** and ***body*** were regarded as equivalent"; the phrase "resurrection of the flesh" is a "legitimate expression of the Biblical doctrine of the resurrection" (in Schep, ***NRB***, 222, 227). Affirming the resurrection of the flesh is not only the biblical teaching on the Resurrection, but it also has been the universal confession of the orthodox church down through the centuries.

CONCLUSION

There is a firm biblical, theological, and historical basis for the belief that the souls of both believers and unbelievers survive death and exist consciously

between death and resurrection. These souls will be raised immortal into the same physical bodies in which they existed before death.
There will be two resurrections. The first is of believers and will occur ***before*** the thousand-year reign of Christ; the second is of unbelievers and will happen ***after*** the millennium.[124]
The believer's resurrection body will be physical ***as well as*** immortal and incorruptible. Believers will spend an eternity of bliss in their physical, glorified resurrection bodies;[125] unbelievers will experience eternal woe in their never-dying resurrected bodies.[126]

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CHAPTER NINE

THE FINAL STATE OF THE SAVED (HEAVEN)

The biblical words for "heaven" (Heb: ***shamayim***; Gk: ***ouranos***) are used in several different ways. There are three heavens: The first is the sky above us (earth's atmosphere—Matt. 6:26), the second is the stars (the realm of space—24:29), and the third is the very abode of God, called "the third heaven" or "paradise" (2 Cor. 12:2, 4). It is in this third sense that "heaven" is used in this chapter, namely, as God's dwelling place, the final destiny of the righteous.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR THE DOCTRINE OF HEAVEN

The Bible is filled with references to heaven. Though many questions are left open, making heaven the subject of a wide range of speculation, there are also many truths we do know about it.

Heaven in the Present: A Place of Bliss for Departed Spirits

Heaven now is a real place of departed spirits, the place of bliss in God's presence where believers go when they die. Enoch entered heaven when "God took him" to be with Himself (Gen. 5:24). Elijah also "went up to heaven in a whirlwind" (2 Kings 2:11). Jesus went there at death after saying, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."[1] A repentant thief did also after Jesus said to him, "Today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). Paul referred to it as being "absent from the body" and "present with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8 nkjv). Heaven is God's home; Jesus spoke of "Our Father in heaven" (Matt. 6:9; cf. 5:16) and said it was an actual place, reminding His disciples:

> In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare *a place* for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be *where I am*. (
> John 14:2–3
>)

Jesus said He came from heaven and would return there: "No one has ever gone into heaven [bodily] except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man" (3:13);[2] "The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all" (v. 31); "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he wll live forever" (6:51).
Jesus told Mary Magdalene, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God' " (20:17). This He did at His ascension, when the angels said He would return the same way He'd just departed.[3]
Angels also are said to be "in heaven" (Matt. 18:10), to come "from heaven" (28:2), to dwell "in heaven" (Mark 13:32), and return to heaven (Luke 2:15). In heaven is God's "throne" (Matt. 5:34), where Christ sits at His "right hand" (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 1:3), where angels surround Him in praise and adoration (Rev. 4–5), and where the seraphim sing the tersanctus: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty" (Isa. 6:3).

That God dwells in heaven does not mean He is localized and not omnipresent.[4] Solomon prayed: "The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you" (1

Kings 8:27). God is everywhere, as the psalmist revealed: “Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there” (139:7–9). The reality of heaven as God’s dwelling simply means that there is a place (like the old covenant tabernacle and temple) where God is manifested in a special way, a center or “throne” from which He rules the universe. Whether heaven is within the physical universe or in another physical dimension, it is an actual place where the righteous will “see his face” (Rev. 22:4).

Heaven in the Future: The New Heaven and the New Earth

According to Revelation, after the resurrection, after all believing human spirits have been reunited with their bodies, heaven will descend to earth[5] in the form of the New Jerusalem:

> Then I [John] saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. (21:1–3)

Heaven has foundations, gates, and dimensions:

> One of the seven angels … came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.…
>
> The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. The city was laid out like a square, as

long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long. He measured its wall and it was 144 cubits thick, by man’s measurement, which the angel was using. (vv. 9–12, 14–17)

The Constituents of Heaven

The innumerable occupants of heaven, in addition to the triune God, include angels and the great multitude of the redeemed from all ages.

The Triune God

At the heart of heaven is the throne of God, which John described:

After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.” At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne. (4:1–3)

Not only is God the Father in heaven, but so is God the Son: “The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals” (5:5). Paul spoke of “Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—[and] is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us” (Rom. 8:34). John added, “My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One” (1 John 2:1). In heaven Jesus lives forever, with a permanent priesthood: “He is able to save completely those who come to God through him because he always lives to intercede for them” (Heb. 7:25).

The blessed Holy Spirit of God is likewise in heaven. John described Him symbolically as “the seven spirits before his [God’s] throne” (Rev. 1:4). This is the “sevenfold Spirit” of Isaiah 11:2: “The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.”[6]
When we get to heaven, we will see Christ in His physical glorified resurrection body with our physical eyes, and we will see the essence of God with our spiritual eyes. This is called the Beatific Vision.[7]

Good Angels

Further,

> Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. (
>
> Rev. 4:4–6
>
>)

Redeemed Humans

In addition to God and a great multitude of angels, there are incalculable redeemed human beings:

> After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. (
>
> 7:9
>
>)

The writer of Hebrews added,

You [believers] have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect. (12:22–23)

Indeed, John "heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them" (Rev. 5:13) singing in heaven to the Lamb.

The Duration of Heaven

Heaven will endure as long as God does, and God is eternal; heaven is where we will experience eternal life in its fullness.[8] Further, heaven is the fulfillment of God's promised everlasting life to believers, "the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time" (Titus 1:2). Jesus said, "The righteous [will go] to eternal life" (Matt. 25:46), and John declared, "I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: 'To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, ***for ever and ever***!' " (Rev. 5:13).

The Nature of Heaven

The following is some of what is known about heaven from Scripture's extensive witness.

Heaven Is a Place Far Better Than Earth

Paul wrote, “I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far” (Phil. 1:23); “we … would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:8).

Heaven Is a Place of No Sorrow

John foretold, “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (Rev. 21:4).
Paul added,

[God] comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. (
2 Cor. 1:4–5
)

Heaven Is a Place of No Curse

In Genesis, God said that by Adam’s sin the world was cursed:

Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, “You must not eat of it”: Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. (
3:17–19
)

But in the paradise to come, “No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him” (Rev. 22:3).

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that *the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay* and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. (
Rom. 8:18–21
)

Heaven Is a Place of No Darkness

People of this sinful world love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil (John 3:19). By contrast, John said of heaven, “The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.… On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there” (Rev. 21:23, 25).

Heaven Is a Place of No Sickness

“He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more … mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (v. 4). “On each side of the river [of the water of life] stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations” (22:2).

Heaven Is a Place of No Death

“There will be no more death” (Rev. 21:4).

When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory” (

1 Cor. 15:53–54

).

Heaven Is a Place of Perfect Bodies

Paul declared that by “the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, [God] will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body” (Phil. 3:21)—immortal, imperishable, and glorious:

We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable,

and the mortal with immortality. (
1 Cor. 15:51–53
)

These perfect bodies will never degenerate, decay, or die:

Those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection. (
Luke 20:35–36
)

Heaven Is a Place of Completed Salvation

As we have seen,[9] salvation comes in three stages: justification (salvation from the past ***penalty*** of sin), sanctification (salvation from the present ***power*** of sin), and glorification (salvation from the future ***presence*** of sin). This last stage, glorification, is heaven.
John described it this way:

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! … Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. (
1 John 3:1–2
)

Paul said, "Those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, ***he also glorified***" (Rom. 8:30), for "when Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory" (Col. 3:4).

Heaven Is a Place of Many Mansions

Listen to these words of Jesus:

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. (
John 14:1–3
)

Sing the wondrous love of Jesus,
Sing His mercy and His grace;
In the mansions bright and blessed
He’ll prepare for us a place.[10]

There will be heavenly homes, magnificent mansions, and palatial palaces—all prepared for those who follow the Lord.

Heaven Is a Place of Perpetual Worship

Eternity is described as a heavenly temple (Rev. 21:3) where the angels worship (Isa. 6:3), where “the living … creatures … do not rest day or night, saying: Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!” and where the elders “fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever” (Rev. 4:8, 10 nkjv; cf. 5:13–14).

Heaven Is a Place of Everlasting Service

John’s vision declares: “The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and ***his servants will serve him***” (Rev. 22:3). Believers will not be idle in heaven; like the angels, we will be engaged in ceaseless activity for God.

Heaven Is a Place of Abundant Life

Jesus said, “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10 kjv). Paul told Timothy that “godliness is

profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come" (1 Tim. 4:8 kjv). Indeed, John says that in the paradise to come there is a tree of life and a river of life:

He shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. (Rev. 22:1–2 kjv)

Heaven Is a Place of Overflowing Joy

Here on earth we are given a foretaste of what is to come because we serve "God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment" (1 Tim. 6:17; cf. Ps. 16:11). Jesus said that the angels already rejoice in heaven because of what God is doing for us: "There is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:10).

Heaven Is a Place of Grand Reunion

Brothers, *we do not want you* to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or *to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope*. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words. (1 Thess. 4:13–18)

Christians never say a final good-bye; rather, it's "So long—I'll see you there."

Heaven Is the Place of the Great Heavenly Wedding

People love weddings, as well we should—every earthly wedding is a picture, a temporal reflection, of the great heavenly wedding to come. Paul said of marriage, “This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (Eph. 5:32 nkjv). There will be no earthly marriage in heaven (cf. Matt. 22:30), but there will be something far better—the heavenly marriage of the Lamb.

I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. (Rev. 21:2–3)

Heaven Is a Celestial City

“None of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone” (Rom. 14:7). We shall all be together as residents in a heavenly city, in “Mount Zion … the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God.” We will be with “thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, [in] the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven” (Heb. 12:22–23).

Love divine, so great and wondrous,
Deep and mighty, pure, sublime!
Coming from the heart of Jesus,
Just the same through tests of time.
He the pearly gates will open,
So that I may enter in;
For He purchased my redemption
And forgave me all my sin.[11]

Heaven Is a Place of Incredible Beauty

In regard to what we have here, Paul said, “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor. 2:9). How much greater will heaven be? The Old Testament speaks of “the beauty of holiness” (1 Chron. 16:29 nkjv), of which heaven is the apex. John described heaven as the jewel-studded, golden-paved city of God (Rev. 21:18–21). This veritable cornucopia of aesthetic delight is literally beyond description.

Heaven Is a Place of Moral Perfection

The present world is laden with layers of evil; even the apostle Paul considered himself the chief of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). In heaven, though, every believer will be made absolutely perfect, for “when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears” (1 Cor. 13:10; cf. 1 John 3:2).

“Nothing impure will ever enter it [heaven], nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Rev. 21:27). Therefore, we are to “make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14). Heaven is a place of ultimate and complete sanctification.

Heaven Is a Place of Eternal Rest

Ever since the Fall, life has been filled with toil (Gen. 3:17–19)—even the spiritual life is a struggle (Eph. 6:11–12). Jesus said, “As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work” (John 9:4). On earth, we are the church militant; in heaven, we will be the church at rest. Hebrews says, “There remains … a Sabbath-rest for the people of God” (4:9), and the Spirit said to John, “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.… They will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them” (Rev. 14:13).

Heaven Is a Place of Eternal Reward

We are not saved ***by*** works, but we are saved ***for*** good works:[12]

By grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (

Eph. 2:8–10

)

If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. (

1 Cor. 3:12–14

)

Jesus promised, "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done" (Rev. 22:12). Those who have followed will hear Him say, "Well done, my good servant!" (Luke 19:17).

Heaven Is a Place of Perfect Knowledge

[Now] we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; *then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known*. (

1 Cor. 13:9–12

)

Heaven Is a Place of Indescribable Glory

Paul said, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18). Trying to describe his vision of heaven's glory, he wrote:

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. And I know that this man … was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell. (

2 Cor. 12:2–4

)

In a passage that narrates the Transfiguration,

> [Jesus] took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.... While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!” (Matt. 17:1–2, 4–5).

Ezekiel described a dazzling display of the divine: “The appearance of the living creatures was like burning coals of fire or like torches. Fire moved back and forth among the creatures; it was bright, and lightning flashed out of it” (Ezek. 1:13).
When Moses experienced only a passing glimpse of God’s glory, the Israelites had to cover his head because of the blinding brightness of its glow (Ex. 34:29–35); to them “the glory of the Lord looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain” (24:17).

Heaven Is the Place of the Beatific Vision

The Beatific Vision is the blessed vision that Moses sought, God forbade, Jesus promised, and John described—***seeing God face-to-face***.

Mortal Man Cannot See God

“No one has seen God at any time,” wrote John in his gospel (1:18 nkjv). When Moses pleaded, “Show me your glory,”

> The Lord said, “I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But you cannot see my

face, for *no one may see me and live*….

Then the Lord said, “There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen” (

Ex. 33:18–23

).

Immortal Man Will See God

However, immortal human beings will see God face-to-face; John declared that in heaven “***they will see his face***, and his name will be on their foreheads” (Rev. 22:4). Again, Paul explained, “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; ***then we shall see face to face***. Now I know in part; ***then I shall know fully***, even as I am fully known” (1 Cor. 13:12). The psalmist added, “In righteousness I will see your face; when I awake, ***I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness***” (17:15). As John said, “When he appears, we shall be like him, for ***we shall see him as he is***” (1 John 3:2).

The term ***Beatific Vision***, this face-to-face experience with God, comes from the word for ***beatitude***, meaning “blessed” or “happy.” This vision is the ultimate fulfillment of all divine aspirations—it will be a direct, complete, and final revelation of God in which the believer will see the divine essence. Of the many who have declared this vision of God, Thomas Aquinas spoke repeatedly of the glory of this ultimate experience;[13] Benedict XII (r. 1334–1342) said that the divine essence would be seen by direct intuition (face-to-face); and the Council of Vienne (1311–1312) insisted that since it transcended a human’s natural capacity, the Beatific Vision is only possible by a supernatural act of God (see Cross, ***ODCC***, 146).

There are several important characteristics and consequences of the Beatific Vision that we can derive from Scripture and reason.

The Beatific Vision Brings Direct Knowledge of God

Paul said our present knowledge of God is indirect (1 Cor. 13:12); now, God is

not known directly but through His creation, “for since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, ***being understood from what has been made***” (Rom. 1:20). However, in heaven we will see and know fully (1 John 3:2); what is now dim for us will become bright; what we now know indirectly we will know directly. All we know now about the infinite God is known through finite images, which is why our knowledge is ***analogous***.[14] In the Beatific Vision’s unmediated knowledge, the divine essence will inform our finite minds; we will have a full and direct knowledge of God Himself.

The Beatific Vision Brings Perfect Knowledge of God

This ultimate knowledge of God will be perfect (1 Cor. 13:9–10); our partial knowledge will turn into whole knowledge; our incomplete understanding will be transformed into complete understanding. Whatever we can know about God, we will know, and we will know it perfectly.
This does not mean we will know God infinitely. Because we will always be finite, so will our knowledge be finite. Only God has an infinite knowledge of the infinite;[15] even in heaven our knowledge will be finite. ***We will perfectly apprehend God, but will never completely comprehend Him***. God will always be ineffable.[16]

The Beatific Vision Brings Perfect Love of God

Jesus said, “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment” (Matt. 22:37–38). This kind of love is never fully attained in this life, but it will be in the next:

> We are told that our final destiny consists in beholding God immediately, face to face, and as He really is … even as He knows Himself; that it [the Beatific Vision] consists also in loving Him even as He loves Himself. (Garrigou-LaGrange, *P*, 379)

"God is love" (1 John 4:16), and to know Him is to know His very essence. To know perfect love is to be able to love perfectly, and "we love Him because He first loved us" (v. 19 nkjv).

The Beatific Vision Makes Sin Impossible

Knowledge of God is knowledge of an infinite good;[17] once one directly sees infinite good, it will no longer be possible for him to do evil,[18] for to be directly informed in one's mind by absolute good is to become completely conformed to it. Hence, the Beatific Vision makes sin impossible. Just as seeing absolute beauty will spoil one forever from longing for anything ugly, likewise, beholding the absolutely holy will overpower any attraction to or desire for the unholy.

The Beatific Vision Fulfills Our Freedom

Though heaven makes sin impossible, it does not destroy but instead ***fulfills*** our freedom. Heaven completes our freedom to completely love God, just as (analogously) marriage here on earth frees us to love the one to whom we belong. True freedom is not the freedom to do evil, but the freedom to do good. The essence of free will is self-determination, and if one's self chooses to do only the good, then the fulfillment of it in a place where only good can be done is not the destruction of freedom, but the completion of it.[19]
God is both free and unablee to sin; it will be likewise for us when we become most godlike, for the perfection of our freedom is the freedom ***from*** sinning, not the freedom ***of*** sinning. The best freedom is the freedom to do the best; beholding and loving the absolute best (which makes sin impossible) is the best thing we can ever do.[20]

The Beatific Vision Is Given Only to Believers

It is important to note that the Beatific Vision is not forced on anyone against his will: Only those who seek God will see God (Heb. 11:6). It is those who choose to fall in love that are overwhelmed by it; no one can be forced to love another.

Love, like God's saving grace, is irresistible, but only on the willing,[21] for irresistible force on the unwilling is not grace but assault. Once again, as C.S. Lewis aptly stated:

> The Irresistible and the Indisputable are the two weapons which the very nature of His [God's] scheme forbids Him to use.... Merely to override a human will ... would be for Him useless. He cannot ravish. He can only woo. (*SL*, 46)

The Beatific Vision Brings a Permanent State of Perfection

Just as God is changeless perfection,[22] even so the perfection of beatified saints will be changeless. Salvation from the presence of sin (glorification) will save us from the damage and distortion that sin wreaks in our lives. Our present growth in perfection (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18) is due to our not yet having reached the ultimate state of perfection. One no longer needs to be changed into what he has ultimately achieved; heaven (and the Beatific Vision it brings) will make permanent (by glorification) what is only in process in this life (through sanctification).[23] The more we become like God, the more unchangeably we become like His moral attributes.[24]

The Beatific Vision Brings a Dynamic State of Perfection

Being in an immutable state of perfection (in heaven) is not to be confused with being in a static state. God is immutable but not immobile;[25] likewise, in heaven we will be immutably (though finitely) perfect without being immobile (static). God is the Unmoved Mover,[26] but He is not an Unmoving Mover. In fact, as Pure Actuality,[27] He is the most active being in the universe (He is Pure

Actuality, having no potentiality). God is active in sustaining everything in existence,[28] in His sovereignty (governance) over the entire world,[29] through His providence in the world,[30] and by His miraculous intervention in human affairs.[31] God also interacts with the prayers of all the saints and saves all sinners who repent.[32] Note, though, that while God is interactive, He is not reactive but proactive; as Isaiah said, before we call, God answers (Isa. 65:24). Likewise, when we reach the most godlike state of absolute perfection possible (via the Beatific Vision), we do not become less active but more active. We will not be God's frozen chosen—we will be His mobile millions, actively worshiping and serving Him (cf. Rev. 4–5). Nevertheless, our action will not be that of striving but of enjoying, not of seeking but of treasuring what was found. Our minds will be active, not in searching for truth but in rejoicing over the infinite truth discovered (1 Cor. 13:12). Our intellectual and spiritual action in heaven will not be that of desiring God but of delighting in Him.
The hymnist said it eloquently:

> Face to face with Christ, my Savior,
> Face to face—what will it be
> When with rapture I behold Him,
> Jesus Christ who died for me?
> Face to face—O blissful moment!
> Face to face—to see and know;
> Face to face with my Redeemer,
> Jesus Christ who loves me so.
> Face to face I shall behold Him,
> Far beyond the starry sky.
> Face to face in all His glory,
> I shall see Him by and by.[33]

One day, while meditating on this topic, these words came to me:

In That Great Day …

The mountains shall be lowered
And the crooked things made straight
When we see the Lord of glory
And pass through the open gate.
The Lord Himself will tell us:
“I have saved you by my grace.”
And all we once-lost sinners
Will see His wondrous face.
The angels up in glory
Will shout with ecstasy
For ne’er in all the ages
Ere this sight did see.
We’ll have the glory of Jesus;
Our bodies will be the same;
In that great Day
When the Lord of Hosts shall reign.

ANSWERING QUESTIONS ABOUT HEAVEN

As with other ultimate truths, when it comes to heaven there are more questions than answers. Many queries are not addressed in Scripture and must await the final reality itself; in the meantime, we must be content that “the secret things belong to the Lord our God” (Deut. 29:29). Even so, there is nothing to hinder theological speculation, provided it contradicts neither Scripture nor sound reasoning.

Will Those Who Die in Infancy Remain Babies in Heaven?

Probably not. Heaven is a place of maturity and perfection, and babies stunted in

their growth, short of maturity, would not reflect a state of perfection.[34] It seems to better befit God's nature and plan for those who were not granted earthly maturity to attain it in heaven.

Will Everyone Be Equally Blessed in Heaven?

The evidence seems to support a negative answer. Everyone in heaven will be ***fully*** blessed, but not everyone will be ***equally*** blessed. Every believer's cup will be full and running over, but not everyone's cup will be the same size. We determine in time what our capacity for appreciating God will be in eternity.[35] Different persons can listen to the same musical performance and have varying degrees of appreciation because they have developed different capacities for enjoying it; similarly, different people can be in the same heaven and yet have different degrees of enjoyment due to developing different abilities for enjoying God here on earth.

By our temporal obedience we determine our reward in eternity (cf. 2 Cor. 5:10), as Paul clearly explains:

> No one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames. (1 Cor. 3:11–15).[36]

How Can Heaven Be a Place of Glory to God and Yet of Reward for Us?

The Bible seems to present contradictory motifs: (1) the worship of God, and (2) rewards for us. How can we be working for rewards and yet doing all things for

God’s glory (1 Cor. 10:31)?
The answer lies in the nature of the reward: If the reward is the capacity to love and serve God more, then these two elements are not contradictory. This seems to be the case in Jesus’ parable of the stewards (Matt. 25:14–30); those who invested their talents were given more, and their master said, “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!”
Indeed, the elders mentioned in Revelation do not strut their crowns on the corner of Glory Street and Hallelujah Avenue:

> They lay their crowns before the throne and say: “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being” (4:10–11).

There is nothing selfish about working for a crown if it is for the privilege of casting it at the feet of Jesus.

Will Believers Have Physical Bodies in Heaven?

Yes.[37] Jesus’ resurrection body was the same physical body in which He died, crucifixion scars and all (cf. Luke 24:39–40; John 20:27). The empty tomb, the scars, the physical touching of His body (cf. Matt. 28:9), calling it “flesh and bones” (Luke 24:39), and His statement that it was the same body that died (John 2:19–21) all demonstrate that His resurrection body was physical. Our resurrection bodies will be like His (Phil. 3:21), and, like Him, we will leave behind an empty grave (John 5:28–29).

Will We Eat in Heaven?

Yes,[38] but for enjoyment, not for sustenance—for pleasure rather than necessity.[39] The physical resurrection body is supernaturally rather than naturally sourced (cf. 1 Cor. 10:4; 15:44); God will have incomparably rich enjoyment for us in heaven even as He has given us great pleasure here on earth.[40] Jesus said to His disciples, “I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father’s kingdom” (Matt. 26:29).

Will We Recognize Loved Ones in Heaven?

Yes. Moses and Elijah were recognized when they appeared from heaven on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:3); Peter even acknowledged them by name (v. 4). There seems to be a personal identity by which we will recognize each other in heaven, as is at least implied in Paul’s comfort of the bereaved among the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 4:13–18) and in Jesus’ response to the Sadducees’ question about the resurrection (Matt. 22:28–30).

Can We Be Married in Heaven?

No, there will be no marriage ceremony or marriage relationship in heaven. This ends at the time of physical death:

> By law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man. (
>
> Rom. 7:2–3
>
>)

How Many People Will Be in Heaven?

Everyone whom God can bring there without violating the free will that He gave them.[41] God desires ***all*** to be saved (2 Peter 3:9; 1 Tim. 2:4), but we cannot know how many will be. Augustine speculated that it would be the same percentage as the angels who fell (one-third; see Rev. 12:9), but the Bible nowhere says this.

Many believe that only a small fraction of all the people who ever lived will be in heaven, based on passages like Matthew 7:13–14:

> Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

However, B. B. Warfield (1851–1921) argued that this is taking such verses out of context ("ATFTBS" in ***BTS***); he maintained that they refer to the ***immediate*** and ***local*** response to Jesus' message, not to the ultimate and universal statistics of heaven. Indeed, granting that all who die in infancy go to heaven,[42] that life begins at conception,[43] and that the mortality rate before the age of accountability[44] down through the millennia has been roughly half of those conceived, it would seem to follow that there will be more people saved than lost. This is to say nothing of much of the world's population ***since the time of Adam*** being still alive at this time;[45] a great revival before Christ's return could sweep even more souls into God's kingdom.

Finally, by analogy with the angels, two-thirds of which did not rebel against God (Rev. 12:4), one could reason that perhaps two-thirds of all humans will be saved. This also is merely speculative, but we do know that "the Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9; cf. 1 Tim. 2:4). Once again: ***There will be as many people in heaven as God can get***

there without violating the free choice that He freely gave His creatures.[46]

Is Heaven a Place or a State of Mind?

Liberal theologians have long insisted that heaven is a state of mind, not a place; thus, those in the right state of mind are in heaven now—here on earth. However, while it's true that unless one enters the right state of mind and heart—a state of belief in God[47]—he will not go to heaven, it is ***untrue*** that everyone in this state of mind is already there. ***Heaven is much more than a state of mind: It is a real place***. Jesus used the word ***place*** three times in regard to heaven in John 14:2–4;[48] He also taught us to pray to "our Father ***in heaven***," and that His will would be accomplished "on earth as it is ***in heaven***" (Matt. 6:9–10). Heaven is a different place than earth (cf. Rev. 21:9–27).[49]

Where Is Heaven Located?

Presently, before the final resurrection, heaven is the abode of righteous human souls and angelic spirits in God's presence (2 Cor. 5:8; Heb. 12:23), where Christ sits on the right hand of God's throne (1:3). This may be somewhere in a far corner of the space-time world, shrouded from human view behind a cloud of God's glory, or in an entirely different physical dimension.

In favor of heaven being in the space-time world, some have cited Job's reference to God coming from the north (Job 37:22; cf. 26:7). Plus, Jesus ascended bodily into the sky and off into space (Acts 1:10–11), and He will return to the same place (the Mount of Olives), in the same physical body, from which He left (Zech. 14:4).

In favor of heaven being in another dimension, others have noted that Jesus seemed to step in and out of this space-time dimension when in His resurrection body (Luke 24:31; John 20:26). Further, contemporary science presents a

multidimensional universe that allows for many dimensions beyond the customary three.

Eventually, after the Second Coming,[50] heaven (the Holy City) will descend to be part of “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 21:1–2). Peter exhorted believers:

> Look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. (
>
> 2 Peter 3:12–13
>
>)

This will be the eventual fulfillment of the prayer that Jesus taught His disciples to pray (Matt. 6:10): In that day there literally will be heaven on earth. For He asks us to pray: “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

Will We Continue to Learn and Morally Improve in Heaven?

Christian theologians have held both views.
Those who hold to eternal human process cite texts like Ephesians 3:10–11:

> His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Also, 1 Peter 1:12 states:

> It was revealed to them [the prophets] that they were not serving themselves but you [later believers], when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.

From such passages it is inferred that even heaven is a great university wherein we continue to learn about (and grow in) God.

On the other hand, those who deny heavenly spiritual progress point to several factors.

First, heaven is a place of perfection, not progress (cf. 1 Cor. 13:2). Heaven represents rest and attainment, not striving (cf. John 9:4; Rev. 14:13).

Second, heaven is a place of receiving, not working for, rewards (cf. 1 Cor. 3:11ff.; Rev. 22:12).

Third, the sense of urgency and finality about this life (cf. Heb. 9:27) supports the conclusion that heaven completes and finalizes what is done here and now. As Jesus said to Peter, "Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16:19; cf. 18:18).

Fourth, and finally, the very nature of the Beatific Vision as the ultimate and final state of perfection and sinlessness suggests that once we have it, we will no longer be learning;[51] instead, we will be engaged in the eternal experience of resting in, delighting in, and reveling in the incredible and unsurpassable knowledge provided by God's infinite nature.

The one thing heaven will ***not*** be is a place of boredom, which results from falling short of perfection rather than from attaining it. The following chart illustrates the difference:

Moral Perfection on Earth	**Moral Perfection in Heaven**
Changing	Unchanging
Growing	Matured
Striving for	Resting in
Seeking	Enjoying
Desiring of	Delighting in
Our goal	Our reward
Our aim	Our attainment

Paul wrote,

> Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.... I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. (
>
> Phil. 3:12–14
>
>)

Will We Be Able to Explore the Universe in Heaven?

Yes, but in an infinitely higher way than space travelers could. The nature of the Beatific Vision grants this: We will know everything our finite capacity will allow us to know directly through the infinite mind of God. As He knows the entire universe in and through Himself,[52] so will we know the universe by virtue of knowing everything directly in and through His Mind (essence). Hence, with effortless ease, we will be able to explore the entire universe, insofar as it is finitely possible. Such exploration will not be that of ceaseless discovering, but of endless delighting in what we have ***already*** discovered in God.

Will We Experience Time in Heaven?

Here again, there are two views held by orthodox Christians.
The first position says yes, we will experience time in heaven, a conclusion based on passages that speak about eternity being described as, for instance, "day and night" forever (e.g., Rev. 4:8; 7:15), though these ***could*** be figures of speech for an endless eternity.
The second view emphasizes that heaven is the abode of the eternal (nontemporal) God.[53] We, the beatified, will have reached a state of changeless

perfection in which the timeless God directly informs our minds. Because time is a measurement of change according to a before and an after, we cannot be temporal in heaven; if we were temporal, then we would still be changing; however, we will be perfect, and what is perfect does not need to change.[54] If perfection changed, it would have to be either change for the better (we cannot be better than being absolutely perfect) or change for the worse (we cannot get worse in heaven). Since humans in heaven cannot be in time, nor, as finite, can we be absolutely changeless like God, the medieval theologians gave another name to this state: ***aeviternity***. Our state of aeviternity will be one like that of the angels, who are not in time by nature but can be related to it by activity.[55][56]

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE DOCTRINE OF HEAVEN

Like every other major biblical doctrine, heaven is rooted in the very nature and will of God. Particularly, heaven is based in God's omnibenevolence, omniscience, omnisapience, and omnipotence. As the place of ultimate good, heaven was desired by God's omnibenevolence, was conceived by His omniscience, was planned in accordance with His omnisapience, and will be achieved by His omnipotence.

Heaven Follows From God's Omnibenevolence

God, by nature, is all-loving.[57] He does not want anyone to perish (2 Peter 3:9) but desires "all men … to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4 net). "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son" (John 3:16 tlb), who is the sufficient sacrifice for the sins of "the whole world" (1 John 2:2).[58] The love of Christ is manifest in that "one died for all" (2 Cor. 5:14); that is, "He

might taste death for everyone" (Heb. 2:9 nlt). If God loves everyone and wants everyone to be saved, then there must be an eternal place for them. This is why Jesus said, "In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2). In the Bible, this place is called "heaven" (Matt. 6:9).

Heaven Follows From God's Omniscience

Of course, it would be useless for God to prepare a heaven unless He knew in advance that someone was going to be there. Only an omniscient being with infallible foreknowledge of human freedom[59] could know with certainty that any free creatures would accept His offer of salvation.[60] Paul confirms,

> *Those God foreknew he also predestined* to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; *those he justified, he also glorified*. (Rom. 8:29–30)

Peter wrote to those "who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood" (1 Peter 1:2). In accordance with God's foreknowledge of those who would receive Him (cf. John 1:12) and thus be saved, He provided an eternal heaven for their happiness.

Heaven Flows From God's Omnisapience

God is not only all-knowing, He is also all-wise;[61] He not only knows who will be saved, but He also knows how to get them there. This requires omnisapience:

Wisdom chooses the best way to obtain the best end.[62] Since humans were created free, the infinitely wise God ordained the best means to keep them on the track to heaven. Needless to say, this was no small task, since He willed not to violate our choice and yet also assure our ultimate destiny.[63]

Heaven Flows From God's Omnipotence

A plan that transforms sinners and makes them saints cannot be accomplished by natural powers—***only*** the efficacious grace of God can do this.[64] As such, it is God's omnipotence that can guarantee the end from the beginning: "What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do" (Isa. 46:11). It is with this assurance that we can know heaven will have occupants, the exact ones whom God has foreordained will be there.[65] Because of God's omnipotence, Peter was compelled to speak of those "who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:5). The surety of heaven is a confident expectation, not only because God is all-loving and wants to achieve it, but also because He is all-powerful and can do it.[66]

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR THE DOCTRINE OF HEAVEN

In addition to the strong biblical and theological bases for the doctrine of heaven, there is also ample historical support, beginning with the earliest church and continuing through the Reformation into modern times.

Early Fathers

The church's early leaders made numerous references to the final blessed state of believers, beginning with the ante-Nicene fathers.

Ignatius (d. c. 110)

Grace, mercy, and peace from Almighty God, and from Christ Jesus our Lord, His only-begotten Son, "who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from the present evil world," and preserve us unto His heavenly kingdom. (*EIHDA*, introduction)

Justin Martyr (c. 100–c. 165)

We are just as if drawn out from the fire, when purified from our former sins, and [saved] from the affliction and the fiery trial by which the devil and all his coadjutors try us; out of which Jesus the Son of God has promised again to deliver us, and invest us with prepared garments, if we do His commandments; and has undertaken to provide an eternal kingdom. (*DJ*, 116)

Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)

There shall in truth be a common joy consummated to all those who believe unto life, and in each individual shall be confirmed the mystery of the Resurrection, and the hope of incorruption, and the commencement of the eternal kingdom, when God shall have destroyed death and the devil. For that human nature and flesh which has risen again from the dead shall die no more; but after it had been changed to incorruption, and made like to spirit, when the heaven was opened, [our Lord] full of glory offered it (the flesh) to the Father. (*FLWI*, 50)

Cyprian (200–258)

You also, retaining this faith, and meditating day and night, with your whole heart prepared for God, think of the future only, with contempt for the present, that you may be able to come to the fruit of the eternal kingdom, and to the embrace and kiss, and the sight of the Lord. (*EC*, 80)

Methodius (c. 260–311)

The creation, then, after being restored to a better and more seemly state, remains, rejoicing and exulting over the children of God at the resurrection; for whose sake it now groans and travails, waiting itself also for our redemption from the corruption of the body, that, when we have risen and shaken off the mortality of the flesh … and have been set free from sin, it also shall be freed from corruption and be subject no longer to vanity, but to righteousness.… For in reality God did not establish the universe in vain, or to no purpose but destruction, as those weak-minded men say, but to exist, and be inhabited, and continue. Wherefore the earth and the heaven must exist again after the conflagration and shaking of all things. (*FDR*, 1.8)

As the earth is to exist after the present age, there must be by all means inhabitants for it, who shall no longer be liable to death, nor shall marry, nor beget children, but live in all happiness, like the angels, without change or decay. Wherefore it is silly to discuss in what way of life our bodies will then exist, if there is no longer air, nor earth, nor anything else. (ibid., 1.9)

Medieval Fathers

The doctrine of heaven was abundantly confirmed during the Middle Ages.

Augustine (354–430)

“Christ is the head of the Church, which is His body, destined to be with Him in His eternal kingdom and glory” (***OCD***, 1.37.55).

In His promise to the good he says that He will flow down as a river of peace, that is to say, in the greatest possible abundance of peace. With this peace we shall in the end be refreshed; but of this we have spoken abundantly in the preceding book. It is this river in which he says He shall flow down upon those to whom He promises so great happiness, that we may understand that in the region of that felicity, which is in heaven, all things are satisfied from this river. But because there shall thence flow, even upon earthly bodies, the peace of incorruption and immortality, therefore he says that He shall flow down as this river, that He may as it were pour Himself from things above to things beneath, and make men the equals of the angels.

By “Jerusalem,” too, we should understand not that which serves with her children, but that which, according to the apostle, is our free mother, eternal in the heavens. In her we shall be comforted as we pass toil worn from earth’s cards and calamities, and be taken up as her children on her knees and shoulders. Inexperienced and new to

such blandishments, we shall be received into unwonted bliss. There we shall see, and our heart shall rejoice. (*CG*, 20.21)

Sight shall displace faith; and hope shall be swallowed up in that perfect bliss to which we shall come: love, on the other hand, shall wax greater when these others fail. For if we love by faith that which as yet we see not, how much more shall we love it when we begin to see! And if we love by hope that which as yet we have not reached, how much more shall we love it when we reach it! For there is this great difference between things temporal and things eternal, that a temporal object is valued more before we possess it, and begins to prove worthless the moment we attain it, because it does not satisfy the soul, which has its only true and sure resting-place in eternity: an eternal object, on the other hand, is loved with greater ardor when it is in possession than while it is still an object of desire, for no one in his longing for it can set a higher value on it than really belongs to it, so as to think it comparatively worthless when he finds it of less value than he thought; on the contrary, however high the value any man may set upon it when he is on his way to possess it, he will find it, when it comes into his possession, of higher value still. (op. cit., 1.38.42)

John of Damascus (676–754)

We shall therefore rise again, our souls being once more united with our bodies, now made incorruptible and having put off corruption.... Those who have done good will shine forth as the sun with the angels into life eternal, with our Lord Jesus Christ, ever seeing Him and being in His sight and deriving unceasing joy from Him, praising Him with the Father and the Holy Spirit throughout the limitless ages of ages. (*DFO*, 4.27)

Anselm (1033–1109)

If swiftness or endurance, or freedom of body, which naught can withstand, delight thee, they shall be as angels of God—because it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body—in power certainly, though not in nature. If it is a long and sound life that pleases thee, there a healthful eternity is, and an eternal health. For the righteous shall live forever, and the salvation of the righteous is of the Lord. (*CDH*, 30)

If honor and riches, God shall make his good servants rulers over many things; nay, they shall be called sons of God, and gods; where his Son shall be, there they shall be also, heirs indeed of God, and joint-heirs with Christ. (ibid., 31)

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)

He cannot be fathomed by our intellect: but our most perfect knowledge of Him as wayfarers is to know that He is above all that our intellect can conceive, and thus we are united to Him as to something unknown. In heaven, however, we shall see Him by a form which is His essence, and we shall be united to Him as to something known. (*ST*, 6.92.1)

The distinctive principle of the mansions or degrees of beatitude is twofold, namely proximate and remote. The proximate principle is the difference of disposition which will be in the blessed, whence will result the difference of perfection in them in respect to the beatific operation: while the remote principle is the merit by which they have obtained that beatitude. In the first way the mansions are distinguished according to the charity [love] of heaven, which the more perfect it will be in any one, the more will it render him capable of the Divine clarity, on the increase of which will depend the increase in perfection of the Divine vision. In the second way the mansions are distinguished according to the charity of the way. For our actions are meritorious, not by the very substance of the action, but only by the habit of virtue with which they are informed. Now every virtue obtains its meritorious efficacy from charity [love], which has the end itself for its object. Hence the diversity of merit is all traced to the diversity of charity, and thus the charity of the way will distinguish the mansions by way of merit. (ibid., 6.93.3)

Reformation Theologians

The great Reformers likewise held firmly to the scriptural and traditional doctrine of heaven. Their unique contribution was to stress the simplicity of the plan of salvation by which people arrive at this final place of ultimate bliss.

Martin Luther (1483–1546)

The coming of God's Kingdom to us occurs in two ways; first, here in time through the Word and faith; and secondly, in eternity forever through revelation. Now we pray for both these things, that it may come to those who are not yet in it, and, by daily increase, to us who have received the same, and hereafter in eternal life. All this is nothing else than saying: Dear Father, we pray, give us first Thy Word, that the Gospel be preached properly throughout the world; and secondly, that it be received in faith, and work and live in us, so that through the Word and the power of the Holy Ghost Thy kingdom may prevail among us, and the kingdom of the devil be put down, that he may have no right or power over us, until at last it shall be utterly destroyed, and sin, death, and hell shall be exterminated, that we may live forever in perfect righteousness and blessedness. (*LC*, 3)

The manner of the resurrection consists in these words: “Arise, come, stand up, appear, rejoice ye which dwell in the dust of the earth.” I shall arise again, and shall speak with you; this finger wherewith I point must come to me again; everything must come again; for it is written: “God will create a new heaven and a new earth, wherein righteousness shall dwell.”

It will be no arid waste, but a beautiful new earth, where all the just will dwell together. There will be no carnivorous beasts, or venomous creatures, for all such, like ourselves, will be relieved from the curse of sin, and will be to us as friendly as they were to Adam in Paradise. There will be little dogs, with golden hair, shining like precious stones. The foliage of the trees, and the verdure of the grass, will have the brilliancy of emeralds; and we ourselves delivered from our mundane subjection to gross appetites and necessities, shall have the same form as here, but infinitely more perfect.

Our eyes will be radiant as the purest silver, and we shall be exempt from all sickness and tribulation. We shall behold the glorious Creator face to face; and then, what ineffable satisfaction will it be to find our relations and friends among the just! If we were all one here, we should have peace among ourselves, but God orders it otherwise, to the end we may yearn and sigh after the future paternal home, and become weary of this troublesome life. Now, if there be joy in the chosen, so must the highest sorrow and despair be in the damned. (*TT*, 797)

John Calvin (1509–1564)

All that has hitherto been said of our salvation calls upon us to raise our minds towards heaven, that, as Peter exhorts, though we now see not Christ, “yet believing,” we may “rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory,” receiving the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls. For this reason Paul says, that the faith and charity of the saints have respect to the faith and hope which is laid up for them in heaven, (

Col. 1:5

). When we thus keep our eyes fixed upon Christ in heaven, and nothing on earth prevents us from directing them to the promised blessedness, there is a true fulfillment of the saying, “where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (

Matt. 6:21

). (*ICR*, 3.25.1)

Let it be a fixed principle in our hearts that the kingdom of heaven is not the hire of servants, but the inheritance of sons (

Eph. 1:18

), an inheritance obtained by those only whom the Lord has adopted as sons, and obtained for no other cause than this adoption, “The son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman” (

Gal. 4:30

). And hence in those very passages in which the Holy Spirit promises eternal glory as the reward of works, by expressly calling it an inheritance, he demonstrates that it

comes to us from some other quarter. Thus Christ enumerates the works for which he bestows heaven as a recompense, while he is calling his elect to the possession of it, but he at the same time adds, that it is to be possessed by right of inheritance (Matt. 25:34). (ibid., 3.18.2)

Post-Reformation Teachers

Space does not permit an extensive listing of citations from the church's teachers of this period. Since the abundance of their testimony itself is fairly common knowledge, a few references will suffice.

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758)

The heaven I desired was a heaven of holiness; to be with God, and to spend my eternity in divine love, and holy communion with Christ. My mind was very much taken up with contemplations on heaven, and the enjoyments there; and living there in perfect holiness, humility, and love; and it used at that time to appear a great part of the happiness of heaven, that there the saints could express their love to Christ. (*WJE*, 1.1)

It is no solid objection against God aiming at an infinitely perfect union of the creature with himself, that the particular time will never come when it can be said, the union is now infinitely perfect.… God, in glorifying the saints in heaven with eternal felicity, aims to satisfy his infinite grace or benevolence, by the bestowment of a good infinitely valuable, because eternal: and yet there never will come the moment, when it can be said, that now this infinitely valuable good has been actually bestowed. (*EWGCW*, 2.7)

What can be more reasonable than to believe a man, when he tells us, that he is sent from God to heal the diseases of our souls, and, in order that we may believe him, heals all sorts of men, of all manner of diseases, by a touch or a word; and plainly shows that he can do it when he will, let the disease be what it will? He tells us, that he will deliver us from spiritual and eternal death; that he will raise us from the dead, and give us eternal life; so that we shall live for ever, and not die: and to prove this, he gives evidence that he has power over men's lives, by restoring them after they are dead; and rises from the dead himself. He tells us, that he will bestow heavenly glory upon us; and will translate us to heaven: and, to confirm us in this belief, tells us, that we shall see himself, after his death, ascend into heaven. What more could we desire? (*MOITS*, 1.1.36)

John Wesley (1703–1791)

If they “hold fast the beginning of their confidence steadfast unto the end,” they shall undoubtedly receive the promise of God, reaching through both time and eternity. But here is another snare laid for our feet: While we earnestly pant for that part of the promise which is to be accomplished here, “for the glorious liberty of the children of God,” we may be led unawares from the consideration of the glory which shall hereafter be revealed. Our eye may be insensibly turned aside from that crown which the righteous Judge hath promised to give at that day; “to all that love his appearing”; and we may be drawn away from the view of that incorruptible inheritance which is reserved in heaven for us. (*WJW*, 42.1.10)

Thus saith the Creator and Governor of the universe: “Behold, I make all things new”—all which are included in that expression of the Apostle, “A new heaven and a new earth.” A new heaven: The original word in Genesis is in the plural number; and, indeed, this is the constant language of Scripture; not heaven, but heavens. Accordingly, the ancient Jewish writers are accustomed to reckon three heavens; in conformity to which, the Apostle Paul speaks of his being caught “up into the third heaven.” It is this, the third heaven, which is usually supposed to be the more immediate residence of God; so far as any residence can be ascribed to his omnipresent Spirit, who pervades and fills the whole universe. It is here (if we speak after the manner of men) that the Lord sitteth upon his throne, surrounded by angels and archangels, and by all his flaming ministers. (ibid., 64.5)

Certainly there will be no sorrow in heaven; there all tears will be wiped from our eyes, but if it were possible grief could enter there, we should grieve at that irreparable loss. Irreparable then, but not now. Now, by the grace of God, we may choose the “more excellent way.” Let us now compare this, in a few particulars, with the way wherein most Christians walk. (ibid., 89.8)

Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892)

Oh, to have seen Him in the freshness of His resurrection beauty! And what will He be in His glory, when He comes again the second time, and all His holy angels with Him, when He shall sit upon the throne of His glory, and heaven and earth shall flee away before His face? To His people He will then be “altogether lovely.” Angels will adore Him, saints made perfect will fall on their faces before Him; and we ourselves shall feel that, at last, our heaven is complete. We shall see Him, and being like Him, we shall be satisfied. (*THCWB*, 2)

When we think of seeing Him as He is, and being like Him, how heaven approaches us! We shall soon behold the beatific vision, of which He will be the center and the sun. At the thought thereof our soul takes wing, and our imagination soars aloft, while

> our faith, with eagle eye, beholds the glory. As we think of that glad period, when we shall be with our Beloved for ever, we are ready to swoon away with delight. It is near, far nearer than we think. (ibid.)
>
> Heaven is the place of perfect holiness, the place of sinless service, the place of eternal glory; and there is nothing that will prepare us for heaven like this rest that Jesus gives. Heaven must be in us before we are in heaven; and he who has this rest has heaven begun below. Enoch was virtually in heaven while he walked with God on the earth, and he had only to continue that holy walk to find himself actually in heaven. This world is part of our Lord's great house, of which heaven is the upper story. Some of us may hear the Master's call, "Come up higher," sooner than we think; and then, while we rest in Christ, there we shall rest with Christ. The more we have of this blessed rest now, the better shall we be prepared for the rest that remaineth to the people of God, that eternal "keeping of a Sabbath" in the Paradise above. (*THCIWGYR*, 2)

CONCLUSION

Heaven, the ultimate destiny of the saved, is a place, not merely a state or condition.

Heaven is where God dwells and where there is absolute perfection. Heaven is where all believers will receive the Beatific Vision and, as a consequence, will never be able to sin again—not because their freedom is lost, but because it is fulfilled,[67] for, as with marriage, one's freedom is fulfilled by "forsaking all others" and clinging, in love, solely to one's beloved.

While being a place of perfection, heaven represents not static and immobile perfection, but dynamic and active perfection. Heaven will not include striving for perfection (as we do on earth), but of resting in, delighting in, and enjoying the perfection we have attained through God's indescribable work.

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CHAPTER TEN

THE FINAL STATE OF THE LOST (HELL)

Among many other things, hell has been called cruel and barbarous. As we'll later examine,[1] Bertrand Russell (1872–1970) said that anyone who threatens people with eternal punishment, as Jesus did, is inhumane (***WIANC***, 593–94). Unbelievers in general have questioned both hell's existence and justice; even some otherwise evangelical Christians, such as John Stott (b. 1925), have denied it. However, mainstream orthodox Christianity, both Catholic and Protestant, has defended the reality and equity of hell.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR THE DOCTRINE OF HELL

The existence of hell is supported by many arguments from both the authority of God's Word and the use of human reason. Scripture contains numerous emphatic affirmations of the doctrine of hell.

Terms Used for the Place of Ultimate Damnation

The Old Testament Hebrew word for ***hell*** is ***sheol***, which means "the unseen world." While ***sheol*** is often used of the grave, wherein the body is unseen, it also sometimes refers to the world of spirits.[2] The New Testament Greek word for ***hell*** is ***hades***, which usually signifies a place of departed wicked spirits.

In addition, ***gehenna*** is often translated using the word ***hell***;[3] the Valley of Gehenna was a putrid dump outside Jerusalem that burned perpetually. In reference to the eternal damnation of fallen angels, the New Testament also uses the word ***tartaroô*** (2 Peter 2:4); Tartarus was envisioned by the Greeks as a subterranean place even lower than hades (see Arndt and Gingrich, ***GELNT***, 813).

Old Testament Teaching on Hell

The doctrine of hell, like the doctrine of the Trinity,[4] was revealed progressively: more implied (implicit) in the Old Testament and more developed (explicit) in the New Testament.

Genesis 3:15

From the very beginning, hell is implied in the curse on the serpent (Satan): "I [God] will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; ***he will crush your head***, and you will strike his heel." As we learn later, the devil's final defeat will come when he is cast into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:10; cf. Rom. 16:20).

Psalm 9:17

"The wicked return to the grave [Heb: ***sheol***], all the nations that forget God."

This word for ***hell*** and its translation as ***hades*** in the Septuagint[5] often mean "the grave,"[6] but some passages seem to go beyond this, suggesting something deeper into "the unseen world." Deuteronomy 32:22, for instance, speaks of the "lowest hell" (nkjv). At any rate, since death is the soul's point of departure from the body,[7] there is more involved in hell than the body's burial in a grave—***death is also the soul's entrance into the spiritual realm***.

Psalm 16:10–11

You will not abandon me [David] to the grave [*sheol*], nor will you let your Holy One [Jesus Christ] see decay. You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

Just as in the Old Testament (here as elsewhere) the word ***sheol*** means more than the grave for a believer,[8] so it means more than the grave for an unbeliever. Specifically, this includes the spiritual world, to which the grave is merely the entrance.

Daniel 12:2

"Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, ***others to shame and everlasting contempt***."

Isaiah 66:22–24

"As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me," declares the Lord, "so will your name and descendants endure. From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me," says the Lord. "And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; *their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched*, they will be loathsome to all mankind."

[9]

Intertestamental Jewish Belief About Hell

In the era between the Old and New Testaments,[10] Jewish religious sources referenced hell. The writer of 4 Maccabees said:

> Thou for our cruel murder shalt suffer at the hands of divine justice sufficient torment by fire for ever.... Thou for thy impiety and thy cruelty shalt endure torments with end ... [in] eternal doom.... The divine justice delivers thee unto a more rapid and eternal fire and torments which shall not leave hold on thee to all eternity.... A great struggle and peril of the soul awaits in eternal torment those who transgress the ordinance of God. (
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> 9:9
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[11]

Flavius Josephus on Hell

In a similarity with statements that Christ made,[12] the Jewish historian Josephus (c. 37–100), a contemporary of Jesus, wrote a “Discourse to the Greeks Concerning Hades”:

> Hades is a place in the world not regularly finished; a subterraneous region, where the light of this world does not shine; from which circumstances, that in this place the light does not shine, it cannot be but there must be in it perpetual darkness. This region is allowed as a place of custody for souls, in which angels are appointed as

guardians to them, who distribute to them temporary punishment, agreeable to every one's behaviour and manners.

In this region there is a certain place set apart, as a lake of unquenchable fire, wherein we suppose no one hath hitherto been cast; but it is prepared for a day afore-determined by God, in which a righteous sentence shall deservedly be passed upon all men.... [They shall receive] this everlasting punishment, as having been the causes of defilement; while the just shall obtain an incorruptible and never-dying kingdom. These are now confined in Hades, but not in the same place wherein the unjust are confined....

[God allots] to the lovers of wicked works eternal punishment. To these belong the unquenchable fire, and that without end, and a certain fiery worm never dying, and not destroying the body, but continuing its eruption out of the body with never ceasing grief.

Jesus' Teachings on the Existence of Hell

Perhaps the strongest of all arguments for hell as a place of punishment for those (angels and humans) who reject God is that the Lord Jesus Christ, second person of the Holy Trinity,[13] repeatedly affirmed its existence. Indeed, He had more to say about hell than He did about heaven.

Matthew 5:29–30

If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.
[14]

Matthew 10:28

"Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell."

Matthew 11:23

“And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day.”

Matthew 13:40–41

“As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil.”

Matthew 13:49–50

Jesus added of those who reject Him, “This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Matthew 22:13

“Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ ”

Matthew 23:15, 33

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are.... You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?

Matthew 25:41

In His Mount Olivet Discourse, our Lord declared, “Then he [the King] will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’ ”[15]

Mark 9:43–48

If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where their “worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.”

Luke 12:5

“I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell.”

Luke 16:19–31

In a stunningly vivid story that speaks for itself and, unlike parables, uses a person’s actual name (Lazarus), Jesus tells of a man in hell:

There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day.... The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, “Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.”

But Abraham replied, “Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.”

He answered, “Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father’s house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.”

Abraham replied, “They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.”

“No, father Abraham,” he said, “but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.”

He said to him, “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.”

Other New Testament Teachings on the Existence of Hell

In addition to the words of Jesus in the Gospels, other New Testament writings also affirm the doctrine of hell.

2 Thessalonians 1:7–9

Talking of everlasting separation from God, Paul wrote,

This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power.

Hebrews 9:27

The writer of Hebrews added this note of finality: “Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.”

2 Peter 2:4, 9

“If God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment … if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.”

Jude 6

“The angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home—these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day.”

Jude 12–13

These [immoral, godless] men [who secretly slipped in among you] are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm—shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted—twice dead. They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever.

Revelation 2:11

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.”[16]

Revelation 14:10–11

“He [the beast], too, will drink of the wine of God’s fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever.”

Revelation 19:20

“The beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur.”

Revelation 20:10

“The devil, who deceived them [those who march against God’s people], was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.”

Revelation 20:11–15

Then I [John] saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Revelation 21:8

“The cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE DOCTRINE OF HELL

Several attributes—some of God’s and some of ours—call for the existence of hell. The characteristics of God that necessitate hell are His justice, His love, and His sovereignty. The characteristics of humanity that require the same are depravity and dignity.

God's Justice Demands a Hell

In addition to the direct biblical affirmations, Scripture contains many other reasons for hell's existence. One is that justice demands it, and God is just (cf. Rom. 2); He is so pure and holy that He cannot even look upon sin (Hab. 1:13). "There is no partiality with God" (Rom. 2:11 nkjv), and "the Judge of all the earth [will] do [what is] right" (Gen. 18:25).[17]

It is a simple fact that not all evil is punished in this life; many observers have noted that the wicked sometimes prosper (cf. Ps. 73:3). Thus, the existence of an after-this-life place of punishment for the wicked is necessary to maintain God's justice. In a trenchant defense, Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) pointed out that even one sin deserves hell:

> The eternal holy God cannot tolerate any sin. How much more, then, a multitude of daily sins in thought, word, and deed? This is all compounded by the fact that we reject God's immense mercy. And add to this man's readiness to find fault with God's justice and mercy, and we have abundant evidence of the need for hell. [Therefore,] if we had a true spiritual awareness we would not be amazed at hell's severity but at our own depravity. (*WJE*, 1.109)

God's Love Demands a Hell

The Bible shows that "God is love" (1 John 4:16), and love cannot be coercive but rather is persuasive. A God of love cannot force people to love Him;[18] we respond to His love freely, not because we are required (1 John 4:19; 2 Cor. 9:7). God does not force Himself upon humans against the will He chose to give them (cf. Matt. 23:27), so those who do not wish to love God must be released. Those who decide not to be with Him must be allowed to be separated from Him (see Lewis, ***GD***, 38). Hell is eternal separation from God.

God's Sovereignty Demands a Hell

If there were no hell, there would be no final victory over evil.[19] Evil frustrates good. The wheat and tares cannot grow together forever (cf. Matt. 13:40–41)—if there were no ultimate separation, good would not ultimately triumph and God would not be in ultimate control. God's sovereignty demands a hell;[20] His Word declares Him the ultimate victor over evil (cf. 1 Cor. 15:24–28; Rev. 20–22).

Jonathan Edwards argued,

> It is a most unreasonable thing to suppose that there should be no future punishment, to suppose that God, who had made man a rational creature, able to know his duty, and sensible that he is deserving punishment when he does it not; should let man alone, and let him live as he will, and never punish him for his sins, and never make any difference between the good and the bad. (*WJE*, 2.884)

Human Depravity Demands a Hell

The only just punishment for sin against the eternal God is eternal punishment. God is absolutely perfect (Hab. 1:13; Matt. 5:48), and human beings are irretractably sinful:[21]

> There is no one who does good. The Lord looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one. There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins.[22]

> Not a word from their mouth can be trusted; their heart is filled with destruction. Their throat is an open grave; with their tongue they speak deceit.[23]

> They make their tongues as sharp as a serpent's; the poison of vipers is on their lips.[24]

> His mouth is full of curses and lies and threats; trouble and evil are under his tongue.[25]

> Their feet rush into sin; they are swift to shed innocent blood. Their thoughts are evil thoughts; ruin and destruction mark their ways. The way of peace they do not know; there is no justice in their paths.[26]

There is no fear of God before his eyes.
[27]

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.... There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.
[28]

The wisest man who ever lived said, “This only have I found: God made mankind upright, but men have gone in search of many schemes” (Eccl. 7:29). We are born in sin (Ps. 51:5) and are “by nature the children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3 kjv):

[Although God’s creatures] knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. (
Rom. 1:21–23
)

How can anyone suppose that unrepentant, depraved rebellion against flawless, unblemished holiness is undeserving of God’s wrath?

Human Dignity Demands a Hell

God created humans to be free;[29] because He will not (***cannot***) force people into heaven against this freedom, human dignity demands a hell. Jesus cried out, “‘O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but ***you were not willing***’ ” (Matt. 23:37). C.S. Lewis (1898–1963) explained, “There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, in the end, ‘***Thy*** will be done’ ” (***GD***, 69).

The Cross of Christ Implies Hell

At the center of Christianity is the Cross;[30] it is the very purpose for which Christ came into the world.[31] Without Him salvation is not possible,[32] and only through His finished work can we be delivered from our sins (Rom. 3:21–26). Jesus suffered unimaginable agony and even separation from His beloved Father (Heb. 2:10–17; 5:7–9); anticipating the Cross, His "sweat became as it were great drops of blood" (Luke 22:44 asv). ***Why the Cross and all this suffering unless there is a hell***? If there is no hell to shun, then the Cross was in vain. Christ's death is robbed of its eternal significance unless there is a hellish eternal destiny from which sinful souls need to be delivered.[33]

It Is Illusory to Deny Hell

It is not only Christians that acknowledge or demonstrate the reality of hell. Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) defined an illusion as beliefs that "are derived from human wishes." He added, "We call a belief an illusion when a wish-fulfillment is a prominent factor in its motivation, and [when] in doing so we disregard its relations to reality" (see ***FI***, 38–40). Given the evidence for hell, denial of hell is a strong candidate for an illusion. Freud said of religion, "We shall tell ourselves that it would be very nice if there were a God who created the world and was a benevolent Providence … but it is very striking that all this is exactly as we are bound to wish it to be so" (ibid., 52–53). We can rephrase this as: We can tell ourselves that it would be wonderful if there were no hell or no final day of judgment at which we will be held accountable for all our deeds, but we shouldn't fail to note that all of this is exactly what we naturally want to be true. Another atheist, Walter Kaufmann (1921–1980), admitted that belief in hell is not based in illusion: "It neither follows that everybody who believes in hell is prompted by wishful thinking nor … that belief in hell originated in this way"

(***CRP***, 135). Indeed, belief in hell did not; however, ***disbelief*** in hell may have originated as such. Polls have yielded an interesting statistic in this regard: While a majority of people in North America believe in the reality of hell, very few believe they are going there. This could be an even greater illusion than that of those who deny hell's existence.

HELL'S NATURE, LOCATION, AND DURATION

What is hell like? Where is it? How long will it last? These and numerous other questions have been the subject of theological discussion for centuries.

The Nature of Hell

The nature of hell is a horrifying reality. Hell is like being left outside in the dark forever. Hell is like a wandering star, a waterless cloud, a perpetually burning dump, a bottomless pit, an everlasting prison. Hell is a place of anguish and regret.[34]

To borrow the title of a marvelous book (see Lewis, ***GD***), hell is like a great divorce—an eternal separation from God (cf. 2 Thess. 1:7–9). There is, in biblical language, "a great gulf fixed" between hell and heaven so that no one can pass from one side to the other (Luke 16:26 nkjv).

It is noteworthy that Scripture nowhere describes hell as a torture chamber where people are forced against their will to undergo agonizing pain; this is a caricature of hell created by unbelievers in an attempt to paint God as cruel. That a loving God will not torture anyone does not mean hell is not a place of torment—Jesus said it is (v. 24). However, unlike ***torture***, which is inflicted from without ***against*** one's will, ***torment*** is self-inflicted ***by*** one's own will. As has been noted even by atheists—for example, Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980)[35]—the door of hell is locked from the inside.

We can be condemned by our own freedom: Torment is living with the consequences of our own bad choices. Torment is the anguish that results from realizing we used our freedom for evil and chose wrongly. Everyone in hell will

know that the pain he or she suffers is self-induced; hence, the “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 22:13; Mark 8:12).

Hell is also depicted as a place of eternal fire. The fire is ***real***, but not necessarily ***physical*** (at least not as we customarily understand the word), because people in hell will have imperishable physical bodies (John 5:28–29; Rev. 20:13–15), so normal fire will not affect them. Further, the figures of speech that describe hell are contradictory if taken in a strictly physical sense. Hell has ***flames***, yet it is outer ***darkness***. Hell is a ***dump*** (with a bottom), yet it is a ***bottomless*** pit. While everything in the Bible is literally true, not everything is true literally.[36] For instance, God is not a literal rock (Ps. 42:9), since He is spirit (John 4:24), but He is literally a solid, rocklike foundation.

The Location of Hell

Hell is said to be “under the earth” (Phil. 2:10), a place of “outer darkness” (Matt. 8:12; 22:13 nkjv), “outside” the gate of the heavenly city (Rev. 22:15). Hell is away from the “presence of the Lord” (2 Thess. 1:9; cf. Matt. 25:41). Of course, “under” and “outside” are relational terms that need not necessarily be taken as spatial. God is “up” and hell is “down.” God is “inside” and hell is “outside.” ***Hell is the other direction from God***, eternal separation from Him (2 Thess. 1:7–9).

The Duration of Hell

Annihilationists[37] argue that the Greek word rendered ***everlasting*** (***aiôn, aiônios***) when applied to heaven means “unending” but when applied to hell means “ending” (see Froom, ***CFF***, 1.433). As we will see, this is inconsistent and untrue—that hell will last as long as God and heaven is supported by several lines of evidence.

God’s Word declares that He will endure forever (Ps. 90:1); He had no beginning and has no end (Rev. 1:8); He created all things (Col. 1:15–16; John 1:3); and He

will abide after this world is destroyed (2 Peter 3:10–12). Because God by His very nature cannot tolerate evil (Isa. 6:1ff.; Hab. 1:13), evil persons must be separated from Him ***forever***.

Hell Will Last As Long As Heaven Does

Heaven is "everlasting," and the same word (Gk: ***aiônion***), used in the same context, also affirms that hell is "everlasting."[38] If heaven is forever, then so is hell; there is absolutely no biblical ground for supposing that one is eternal and one is temporal. Likewise, there is no possibility of a person escaping hell after arriving (cf. Luke 16:26). Judgment begins after death (Heb. 9:27; John 8:21). What is more, people are conscious after they die, whether in heaven or in hell.[39] It makes no sense to resurrect unbelievers to everlasting judgment (Dan. 12:2; John 5:28–29) before the Great White Throne (Rev. 20:11ff.) in order to punish them for their sins unless they are conscious.

Annihilation of the wicked is contrary to both the nature of God and the nature of humans made in His image.[40] It is not consistent with the character of an all-loving God to snuff out the souls of those who do not do His wishes;[41] can you imagine an earthly father killing his children for not doing what he wants them to do? Further, were God to annihilate human beings, He would be attacking Himself, for we are made in His image (Gen. 1:27), and He is immortal.[42] That these persons will be suffering does not justify annihilating them any more than having a child in pain justifies smothering him. Annihilationism violates God's nature and human freedom,[43] as recognized not only by believers but also by some who have denied God. For example, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), who held that annihilation is not preferable to conscious freedom, once wrote, "I would rather will nothingness than not to will at all" (***TGM***, last line).

Hell Will Last As Long As God Does

Not only will hell's duration be as long as heaven's, but it also will endure as long as God Himself—the same term meaning "eternal" (Gk: ***aiônion***) is used of all three.[44] Romans 16:26 declares that God's mystery is "now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him."[45] Since hell is reserved for those who have lived for sin instead of for the eternal God, hell will endure as long as the eternal God against whom they have sinned—forever.

ANSWERING OBJECTIONS TO HELL

Critics of biblical and historic Christian teaching on hell have offered many objections to the doctrine. We'll now examine some of the most common.

Objection One: Why Punish People in Hell—Why Not Reform Them for Heaven?

Why never-ending punishment? Why doesn't God try instead to reform sinners? Even human beings, with their limited abilities and resources, provide reformatories for criminals. How much more should God, with His unlimited abilities and resources, have a reformatory, rather than an eternal penal institution, for the creatures He made in His image and likeness?

Response to Objection One

The answer is not difficult, either biblically or rationally.
First, God does try to reform people; the time of reformation is called life. Peter declared, "The Lord … is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). After the time of ***reformation*** comes the time of ***reckoning***: "Man is destined to die once, and after that to face

judgment" (Heb. 9:27).

Second, hell is only for the unreformable and unrepentant, the reprobate (cf. 2 Peter 2:1ff.). Hell is ***not*** for anyone who is reformable; anyone reformable will still be alive, for God in His wisdom and goodness does not allow anyone to go to hell whom He knew would go to heaven if He gave more opportunity.[46] ***God wants everyone to be saved*** (1 Tim. 2:4); hell was created not for people, but for the devil and his fallen angels (Matt. 25:41). Lewis observed, "No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. To those who knock [the door] is opened" (***GD***, 69).

Third, contrary to the assumption that once a person reached such a horrible place he would want to leave, it is simply not so. There is no evidence for this in the gospel story of the man in hell,[47] and there is no support for it in the known nature of the human psyche. In regard to changing the hearts and dispositions of wicked people, ***how can a place devoid of God's mercy accomplish what no measure of His grace could accomplish on earth***? If hell could reform those who choose evil, then they could be saved without Christ, who is the sole means of God's salvation.[48] In fact, as opposed to softening a hard heart, suffering often has the result of hardening it more, as illustrated in the case of Pharaoh (Ex. 7–14) and as demonstrated by the recidivism of hardened criminals.

Fourth, and finally, God cannot force free creatures to be reformed.[49] Forced reformation is worse than punishment, for punishment honors the freedom and dignity with which God endowed His human creation: "To be 'cured' against one's will … is to be put on a level with those who have not yet reached the age of reason or those who never will; to be classed with infants, imbeciles, and domestic animals" (Lewis, ***GITD***, 292). Humans are not objects to be manipulated; humans are subjects to be respected. People, made in God's image, receive punishment when they do evil because they were free and knew better (see Rom. 1:18ff.).

Objection Two: Isn't Eternal Damnation for Temporal Sins Overkill?

To punish a person eternally for what he did temporally seems like a gigantic case of overkill. No human parent would mete out a lifetime of punishment upon his child for a crime that involved a few minutes; why should God punish forever those who have only sinned for a short time?

Response to Objection Two

On closer examination, eternal punishment turns out to be not only just but also necessary.

For one thing, ***only eternal punishment will suffice for sins against the eternal God***. Sins committed in time are perpetrated against the Eternal One; analogically, while it may take only an instant to kill someone, the deserved punishment is life in prison. No sin can be tolerated as long as God exists;[50] because He is eternal, punishment for sin must also be eternal. God's justice demands eternal punishment because "the heinousness of any crime must be gauged according to the worth or dignity of the person it is committed against" (Edwards in Davidson, "RD" in ***JETS***, 50).[51] Sin against an infinite God is infinitely evil and worthy of infinite punishment (Edwards, ***WJE***, 2.83).

What is more, as we have seen, the only alternative to eternal punishment is robbing persons of their freedom by forcing them into heaven. ***This would not be heavenly but instead would be "hell" for them***, since they would be trapped in a place where everyone is loving and praising the One they want most to avoid (cf. Lewis, ***PP***, 106–07). Again, God's third choice, annihilating His own image within His creatures—and, therefore, snuffing them out of existence—would be an attack of God on Himself.[52]

In addition, ***without an eternal separation of evil from good (in hell), there could be no heaven, an eternal preservation of good***. Evil is contagious (1 Cor. 5:6) and must be quarantined;[53] like a deadly plague, if uncontained, evil will continue to contaminate and corrupt. If God did not eventually separate the tares from the wheat, the tares would choke out the wheat (cf. Matt. 13:24–30); an eternal heaven necessitates an eternal hell.

Finally, unbelievers prefer to be distanced from God in time. Why should we not expect this to be their chosen state in eternity?

Objection Three: How Can We Be Happy in Heaven Knowing a Loved One Is in Hell?

The mere thought of a loved one eternally separated from God is dreadful. How could a husband be happy in heaven knowing his wife is forever in hell's anguish? A parent is tormented by a child suffering the pain of leukemia for a few months; how could a parent possibly be happy in heaven knowing the child is going to be suffering forever?

Response to Objection Three

First of all, the seriously flawed presupposition of this question is that we are more merciful than God. He is infinitely more merciful than we are (cf. Lewis, ***PP***, 114).
Furthermore, God is happy in heaven, yet He knows that not everyone will be there.
Also, if we could not be happy in heaven while knowing that others were in hell, then our happiness would be in someone else's hands:

> What some people [wrongly] say on earth is that the final loss of one soul gives the lie to all the joy of those who are saved. The demand of the loveless and the self-imprisoned [is] that they should be allowed to blackmail the universe: that till they consent to be happy (on their own terms) no one else shall taste joy: that theirs should be the final power; *that Hell should be able to veto Heaven [is invalid]*. (*GD*, 124)

We would not be happy in heaven if we knew that others had been unjustly kept out. However, we can be happy in heaven the same way we can be happy eating while knowing that others are starving—namely, if we have offered them food but they have refused to eat it. ***No matter the situation, God will "wipe away all tears" in heaven*** (Rev. 21:4 kjv).

Objection Four: Why Did God Create People He Knew Would Go to Hell?

Some critics of hell argue that if God knew some creatures would reject Him and eventuate in such a horrible place, He would have never created them. Wouldn't it be better to have never existed than to exist and spend eternity in hell?

Response to Objection Four

Nonexistence cannot be said to be a better condition than existence, since nonexistence is nothing; to affirm that nothing can be better than something is a colossal category mistake. In order for two things to be comparable, they must have something in common, and there is absolutely nothing in common between being and nonbeing—they are diametrical opposites. Someone may ***feel*** like being put out of his misery, but he cannot even consistently ***think*** of nonbeing as a better state than being. ***What has no being cannot be better than what is***. Jesus' statement that it would have been better if Judas had never been born (Mark 14:21) is simply a strong expression indicating the severity of his sin, not a statement of nonbeing's superiority over being. In a parallel condemnation of the Pharisees, Jesus said Sodom and Gomorrah would have repented had they seen His miracles (Matt. 11:20–24). This does not mean Sodom and Gomorrah literally would have repented;[54] rather, this is a powerful figure of speech indicating that the Pharisees' sin was so great that "it will be more tolerable" (v. 24 tlb) for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment[55] than for the Pharisees.

That not all people will win in the game of life does not mean it should not be played: "If a game is played, it must be possible to lose it" (Lewis, ***PP***, 106). Before the Super Bowl ever begins, players from both teams know that one of them will lose, yet they all will play. American drivers know that people will be killed daily in auto accidents, yet we still daily take to the road. All of us who are parents know that having children could end in tragedy for them and for

ourselves, yet our knowledge of evil's existence does not negate our will to permit the likelihood of good. Why do we will as such? Because we deem it worthwhile—because we ***know*** that it's better to have had the opportunity for goodness, for life, for love. Likewise, from God's standpoint, it is better to have loved all the people of the world (John 3:16) and have lost some than not to have loved them at all.[56]

Objection Five: That Hell Has No Redeeming Value

Some maintain that hell has no redeeming value because no one ever emerges from it; no one who goes there learns from it; no one "lives to tell the tale." What's the point, if everyone who chooses hell stays there forever?

Response to Objection Five

To this argument Jonathan Edwards answered that hell's redeeming value is that it not only satisfies God's justice but also glorifies God's justice by showing how great a standard it is: "The vindictive justice of God will appear strict, exact, awful, and terrible, and therefore glorious" (***WJE***, 2.87). In other words, the more terrific and fearsome the judgment, the brighter the sheen on the sword of God's justice.[57] Awesome punishment befits the nature of an awesome God: By a majestic display of wrath, God reclaims the majesty that the wicked have refused to return to Him.[58] Awful punishment in the afterlife will bring to God what people stole from Him in this life; those who choose no glory for God during this life will be given no such choice thereafter.[59]
All human beings are either actively or passively useful to God. In heaven believers will be actively useful in praising His mercy; in hell unbelievers will be passively useful in bringing majesty to His justice. Just as a barren tree is useful for firewood, so the wicked are fuel for an eternal fire (ibid., 2.126).

Further, in hell the tares are separated from the wheat and the evil from the good. This is both useful and necessary. For what frustrates evil is good. Hence, heaven is a place where there is no evil to frustrate good people, and hell is a place where there is no more good to frustrate evil people. The final separation is needed for the triumph of good over evil so that evil can no longer contaminate good.

Objection Six: Is It Right (Just) to Send People to Hell When They Can't Help Being Sinners?

The Bible says we are born sinners (Ps. 51:5) and are "by nature the children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3 kjv). If sinners cannot avoid sinning, then is it fair to send them to hell for sin?

Response to Objection Six

People go to hell for two reasons: (1) They are born with a bent to sin ***and*** (2) they choose to sin. They are born on a road that leads to hell, but those who remain on that road also fail to heed the warning signs to turn from destruction and be saved.

While human beings sin because they are sinners by nature, nonetheless, their sin nature does not force them to sin; they choose to sin.[60] As correctly said by Augustine (354–430), "We are born with the propensity to sin and the necessity to die." Notice he did not say we are born with the necessity to sin; while sin is ***inevitable***, since we are born with a bent in that direction, nonetheless, sin is not ***unavoidable***.[61] Likewise, the ultimate place to which sinners are destined is also avoidable—all one needs to do is repent.[62] Everyone is held responsible for his decision to accept or reject God's offer of salvation, and responsibility always implies the ability to respond (if not on our own, then by God's

grace[63]). All who go to hell could have avoided it; even the pagan has clear light from God so that he is "without excuse."[64] Those who seek will find,[65] and just as God sent a missionary to Cornelius (Acts 10:23–25), so He will provide the message of salvation for all who seek it: "Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him" (Heb. 11:6).

Objection Seven: Why Not Annihilate Sinners Instead of Consciously Tormenting Them?

If God is merciful, as the Bible maintains, then would it not be more merciful to put sinners out of their misery by annihilating them?[66] If, for example, people shoot farm animals that will not be able to escape burning barns, why should not God be at least as merciful to humans?

Response to Objection Seven

It is precisely because we are not animals that God does not treat us like them. Annihilating those who do not carry out His will would be unkind and unmerciful, as would be a father who shot his son because the young man grew up and disagreed with him. It is more merciful for God to allow us to choose our own way—even if it is against His will—than to force His will on us.[67]

Objection Eight: Hell Itself Is Contrary to the Mercy of God

In the same vein, some have insisted that a merciful God would not permit

suffering in hell. No loving earthly father could allow his child to be in perpetual torment if he could do anything about it.

Response to Objection Eight

First, it is untenable to suppose that God's mercy does not permit suffering in hell. God allows plenty of suffering in this world. It is an empirical fact that God and creature-pain are not incompatible.[68]

Second, Edwards contended that God's mercy is not a passion or emotion that overcomes His justice. Mercy so construed is a defect in God that would make Him weak and inconsistent within Himself, not fit to be a judge.[69]

Third, from the vantage point of eternity, as our attitudes and feelings will be transformed and correspond to God's, we will love only what He loves and hate what He hates. Since God is not miserable at the thought or sight of hell, neither will we be—even in the case of people we loved in this life. John Gerstner (1914–1996) compiled a digest of Jonathan Edwards' entire sermon devoted to this, called "The End of the Wicked Contemplated by the Righteous," in which he says that "it will seem in no way cruel in God to inflict such extreme suffering on such extremely wicked creatures" ("OAJE" in ***BS***, 90). ***Not*** doing so would be unjust, and God is perfectly just.[70] Since none of God's attributes are inconsistent with each other,[71] it follows that God is not unmerciful to allow hell.

Fourth, and finally, God will have done everything he could do, short of robbing His creatures of His very image in them. He has loved all (John 3:16), sent His Son to die for all (1 John 2:2), and sent His Holy Spirit to convict all (John 16:8). He cannot make their decision for them, and He cannot force a free decision (Matt. 23:37), so the rest is in human hands; God could not possibly have been more merciful.

Objection Nine: Eternal Punishment Is Not Eternal Misery

Annihilationists argue that God's punishment is eternal in its ***results*** but not in its ***process***; that is, the effect is eternal but the duration is temporal (see Froom, ***CFF***, 1.294). Take the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (see 2 Peter 2:6): They are not still being punished, but the result of their punishment will never end.

> Everlasting punishment is clearly not the same as being everlastingly punished. It is eternal loss of being. [Hell is a place where] the undying worm and the quenchless flame feed upon their victim until the whole is consumed. (op. cit., 1.295)

Response to Objection Nine

This objection is contrary to clear scriptural statements that speak, for example, of those in hell being "tormented day and night forever and ever" (Rev. 20:10). In hell, their "worm ***does not*** die, and the fire is ***not*** quenched" (Mark 9:48). The flames of hell are said to be eternal.[72]

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR THE DOCTRINE OF HELL

The doctrine of eternal suffering for the wicked is amply supported in church history. In fact, denials of it are rare before modern times, and most of these are based on false premises about God's nature,[73] the nature of free choice,[74] or the reformatory view of justice.[75]

A Pre-Christian View of Hell

Plato (c. 427–347 b.c.) held to the doctrine of eternal punishment:

Those who have been guilty of the most heinous crimes and whose misdeeds are past cure—of these warnings are made, and they are no longer capable themselves of receiving and benefit, because they are incurable—but others are benefited who behold them *suffering throughout eternity* the greatest and most excruciating and terrifying tortures because of their misdeeds, literally suspended as examples there in the prison house in Hades, a spectacle and a warning to any evil doers who from time to time arrive. (*G*, 525c, emphasis added)

Early Fathers

Affirmation of hell appears in the writings of the earliest Fathers. Shortly after the apostles set forth Christ's teachings,[76] their followers taught the same.

Ignatius (d. c. 110)

If those that corrupt mere human families are condemned to death, how much more shall those suffer everlasting punishment who endeavor to corrupt the Church of Christ, for which the Lord Jesus, the only-begotten Son of God, endured the cross, and submitted to death! Whosoever, "being waxen fat," and "become gross," sets at nought His doctrine, shall go into hell. (*EIE*, 16)

Brethren, be not deceived. If any man follows him that separates from the truth, he shall not inherit the kingdom of God; and if any man does not stand aloof from the preacher of falsehood, he shall be condemned to hell. (*EIP*, 4)

Polycarp (fl. second century)

Thou threatenest me with fire which burneth for an hour, and after a little is extinguished, but art ignorant of the fire of the coming judgment and of eternal punishment, reserved for the ungodly. (*EECS*, 11)

Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)

God, foreknowing all things, prepared fit habitations for both, kindly conferring that light which they desire on those who seek after the light of incorruption, and resort to it; but for the despisers and mockers who avoid and turn themselves away from this light, and who do, as it were, blind themselves, He has prepared darkness suitable to persons who oppose the light, and He has inflicted an appropriate punishment upon those who try to avoid being subject to Him. Submission to God is eternal rest, so that they who shun the light have a place worthy of their flight; and those who fly from eternal rest, have a habitation in accordance with their fleeing.

Now, since all good things are with God, they who by their own determination fly from God, do defraud themselves of all good things; and having been [thus] defrauded of all good things with respect to God, they shall consequently fall under the just judgment of God. For those persons who shun rest shall justly incur punishment, and those who avoid the light shall justly dwell in darkness. For as in the case of this temporal light, those who shun it do deliver themselves over to darkness, so that they do themselves become the cause to themselves that they are destitute of light, and do inhabit darkness; and, as I have already observed, the light is not the cause of such an [unhappy] condition of existence to them; so those who fly from the eternal light of God, which contains in itself all good things, are themselves the cause to themselves of their inhabiting eternal darkness, destitute of all good things, having become to themselves the cause of [their consignment to] an abode of that nature. (*AH*, 4.39.4)

To as many as continue in their love towards God, does He grant communion with Him. But communion with God is life and light, and the enjoyment of all the benefits which He has in store. But on as many as, according to their own choice, depart from God, He inflicts that separation from Himself which they have chosen of their own accord. But separation from God is death, and separation from light is darkness; and separation from God consists in the loss of all the benefits which He has in store.... Now, good things are eternal and without end with God, and therefore the loss of these is also eternal and never-ending. (ibid., 5.27.2)

It is in this matter just as occurs in the case of a flood of light: those who have blinded themselves, or have been blinded by others, are for ever deprived of the enjoyment of light. It is not, [however], that the light has inflicted upon them the penalty of blindness, but it is that the blindness itself has brought calamity upon them: and therefore the Lord declared, “He that believeth in Me is not condemned,” that is, is not separated from God, for he is united to God through faith. On the other hand, He says, “He that believeth not is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God”; that is, he separated himself from God of his own accord. (ibid.)

Theophilus (c. 130–190)

Admitting, therefore, the proof which events happening as predicted afford, I do not disbelieve, but I believe, obedient to God, whom, if you please, do you also submit to, believing Him, lest if now you continue unbelieving, you be convinced hereafter, when

you are tormented with eternal punishments; which punishments, when they had been foretold by the prophets, the later-born poets and philosophers stole from the holy Scriptures, to make their doctrines worthy of credit. (*TA*, 1.14)

Tertullian (c. 155–c. 225)

O ye heathen; who have and deserve our pity, behold, we set before you the promise which our sacred system offers. It guarantees eternal life to such as follow and observe it; on the other hand, it threatens with the eternal punishment of an unending fire those who are profane and hostile; while to both classes alike is preached a resurrection from the dead. (*AN*, 1.1.7)

Therefore after this there is neither death nor repeated resurrections, but we shall be the same that we are now, and still unchanged—the servants of God, ever with God, clothed upon with the proper substance of eternity; but the profane, and all who are not true worshipers of God, in like manner shall be consigned to the punishment of everlasting fire—that fire which, from its very nature indeed, directly ministers to their incorruptibility. (*A*, 1.48)

If, therefore, any one shall violently suppose that the destruction of the soul and the flesh in hell amounts to a final annihilation of the two substances, and not to their penal treatment (as if they were to be consumed, not punished), let him recollect that the fire of hell is eternal—expressly announced as an everlasting penalty; and let him then admit that it is from this circumstance that this never-ending "killing" is more formidable than a merely human murder, which is only temporal. (*ORF*, 35)

Justin Martyr (c. 100–c. 165)

This … is what we expect and have learned from Christ, and teach. And Plato, in like manner, used to say that Rhadamanthus and Minos would punish the wicked who came before them; and we say that the same thing will be done, but at the hand of Christ, and upon the wicked in the same bodies united again to their spirits which are now to undergo everlasting punishment; and not only, as Plato said, for a period of a thousand years. (*FAJ*, 8)

Reflect upon the end of each of the preceding kings, how they died the death common to all, which, if it issued in insensibility, would be a godsend to all the wicked. But since sensation remains to all who have ever lived, and eternal punishment is laid up (i.e., for the wicked), see that ye neglect not to be convinced, and to hold as your belief, that these things are true. (ibid., 18)

That it is better to believe even what is impossible to our own nature and to men, than to be unbelieving like the rest of the world, we have learned; for we know that

> our Master Jesus Christ said, that "what is impossible with men is possible with God," and, "Fear not them that kill you, and after that can do no more; but fear Him who after death is able to cast both soul and body into hell." And hell is a place where those are to be punished who have lived wickedly, and who do not believe that those things which God has taught us by Christ will come to pass. (ibid., 19)

From Justin's ***Apology***, one can glean a substantial list of verses that support eternal punishment for the wicked (cited in Froom, ***CFF***, 1.819):

"To undergo everlasting punishment" (op. cit., 8).
"To the everlasting punishment of fire" (12).
"Suffer punishment in eternal fire" (17).
"Eternal punishment is laid up" (18).
"There will be burning up of all [the wicked]" (20).
"Are punished in everlasting fire" (21).
"Brings eternal punishment by flames" (45).
"Punished in eternal fire" (***SAJ***, 1).
"In eternal fire shall suffer their just punishment and penalty" (ibid., 8).
"The wicked are punished in eternal fire" (ibid.).

Some maintain Justin adds that when the fires have done their work, the wicked then "shall cease to exist" (ibid., 7); conditionalists and annihilationists[77] use this in support of their views (Froom, ***CFF***, 1.819). However, they take Justin's statement out of context, which reads in full like this:

> God delays causing the confusion and destruction of the whole world, by which the wicked angels and demons and men shall cease to exist, because of the seed of the Christians, who know that they are the cause of preservation in nature.

Then Justin goes on to say that "since God in the beginning made the race of angels and men with free-will, they will justly suffer in ***eternal*** fire the punishment of whatever sins they have committed" (ibid., emphasis added). Why would he say the fire will be eternal if he believed it would only last for a

short time? If one follows the sound rule of interpretation—that an unclear text should be understood in the light of the clear ones[78]—then Justin's statement that men "shall cease to exist" should be taken in another sense. It could mean "cease to exist ***on this earth*** so as to spread their destructive influence."

Church Councils

After already having been earlier condemned by the Second Council of Constantinople (553), the denial of hell was condemned by the Fifth Lateran Council in 1513 (see Cross, ***ODCC***, 328). The last of the nine anathemas (543) of Emperor Justinian (c. 483–565) against Origen (c. 185–c. 254) reads: "If anyone says or thinks that the punishment of demons and of impious men is only temporary and will one day have an end … let him be anathema" (in Roberts and Donaldson, ***ANF***, Vol. 14).[79]

Medieval Fathers

The "bookends of the Middle Ages," Augustine and Aquinas, sum up the orthodox doctrine of hell. Aquinas especially addressed the rational problem of eternal suffering.

Augustine (354–430)

> Since the devil has nothing to do with the death of the flesh, whence comes his exceeding pride, a death of another kind is prepared in the eternal fire of hell, by which not only the spirits that have earthly, but also those who have aerial, bodies can be tormented. (*CG*, 4.13)

> If the soul live in eternal punishments, by which also those unclean spirits shall be tormented, that is rather eternal death than eternal life. For there is no greater or worse death than when death never dies. But because the soul from its very nature, being created immortal, cannot be without some kind of life, its utmost death is alienation from the life of God in an eternity of punishment. (ibid., 6.12)

If both destinies are “eternal,” then we must either understand both as long-continued but at last terminating, or both as endless. For they are correlative—on the one hand, punishment eternal, on the other hand, life eternal. And to say in one and the same sense, life eternal shall be endless, punishment eternal shall come to an end, is the height of absurdity. Wherefore, as the eternal life of the saints shall be endless, so too the eternal punishment of those who are doomed to it shall have no end. (ibid., 21.23)

John Chrysostom (347–407)

Let us then turn to Him, my beloved friend, and execute the will of God. For He created us and brought us into being, that He might make us partakers of eternal blessings, that He might offer us the kingdom of Heaven, not that He might cast us into Hell and deliver us to the fire; for this was made not for us, but for the devil: but for us the kingdom has been destined and made ready of old time. (*ETAHF*, 1.9)

Thus hell has not been made for us but for him and his angels: but the kingdom has been prepared for us before the foundation of the world. Let us not then make ourselves unworthy of entrance into the bride-chamber: for as long as we are in this world, even if we commit countless sins it is possible to wash them all away by manifesting repentance for our offenses: but when once we have departed to the other world even if we display the most earnest repentance it will be of no avail, not even if we gnash our teeth, beat our breasts, and utter innumerable calls for succor, no one with the tip of his finger will apply a drop to our burning bodies, but we shall only hear those words which the rich man heard in the parable, “Between us and you a great gulf has been fixed” (ibid.).

Anselm (1033–1109)

O hidden strength: a man hangs on a cross and lifts the load of eternal death from the human race; a man nailed to wood looses the bonds of everlasting death that hold fast the world. O power: a man condemned with thieves saves men condemned with devils, a man stretched out on the gibbet draws all men to himself. O mysterious strength: one soul coming forth from torment draws countless souls with him out of hell, a man submits to the death of the body and destroys the death of souls. (*PM*, 230–31)

So then, nothing can be seen to follow more consistently, and nothing ought to be believed more assuredly, than that man’s soul was created in such a way that if it despises loving the Supreme Being it will suffer eternal wretchedness. Consequently, just as the loving soul will rejoice in an eternal reward, so the despising soul will grieve in eternal punishment. And as the former will experience immutable sufficiency, so the latter will experience inconsolable need. (*M*, 71)

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)

It must also be known that the condition of the damned will be the exact contrary to that of the blessed. Theirs is the state of eternal punishment, which has a fourfold evil condition. The bodies of the damned will not be brilliant: “Their countenances shall be as faces burnt” [

Isa. 13:8

]. Likewise they shall be passible, because they shall never deteriorate and, although burning eternally with fire, they shall never be consumed: “Their worm shall not die and their fire shall not be quenched.” They will be weighed down, and the soul of the damned be as it were chained therein: “To bind their kings with fetters, and their nobles with manacles of iron. Finally, beasts have rotted in their dung” (*CISTA*, 62).

The disposition of hell will be such as to be adapted to the utmost unhappiness of the damned. Wherefore accordingly both light and darkness are there, in so far as they are most conducive to the unhappiness of the damned. Now seeing is in itself pleasant, for … “the sense of sight is most esteemed, because thereby many things are known.”

Yet it happens accidentally that seeing is painful, when we see things that are hurtful to us, or displeasing to our will. Consequently in hell the place must be so disposed for seeing as regards light and darkness, that nothing be seen clearly, and that only such things be dimly seen as are able to bring anguish to the heart. Wherefore, simply speaking, the place is dark. Yet by Divine disposition, there is a certain amount of light, as much as suffices for seeing those things which are capable of tormenting the soul. The natural situation of the place is enough for this, since in the centre of the earth, where hell is said to be, fire cannot be otherwise than thick and cloudy, and reeky as it were. (*ST*, 4.97.4)

Further, according to the Philosopher, punishment is meted according to the dignity of the person sinned against, so that a person who strikes one in authority receives a greater punishment than one who strikes anyone else. Now whoever sins mortally sins against God, Whose commandments he breaks, and Whose honor he gives another, by placing his end in some one other than God. But God’s majesty is infinite. Therefore whoever sins mortally deserves infinite punishment; and consequently it seems just that for a mortal sin a man should be punished forever. (ibid., 4.99.1)

The suffering of eternal punishment is in no way opposed to divine justice. Even in the laws men make, punishment need not correspond to the offense in point of time. [For example, one may commit murder in a minute but deserve a lifetime in jail]. (*CT*, 183)

We should also take into consideration the fact that eternal punishment is inflicted on a sinner who does not repent of his sin, and so he continues in his sin up to death. And since he is in sin for eternity, he is reasonably punished by God for all eternity. Furthermore, any sin committed against God has a certain infinity when regarded from the side of God, against whom it is committed. For clearly, the greater the

person who is offended, the more grievous is the offense. He who strikes a soldier is held more gravely accountable than if he struck a peasant: and his offense is much more serious if he strikes a prince or a king.

Accordingly, since God is infinitely great, an offense committed against Him is in a certain respect infinite; and so a punishment that is in a certain respect infinite is attached to it. Such a punishment cannot be infinite in intensity, for nothing created can be infinite in this way. Consequently a punishment that is infinite in duration is rightly inflicted for mortal sin. Moreover, while a person is still capable of correction, temporal punishment is imposed for his emendation or cleansing. But if a sinner is incorrigible, so that his will is obstinately fixed in sin, as we said above is the case with the damned, his punishment ought never to come to an end. (ibid.)

Reformation Leaders

The Reformers did not reject their predecessors' teaching on hell but strongly reaffirmed it.

Martin Luther (1483–1546)

The Fathers made four sorts of hell. (1) The fore-front, wherein, they say, the patriarchs were until Christ descended into hell. (2) The feeling of pain, yet only temporal, as purgatory. (3) Where unbaptized children are, but feel no pain. (4) Where the damned are, which feel everlasting pain. This is the right hell; the other three are only human imaginings. (*TT*, 802)

The fiery oven is ignited merely by the unbearable appearance of God and endures eternally. For the Day of Judgment will not last for a moment only but will stand throughout eternity and will thereafter never come to an end. Constantly the damned will be judged, constantly they will suffer pain, and constantly they will be a fiery oven, that is, they will be tortured within by supreme distress and tribulation. (*WLS*, 2:627)

John Calvin (1509–1564)

God, who is perfect righteousness, cannot love the iniquity which he sees in all. All of us, therefore, have that within which deserves the hatred of God. Hence, in respect, first, of our corrupt nature; and, secondly, of the depraved conduct following upon it,

we are all offensive to God, guilty in his sight, and by nature the children of hell. (*ICR*, 2.16.3)

On the other hand, he [God] proclaims not only that iniquity is hateful in his sight, but that it will not escape with impunity, because he will be the avenger of his insulted majesty. That he may encourage us in every way, he promises present blessings, as well as eternal felicity, to the obedience of those who shall have kept his commands, while he threatens transgressors with present suffering, as well as the punishment of eternal death. (ibid., 2.8.4)

The mode in which the Spirit usually speaks in Scripture is, that God was the enemy of men until they were restored to favor by the death of Christ, (
Rom. 5:10
); that they were cursed until their iniquity was expiated by the sacrifice of Christ, (
Gal. 3:10
,
13
); that they were separated from God, until by means of Christ's body they were received into union (
Col. 1:21–22
). Such modes of expression are accommodated to our capacity, that we may the better understand how miserable and calamitous our condition is without Christ. For were it not said in clear terms, that Divine wrath, and vengeance, and eternal death, lay upon us, we should be less sensible of our wretchedness without the mercy of God, and less disposed to value the blessing of deliverance. (ibid., 2.16.2)

Post-Reformation Teachers

Beyond the Reformation and into modern times, the doctrine of hell continues to be the standard teaching of the orthodox Christian church. Jonathan Edwards summed up the earlier orthodox view, and C.S. Lewis gave the best expression to the modern orthodox view.

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758)

Once again,

The eternal holy God cannot tolerate any sin. How much more, then, a multitude of daily sins in thought, word, and deed? This is all compounded by the fact that we reject God's immense mercy. And add to this man's readiness to find fault with God's justice and mercy, and we have abundant evidence of the need for hell. [Thus,] if we

had a true spiritual awareness, we would not be amazed at hell's severity but at our own depravity. (*WJE*, 1.109)

It is a most unreasonable thing to suppose that there should be no future punishment, to suppose that God, who had made man a rational creature, able to know his duty, and sensible that he is deserving punishment when he does it not; should let man alone, and let him live as he will, and never punish him for his sins, and never make any difference between the good and the bad.... How unreasonable it is to suppose, that he who made the world, should leave things in such confusion, and never take any care of the governing of his creatures, and that he should never judge his reasonable creatures. (ibid., 2.884)

John Wesley (1703–1791)

Consider a few of the circumstances which will follow the general judgment. And the first is the execution of the sentence pronounced on the evil and on the good: "These shall go away into eternal punishment, and the righteous into life eternal." It should be observed, it is the very same word which is used, both in the former and the latter clause: It follows, that either the punishment lasts for ever, or the reward too will come to an end: No, never, unless God could come to an end, or his mercy and truth could fail. "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father, and shall drink of those rivers of pleasure which are at God's right hand for evermore" (*WJW*, 5.15.3.1).

The wicked, meantime, shall be turned into hell, even all the people that forget God. They will be "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." They will be "cast into the lake of fire burning with brimstone," originally "prepared for the devil and his angels"; where they will gnaw their tongues for anguish and pain, they will curse God and look upward. There the dogs of hell—pride, malice, revenge, rage, horror, despair—continually devour them. There "they have no rest, day or night, but the smoke of their torment ascendeth for ever and ever!" (ibid.).

Does any man find in himself ill will, malice, envy, or any other temper opposite to kindness? Then is misery there: And the stronger the temper, the more miserable he is. If the slothful man may be said to eat his own flesh, much more the malicious, or envious. His soul is the very type of hell—full of torment as well as wickedness. He hath already the worm that never dieth, and he is hastening to the fire that never can be quenched. Only as yet the great gulf is not fixed between him and heaven. (ibid., 7.139)

Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892)

The third kind of death is the consummation of the other two.
80
It is eternal death. It is the execution of the legal sentence; it is the consummation of the spiritual death. Eternal death is the death of the soul; it takes place after the body has been laid in the grave, after the soul has departed from it. If legal death be terrible, it is because of its consequences; and if spiritual death be dreadful, it is because of that which shall succeed it. The two deaths of which we have spoken are the roots, and that death which is to come is the flower thereof. (*SSC*, 1.52)

Oh! had I words that I might this morning attempt to depict to you what eternal death is. The soul has come before its Maker; the book has been opened; the sentence has been uttered; “Depart, ye cursed” has shaken the universe, and made the very spheres dim with the frown of the Creator; the soul has departed to the depths where it is to dwell with others in eternal death. Oh! how horrible is its position now. Its bed is a bed of flame; the sights it sees are murdering ones that affright its spirit. The sounds it hears are shrieks, and wails, and moans, and groans; all that its body knows is the infliction of miserable pain! It has the possession of unutterable woe, of unmitigated misery. The soul looks up. Hope is extinct—it is gone. (ibid.)

It looks downward in dread and fear; remorse hath possessed its soul. It looks on the right hand—and the adamantine walls of fate keep it within its limits of torture. It looks on the left—and there the rampart of blazing fire forbids the scaling ladder of e’en a dreamy speculation of escape. It looks within and seeks for consolation there, but a gnawing worm hath entered into the soul. It looks about it—it has no friends to aid, no comforters, but tormentors in abundance. It knoweth naught of hope of deliverance; it hath heard the everlasting key of destiny turning in its awful wards, and it hath seen God take that key and hurl it down into the depth of eternity never to be found again. It hopeth not; it knoweth no escape; it guesseth not of deliverance; it pants for death, but death is too much its foe to be there; it longs that non-existence would swallow it up, but this eternal death is worse than annihilation. It pants for extermination as the laborer for his Sabbath; it longs that it might be swallowed up in nothingness just as would the galley slave long for freedom, but it cometh not—it is eternally dead. (ibid.)

When eternity shall have rolled round multitudes of its everlasting cycles it shall still be dead. Forever knoweth no end; eternity cannot be spelled except in eternity. Still the soul seeth written o’er its head, “Thou art damned forever.” It heareth howlings that are to be perpetual; it seeth flames which are unquenchable; it knoweth pains that are unmitigated; it hears a sentence that rolls not like the thunder of earth which soon is hushed—but onward, onward, onward, shaking the echoes of eternity—making thousands of years shake again with the horrid thunder of its dreadful sound—“Depart! depart! depart! ye cursed!” This is the eternal death. (ibid.)

C.S. Lewis (1898–1963)

Milton was right.... The choice of every lost soul can be expressed in the words

“Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven.” There is always something they insist on keeping, even at the price of misery. There is always something they prefer to joy —that is, to reality. (*GD*, 66)

There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, “Thy will be done,” and those to whom God says, in the end, “*Thy* will be done.” All that are in Hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. To those who knock [the door] is opened. (ibid., 69)

[Let’s say, for example, that] my bad temper or my jealousy are gradually getting worse—so gradually that the increase in seventy years [of life on this earth] will not be very noticeable. But it might be absolute hell in a million years: in fact, if Christianity is true, Hell is the precisely correct technical term for what it would be. (*MC*, 73)

If a game is played, it must be possible to lose it. If the happiness of a creature lies in self-surrender, no one can make that surrender but himself (though many can help him to make it) and he may refuse. I would pay any price to be able to say truthfully, “All will be saved.” But my reason retorts, “Without their will, or with it?” If I say “Without their will” I at once perceive a contradiction; how can the supreme voluntary act of self-surrender be involuntary? If I say “With their will,” my reason replies, “How, if they *will not* give in?” (*PP*, 106–07).

In a sense, it is better for the creature itself, even if it never becomes good, that it should know itself a failure, a mistake. Even mercy can hardly wish to such a man his eternal, contented continuance in such ghastly illusion. Thomas Aquinas said of suffering, as Aristotle had said of shame, that it was a thing not good in itself, but a thing which might have a certain goodness in particular circumstances. (ibid., 110)

“He has his wish—to live wholly in the self and to make the best of what he finds there. And what he finds there is Hell” (ibid., 111).

[Some object] that death ought not to be final, that there ought to be a second chance.
81
I believe that if a million chances were likely to do good, they would be given. But a master often knows, when boys and parents do not, that it is real useless to send a boy in for a certain examination again. Finality must come some time, and it does not require a very robust faith to believe that omniscience knows when. (ibid., 112)

A damned soul is nearly nothing: it is shrunk, shut up in itself. Good beats upon the damned incessantly as sound waves beat on the ears of the deaf, but they cannot receive it. Their fists are clenched, their teeth are clenched, their eyes fast shut. First they will not, in the end they cannot, open their hands for gifts, or their mouths for food, or their eyes to see. (*GD*, 127)

Finally, it is objected that the ultimate loss of a single soul means the defeat of

> omnipotence. And so it does. In creating free beings with free will, omnipotence from the outset submits to the possibility of such defeat. [However,] what you call defeat, I call miracle: for to make things which are not Itself, and thus to become, in a sense, capable of being resisted by its own handiwork, is the most astonishing and unimaginable of all the feats we attribute to the Deity. I willingly believe that the damned are, in one sense, successful, rebels to the end; that the doors of hell are locked on the *inside*. I do not mean that the ghosts may not *wish* to come out of hell … but they certainly do not will even the first preliminary stages of that self-abandonment through which alone the soul can reach any good. They enjoy forever the horrible freedom they have demanded, and are therefore self-enslaved. (*PP*, 115–16)

CONCLUSION

There are sound biblical, theological, and historical bases for the Christian doctrine of hell, and there are no good reasons to deny it. Even Sigmund Freud showed that anything based on mere wish-fulfillment is an illusion. The root of the denial of hell is the wish to avoid suffering—no one wants to suffer, let alone suffer forever. However, this is nothing more than the wish that it be so; the denial of hell, like its cousin universalism,[82] is illusory.

While it might seem nice to imagine that there are no consequences for defying God, given the depravity of humankind (among other facts),[83] this is an absurd theory. Reality therapy—immersion in truth[84]—can help cure such illusions, but unfortunately for some, their therapy will be self-chosen shock treatment: "Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment" (Heb. 9:27).

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE ALLEGED TEMPORARY STATE OF THE SAVED (PURGATORY)

Roman Catholics, many Anglicans, and some Eastern Orthodox believe in a third place after death, called purgatory, while Protestants reject the existence of any such place. The debate is both crucial and enlightening to the differences between Roman Catholics and evangelical Protestants.[1]

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC DOCTRINE OF PURGATORY

Purgatory is an essential doctrine of the Catholic faith, as the Council of Trent declared "infallibly":

> If anyone says that after the reception of the grace of justification the guilt is so remitted and the debt of eternal punishment so blotted out to every repentant sinner, that no debt of temporal punishment remains to be discharged, either in this world or in Purgatory, before the gates of Heaven can be opened, let him be anathema. (in

Schroeder, *CCT*, 46)

Not everything Catholic theologians have said about purgatory has been pronounced as an infallible Catholic truth, as the following have:

(1) A purification takes place before one enters heaven.
(2) This purification involves some kind of pain or suffering.
(3) This purification can be assisted by prayers and devotions of the living.
(4) Purgatory is an actual place (Ratzinger [now Pope Benedict XVI, r. 2005–], ***E***, 230).
(5) A person will be there for a certain amount of time.

Of course, "infallible" or not, many other teachings about purgatory are widely believed and practiced in Catholicism, as both noted theologians and popes have made declarations on the issue. Even granting room for poetic license, the currently shrinking dogma of purgatory is a far cry from that in the classic *Purgatorio* (Dante Alighieri, 1265–1321).

The Nature of Purgatory

Catholic scholar Ludwig Ott (b. 1906) defined it thus: "The souls of the just which, in the moment of death, are burdened with venial sins or temporal punishment due to sins, enter Purgatory" (***FCD***, 482). Purgatory, then, is ***a period of temporal punishment for sins after death and before heaven***. Many contemporary Catholic theologians downplay and even deny that purgatory is a place, thinking of it more as a ***process*** of purification that leads to heaven.

With regard to fire in purgatory,[2] the contemporary liberal Catholic tendency is to take it in a spiritual sense. One catechism states,

The talk of purgatorial fire is an image that refers to a deeper reality. Fire can be understood as *the cleansing, purifying, and sanctifying power of God's holiness and mercy*. God's power straightens, purifies, heals, and consummates whatever remained imperfect at death.
[3]

The Objective of Purgatory

The purpose of purgatory is to provide cleansing for ***venial*** sins; unrepented ***mortal*** sins send a person to hell.[4] Ott notes that purgatory is for "the remission of the venial sins which are not yet remitted" (***FCD***, 485); supposedly, purgatory will produce "contrition deriving from charity and performed with the help of grace," thus, "the temporal punishments for sins are atoned for in the purifying fire by the so-called suffering of atonement, that is, by the willing bearing of the expiatory punishment imposed by God" (ibid.).

The Duration of Purgatory

The punishment of purgatory is said to be temporal, not eternal: "The purifying fire will not continue after the General Judgment" (ibid.),[5] and after this there is only heaven and hell. Contemporary Catholic theologians (even conservatives like Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI, r. 2005– , b. 1927) shy away from quantifying the "time" one spends in purgatory, speaking, rather, of an "existential time" or "transforming experience" in which one "encounters" Christ. Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI, r. 2005–) claims that purgatory "is the inward necessary process of transformation in which a person becomes capable of Christ" (***E***, 230). In the more traditional view, however, purgatory is a place in which, depending on his sins, one spends either longer or shorter periods of time. Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI, r. 2005–) admits that Trent's doctrinal pronouncement implies that purgatory is a place, since it uses the preposition ***in*** (ibid., 220).

Roman Catholics utilize both Scripture and tradition to defend the dogma of purgatory; we will now examine those defenses, respectively.

Catholic Arguments for Purgatory Using Scripture

Ott holds that "Holy Writ teaches the existence of the cleansing fire indirectly, by admitting the possibility of a purification in the other world" (***FCD***, 483). He cites several passages in support of purgatory.

2 Maccabees 12:42–46 [6]

Ott observes that, in this text, "the Jews prayed for their fallen [dead] … that their sins might be forgiven them" (ibid.). This would seem to indicate that there was both punishment and forgiveness beyond the grave.

Matthew 12:32

Jesus says there will never be forgiveness for blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, "either in this age or in the age to come." Ott infers that this "leaves open the possibility that [other] sins are forgiven not only in this world but in the world to come" (ibid.).

1 Corinthians 3:15

Paul declares, "If someone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss. He himself will be saved, but only as through fire" (net). Ott notes, "The Latin Fathers take the passage to mean a transient purification punishment in the other world" (ibid.).

Matthew 5:26

Jesus speaks of a judge who will not release his prisoner until complete repayment of debt. Ott comments, "Through further interpretation … a time-limited condition of punishment in the other world began to be seen expressed in the time-limited punishment of the prison" (ibid., 484).

Catholic Arguments for Purgatory Using Tradition and Speculation

In spite of his attempt to infer the existence of purgatory from Scripture, Ott admits, “The main proof for the existence of the cleansing fire lies in the testimony of the Fathers” (ibid.)—particularly the Latin Fathers, such as Cyprian (200–258) and Augustine (354–430).
In addition to tradition is theological speculation in favor of purgatory:

> Speculatively, the existence of the cleansing fire can be derived from the concept of the sanctity and justice of God. The former demands that only completely pure souls be assumed into Heaven.... The latter demands that the punishment of sins still present be effected, but on the other hand, forbids that souls that are united in love with God should be cast into hell. [Therefore,] an intermediate state is to be assumed, whose purpose is the final purification and which for this reason is of limited duration. (ibid.)

A PROTESTANT RESPONSE TO CATHOLIC ARGUMENTS FOR PURGATORY

Two preliminary notes.
First, Ott admits that the Bible teaches the existence of purgatory only “indirectly,” and even then it is only a “possibility” from these texts. Such phrases obviously reveal the weakness of purgatory’s supposed biblical basis.
Second, Ott acknowledges that the last argument is only arrived at “speculatively.” ***Purgatory has no direct or positive proof from Scripture; the entire doctrine is based on extrabiblical tradition and human speculation***.

A Response to the Arguments From the Bible

The ***New Catholic Encyclopedia*** frankly discloses that “the doctrine of purgatory is not explicitly stated in the Bible” (11:1034). In fact, neither is

purgatory ***implicitly*** taught in Scripture, since the Roman Catholic use of God's Word to support purgatory does violence to the contexts of the passages employed. Brief examination and rebuttal will suffice.

2 Maccabees 12:42–46

The Protestant response to the use of this text to support purgatory is basic: 2 Maccabees is not part of the inspired canon and has no biblical authority.[7] That work, along with the rest of the Apocrypha, was not accepted as inspired by the Jewish community that wrote it. The apocryphal writings were not accepted by Jesus and the apostles, who never quoted them with authority in the New Testament.[8] They were rejected by many important early Fathers, including Jerome (340–420), the great biblical scholar and translator of the Latin Vulgate. Indeed, they weren't infallibly added to the Roman Catholic Bible until ***after*** the Reformation (c. 1546) in a futile attempt to support purgatory and prayers for the dead, which had been rightly attacked by Martin Luther (1483–1546). Even then, the polemical, counterreformational Council of Trent inconsistently rejected some apocryphal books, including one that speaks against prayer for the dead.[9]

Matthew 12:32

"Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come."

Roman Catholic use of Matthew 12:32 to support theoretical forgiveness of sins after death fails for several reasons.

First, the text is not saying that there will/could be forgiveness in the next life (after suffering for sins), but that ***there will be no forgiveness for this sin***[10] ***in the next world***. How can Christ's absolute denial of post-death forgiveness for a specific sin possibly be the basis for speculation that sins in general will be forgiven in the next life?

Second, purgatory (as defined by the Catholic Church) involves only venial sins,

and this sin is not venial, it is mortal—eternal and unforgivable. How can Jesus' statement about the impossibility of post-death forgiveness for a mortal sin be the foundation of an argument that non-mortal sins will then be forgiven?
Third, Jesus isn't even speaking about punishment, which Catholics affirm will occur in purgatory. Accordingly, in no sense could this passage be used to support the concept of purgatorial punishment.
Fourth, and finally, even if this passage did imply punishment, it would not be for those who will eventually be saved (as Catholics believe is the case with those who go to purgatory); ***Christ is speaking about those who will never be saved***. That Catholic scholars would cite Matthew 12:32 in support of purgatory only highlights the profound lack of biblical support for the doctrine.

1 Corinthians 3:15

First, again, Paul, speaking of believers who will one day be given a "reward" (v. 14) for their service to Christ, says, "If someone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss. He himself will be saved, but only as through fire" (net). This neither says nor implies ***anything*** about a believer suffering temporal consequences in purgatory for his sins: ***He*** is not burned in the fire; his ***works*** are burned. Ott seems to admit that this text "is speaking of a transient punishment ***on the Day of General Judgment***, probably consisting of severe tribulations after which the final salvation will take place" (***FCD***, 483, emphasis added). If so, then even by Catholic admission Paul is not referring to what has traditionally been called purgatory.
Second, just as revelatory, the tendency of contemporary Catholic apologists to reduce purgatorial pain to the scrutinizing experience of postmortem sanctification indicates their retreat from their traditional, even more objectionable, dogma.
Third, 1 Corinthians is written to those "who ***have been*** sanctified in Christ Jesus" (1:2 nasb). Since they were already positionally sanctified in Christ,[11] they needed no further purification to give them a right standing before God. After listing examples of those who will not inherit God's kingdom—including fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, thieves, drunkards, slanderers, and swindlers—Paul adds, "That is what some of you were. But you ***were washed***, you ***were sanctified***, you ***were justified*** in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" (6:11). From

this and other texts (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21), it is evident that their sins were already taken care of by Christ's suffering (cf. 1 Peter 2:22–24; 3:18) and that they were clothed in His righteousness, standing perfect before God. They needed no further suffering for sins; that God desired them to improve their practical state on earth in no sense diminishes their absolutely perfect status in His kingdom.[12]

Fourth, the context reveals that Paul is not speaking about the ***consequence*** for sin, but the ***reward*** for service to those already saved: "If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward" (1 Cor. 3:14 tlb).[13] Likewise, as even Catholic theology acknowledges, the "loss" is clearly not of salvation, since "he himself will be saved" (v. 15); the loss is of reward for not serving Christ faithfully. There is absolutely nothing here about believers suffering for sins after death; ***Jesus suffered for our sins by*** His ***death***.[14]

Fifth, and finally, this "fire" does not purge our ***soul*** from sins; rather, it will disclose and test our ***work***: "Each man's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire [itself] will test what sort of work each one has done" (v. 13 rsv). There is literally nothing here about purging from sin; contrary to Catholic claims, the purpose of this cleansing is not ontological (actual) but functional (pragmatic). The focus is on what the Christian will receive for service (cf. 2 Tim. 4:8; 2 Cor. 5:10), not on how his character is cleansed from sin.[15]

Matthew 5:26

With regard to Jesus' words about a judge who would not release the prisoner until he paid in full, Ott's comment is that "through further interpretation … a time-limited condition of punishment in the other world began to be seen expressed in the time-limited punishment of the prison" (***FCD***, 484). This "further interpretation" goes well beyond the context for several reasons.

First, that Jesus is not talking about a post-death spiritual prison but a pre-death physical prison is made plain by the previous verse: "Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court … or he may hand you over to the judge … and you may be thrown into prison." To be sure, Jesus is speaking

beyond mere external matters to spiritual matters of the heart (cf. vv. 21–22); however, nothing warrants the conclusion that He intended the concept of a "prison" to refer to a place (or process) of purgation for sins in the next life (which is what one must conclude if this passage is made to speak of purgatory). Even orthodox Catholics shy away from the prison image of purgatory, claiming it is not "some kind of supra-worldly concentration camp" (Ratzinger, [now Pope Benedict XVI, r. 2005–] ***E***, 230).

Second, to force this text into functioning as an analogy or illustration of a spiritual prison after death (i.e., purgatory) is to beg the question; one has to assume that there actually is a purgatory where we "will not be released until [we] have paid" (v. 26 amp) before this passage can be an illustration of it. Illustrations do not ***prove*** anything; they ***illustrate*** a belief or concept that may or may not be true.

Third, if this text were a reference to purgatory, it would contradict Scripture's clear teaching that, for the believer, there is nothing left to pay for the consequences of our sins, temporal or eternal.[16]

While Catholic theology acknowledges that Christ's death paid the penalty for the eternal consequences of our sins, it denies that this means there is no purgatory in which we pay the temporal consequences. Conversely, as we shall see,[17] Christ's death was both complete and sufficient for all our sins ***and all their consequences***. To say some suffering for sins remains for us is to insult His "once for all" finished work (cf. Heb. 10:14–15). Because Jesus suffered for our sins, there is "no condemnation" for those in Christ (Rom. 8:1).

A Response to the Arguments From Tradition and Speculation

Ott admits that "the main proof for the existence of the cleansing fire [purgatory] lies in the testimony of the Fathers" (***FCD***, 484), even though he is not hesitant in rejecting their majority testimony on other occasions. At any rate, the question regarding the Fathers' testimony, in each case, is whether "they attest a truth of [God's] Revelation or whether they wrongly interpret a truth of [God's] Revelation" (Ratzinger, [now Pope Benedict XVI, r. 2005–] ***E***, 230). This is what we will ask of the Roman doctrine of purgatory, for, as we have seen,

biblical passages used by Catholics to support it have been misinterpreted. Ludwig Ott is a standard Catholic authority on dogma; in reading through his work, it is fascinating to note how frequently he admits that this doctrine "is not explicitly revealed in Scripture" or that "direct and express scriptural proofs are not to be had" or that "express scriptural proofs are lacking" (op. cit., 200, 208, 214, etc.). The fact is, purgatory has no biblical basis.

PROTESTANT REASONS FOR REJECTING PURGATORY

In addition to counterarguments, Protestants offer many other reasons for rejecting purgatory, including the following.

Purgatory Is a Denial of the All-Sufficiency of Christ's Suffering

Protestants reject purgatory primarily because it effectively denies the all-sufficiency of Christ's atoning death,[18] at which he cried, ***"It is finished"*** (John 19:30). Speaking of His salvific work, Jesus said to the Father, "I glorified you on earth by ***finishing*** the work that you gave me to do" (17:4 tlb). Hebrews declares emphatically that salvation by Christ's suffering was a once-for-all accomplished fact: "By one sacrifice ***he has made perfect forever*** those who are being made holy" (10:14).

Purgatory, the insistence that we must suffer for our own sins, is the ultimate insult to Christ's ultimate sacrifice. Purgatory is not ***after*** our death; it was ***in*** Christ's death, for "when he had made ***purification*** for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (1:3 tlb). Purification, or purging from our sins, ***was*** accomplished (in the past) through the Cross. Praise be to God that this is the only purgatory that ever needed to be suffered!

Of course, there ***is*** hell for those who reject this marvelous provision of divine grace,[19] and there ***are*** temporal cause-effect relations in this life regarding what we sow, and, consequently, reap (Gal. 6:8–9). Nevertheless, there is no evidence

that in the next life we will pay for results of our sins, either eternally or temporally.
To argue that purgatory is part of our experiential sanctification is to overlook two very important points.

One, all ***experiential*** sanctification is in this life, before death;[20] the only sanctification after death is ***ontological*** (actual). The Bible calls this post-death change ***glorification*** (Rom. 8:30; 1 John 3:2).[21]
Two, sanctification is not a process of ***suffering*** for our sins; it is a process through which God, by His grace, ***delivers*** us from our sins—all of which Christ has suffered for, ***past, present, and future***. To be sure, salvation is not fully obtained at the moment of initial justification. As we have repeatedly seen, salvation comes in three stages:[22] salvation from the ***past penalty*** of sin (positional justification), salvation from the ***present power*** of sin (practical sanctification), and salvation from the ***future presence*** of sin (ultimate glorification). ***In none of these stages do we suffer for our sins as a condition for entering heaven***. Salvation is not something we do to obtain heaven; by Jesus' death, salvation is done!

> Jesus paid it all.
> All to him I owe.
> Sin had left a crimson stain.
>
> He washed it white as snow.[23] (cf. Isa. 1:18)

Purgatory Is Contrary to the Immediacy of Heaven or Hell After Death

The Bible speaks of death as the final moment of life after which one goes immediately either to heaven or to hell (Heb. 9:27).[24] A great chasm has been fixed between the two to prevent anyone from crossing the border after death (Luke 16:26). Paul says that at death believers are instantly "away from the body and at home with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8); this certain reality is evident from his

declaration that “we know” it is so (v. 1).[25]
The at-death immediacy of ultimate bliss for the Christian is elsewhere confirmed as well.[26] The dying thief on the cross would be in paradise that very day (Luke 23:43). Paul said that when he died he would “depart and be with Christ” (Phil. 1:23), and some of his last written words speak of his “departure” to his “crown of righteousness” (2 Tim. 4:6–8). The saints who will be martyred during the Tribulation[27] will go immediately to heaven (Rev. 6:9–10), as did Enoch (cf. Heb. 11:5) and Moses and Elijah (cf. Luke 9:30–31).
The at-death immediacy of ultimate anguish for the unbeliever is likewise attested. In Jesus’ story about Lazarus dying and going to heaven, “the rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment,” he cried out (Luke 16:22–23).[28] Scripture completely lacks indication that anyone will be purified for sins after death. Death is final, and a destiny of woe or bliss is instantaneous.

Purgatory Is Based on the Unbiblical Teaching of “The Treasury of Merit”

Another concept associated with the doctrine of purgatory is the Roman Catholic belief in the treasury of the saints and meritorious works for the dead. According to Catholic theology there is, in addition to the merit obtained by Christ on the cross, a storehouse of merit deposited by the saints on which others can draw for help. This concept of merit (or reward) involves the dispersion of mercy over and above justice, but such merit is required for salvation nonetheless. In short, those saints who have done more good deeds than necessary for their salvation have put extra funds in heaven’s bank; those in need can draw on these resources for their own deliverance.[29] Through prayers and good deeds on behalf of the dead, the Catholic’s stay in purgatory can be shortened as he draws on the surplus:

> The possibility of vicarious atonement [of one believer for another] is founded in the unity of the Mystical Body. As Christ, the Head, in His expiatory suffering, took the place of the members, so also one member can take the place of another. [Thus,] the doctrine of indulgences is based on the possibility and reality of vicarious atonement.

(Ott, *FCD*, 317)

In the Jubilee Bull (1350), Pope Clement VI (r. 1342–1352) was the first to declare the doctrine of the "Treasury of the Church." According to Ott, this speaks of "the merits (atonements) of Mary,[30] the Mother of God, and of all the chosen, from the greatest to the least of the just, [who] contribute to the increase of the treasure from which the Church draws in order to secure remission of temporal punishment" (ibid.).

Catholic Arguments for a Treasury of Merit

Some Catholic scholars see biblical grounds for the treasury of merit and for indulgences. An indulgence is the remission of a temporal punishment for a sin whose guilt God has already forgiven. According to Trent (in Schroeder, ***CCT***, 25th Session, 1563), the Church of Rome has the power to grant indulgence, of which there are two kinds: partial and plenary (full). According to Catholic dogma, a partial indulgence frees a person from only part of the temporal punishment for sin that must be suffered either in this life or in purgatory. A plenary indulgence frees a person from the whole punishment due for that sin. The idea that indulgences may be obtained from the Church is based on the doctrine of merit and that one person, by his works or prayers, can merit substitutionary favor with God for another. Trent proclaimed infallibly,

> [The bishops] instruct the faithful diligently in matters relating to intercession and invocation of the saints … to invoke them and to have recourse to their prayers, assistance and support in order to obtain favors from God through His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (ibid.)

Ott claims,

> Even in the Old Testament the idea of vicarious atonement by innocent persons for [the] guilty is known.... Moses offers himself to God as a sacrifice for the people who sinned (
>
> Ex. 32:32

). [Further,] Job brings God a burnt offering, in order to expiate the sins of his children (

Job 1:5

). Isaiah prophesies [in

Isa. 53

] the vicarious suffering of atonement of Christ as a ransom, as an offering in atonement for the sins of mankind. [Likewise,] the Apostle Paul teaches that also the faithful can rend[er] expiation for one another [

Gal. 6:2

]. (*FCD*, 317)

In addition to also citing Colossians 1:24, 2 Corinthians 12:15, and 2 Timothy 4:6 as proof texts, Ott points to early Fathers (including Ignatius and Polycarp) in support of Catholic belief in a treasury of merit:

Origen teaches that the Apostles and Martyrs by their death remove the sins of the faithful.... Cyprian says expressly that sinners can be supported with the Lord by the help of the martyrs.... And St. Thomas Aquinas argued on the basis of

Galatians 6:2

("Bear one another's burdens") [that] in so far as two men are one by charity, one can render [temporal] atonement for the other. (ibid., 317–18)

A Protestant Response to Catholic Arguments for a Treasury of Merit

Protestants reject the Roman Catholic doctrine of a treasury of merit as based in misinterpretation of Scripture and contrary to the all-sufficiency of Christ's atonement.[31]

Exodus 32:30–32

Moses told Israel, "I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin." Then he prayed, "If you will only forgive their sin—but if not, blot me out of the book that you have written" (tlb).

Even a casual look at these words yields interpretation contrary to Catholic usage.

For one thing, there is absolutely nothing, literal or figurative, about any

heavenly storehouse of merit to which some can contribute and upon which others can draw.[32] At best, the passage merely reveals the highly commendable desire of one person willing to suffer for others.

In addition, Exodus doesn't say that God accepted Moses' offer to be blotted out of His book, and, in fact, God did not blot him out. What God did accept was Moses' sacrificial desire as an indication of his heart's sincerity.[33] God did not accept Moses' life as atonement for Israel; he accepted Moses' ***willingness*** to be sacrificed. Paul expressed willingness to go to hell if Israel could be saved (Rom. 9:3), which was admirable but unfulfillable, commendable yet impossible, though indicative of Paul's passion for his people.

Job 1:5

Job said that he offered sacrifices for his children because "it may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts" (nkjv). However, this again falls far short of supporting a heavenly treasury of merit.

First, the text makes no mention of any such treasury.

Second, the text never indicates that God accepted this solicitous act on behalf of Job's children. The passage could be descriptive (not prescriptive), informing us as to what Job did but not as to whether this is what ought to be done. This is true of the record of Job's friends, which is descriptive of what they said, but not of what God thought (e.g., cf. Job 42:7).

Third, a careful contextual study reveals that the passage's intent is to show us how righteous Job was (cf. 1:1), not whether atonement can be made for someone else's sins. Certainly, God hears the prayers of a righteous person (42:8; cf. James 5:16), but this in no way implies that he or she can help atone for another's sins. A person's right standing before God is not transferable: "The righteousness of the righteous shall be his own" (Ezek. 18:20 tlb).

Fourth, and finally, even if the acts of one righteous person (like Job) ***were*** in some way efficacious for his family or friends on earth, that would not support its effectiveness for the departed. Even if this passage ***were*** prescriptive, Job offered sacrifices for the living, not for the dead.

Isaiah 53

Unfortunately for Catholicism, this famous passage does not teach the

substitutionary atonement of one sinful human being for another; it teaches that the sinless Christ is the substitutionary atonement for a sinful world.[34]

> He [Christ] was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins,
> Upon him was the chastisement that makes us whole.…
> We had ***all*** gone astray like sheep, each following his own way;
> But the Lord laid upon him the guilt of us ***all***. (vv. 5–6, nab)

Furthermore, notice that it's not simply our ***guilt*** for which Christ died but also our "chastisement" or ***punishment*** (v. 5). This is directly contrary to the Catholic claim that we must satisfy temporal consequences for sin. Either Christ did not pay for the temporal consequences, in which case His death is not all-sufficient for our sins (as this text and others declare it to be), or Christ paid for all (including the temporal) consequences of our sins, in which case there is no need for purgatory. Catholicism is stuck: Either its view of Christ's death is deficient or purgatory is unnecessary.

Galatians 6:2

Paul exhorts us to "bear one another's ***burdens***" (nkjv), but he does not say we can bear the ***punishment*** for each other's sins.

The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous man will be credited to him, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against him. (
Ezek. 18:20
)

There is solidarity between believers in regard to our struggles, but there is no human substitution for sins. We are to bear our "own load" (Gal. 6:5), and then we are to help bear our brother's load, but that we cannot bear his sins is made clear in the verse "A man reaps what ***he*** sows" (v. 7).

Colossians 1:24

Paul's words about "completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church" (tlb) give no basis for purgatory.

First, Paul does not mean that Christ's atoning sacrifice is inefficient for all eternal and temporal consequences of sin. If he did mean this, he plainly would be contradicting himself and the rest of the New Testament.[35] If Christ's death is sufficient—and Catholics say they believe that it is—then nothing can be added to this sufficiency.[36]

Second, there is a certain sense in which Christ still suffers after His death. When Jesus said to Paul, "Why are you persecuting Me?" He was not then literally on earth, so this must be a reference to His body (the church), which Paul was persecuting (cf. Acts 8:1; 9:1–2).[37] In a similar sense, we can suffer for Jesus, since "it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake" (Phil. 1:29 nkjv). But this is ***not*** atoning for sin. Only Jesus suffered ***for*** sin (cf. 1 Peter 2:21; 3:18; 2 Cor. 5:21); we suffer ***because*** of our sins, but never ***for*** the sins of others (cf. Ezek. 18:20). When we suffer for Christ, we are undergoing pain as part of His spiritual body (cf. 1 Cor. 12:26), but only what He suffered in His physical body on the cross is efficacious for our sins. Our suffering is in ***service*** to Christ, not for the ***salvation*** of others.

Third, even according to the nonsalvific sense in which this Pauline statement declares that we can suffer for others, no passage in the scriptural canon says we can suffer on behalf of those who are dead (cf. Rom. 5:7).

2 Corinthians 12:15

The apostle says to the Corinthians, "I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls" (nkjv). However, there are several significant leaps one must take from this to reach the teaching that the living can offer prayers and indulgences on behalf of those suffering in purgatory:

(1) Neither this nor any other passage speaks of purgatory.

(2) The action in this text on behalf of others is for the living, not for the dead.
(3) The suffering is not for their ***sins*** (or sin's temporal consequences) but in order to help bear their ***burden*** or help minister the grace of Christ to them.

2 Timothy 4:6

Paul's being "poured out as a libation [offering]" (tlb) is referring to his death as a martyr. There is ***nothing*** here about purgatory, indulgences, prayers for the dead, or a treasury of merit. The truth is, this Catholic dogma is biblically unfounded and contrary to the unassailable doctrine of salvation by grace through faith.[38]

Other Reasons to Reject a Treasury of Merit and/or Purgatory

The Very Idea of Salvific Merit Violates Clear Biblical Teaching

The most important reason to reject a treasury of merit, by which one human being can perform good deeds that will be credited to the account of another in purgatory, is the concept of merit itself. Salvation is not earned (Rom. 4:4–5); eternal life is by grace alone through faith alone.[39] The idea of buying[40] an indulgence (the concept that prompted Martin Luther's reaction against abuses in the Catholic Church) is repugnant: "You were ransomed from the futile ways … not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish" (1 Peter 1:18–19 tlb). Like the "official" Jewish traditions that grew up around the Old Testament, official Roman Catholic tradition has often gone contrary to the Word of God (cf. Matt. 15:6).

Catholic Church Tradition Is Not Infallible

Extrabiblical speculation for purgatory fares no better. As already noted, the early Fathers were not at all unanimous on this issue, which is in contradiction to the Council of Trent's demand that the Bible be interpreted according to the "unanimous consent" of the Fathers.

Tremendous Catholic scholars have rightly taught that the Fathers were not infallible and that only Scripture is.[41] For example, Augustine declared,

> It is to the canonical Scriptures alone that I am bound to yield such implicit subjection as to follow their teaching, without admitting the slightest suspicion that in them any mistake or any statement intended to mislead could find a place. (*L*, 82.3 in Schaff, *NPNF*)

Likewise, Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) affirmed, "We believe the successors of the apostles and prophets only in so far as they tell us those things which the apostles and prophets have left in their own writings" (***DV***, XIV.10–11). Even the official (infallible) pronouncement of this doctrine at Trent (1546) is late and ill-founded, finding only scant early-church support.

According to God's Word, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). Catholics accept that those who go to purgatory are "in Christ," that is, they are believers. Thus, no condemnation for anything having to do with our sins (guilt or consequences) awaits us after death: Jesus took all our condemnation for us on the cross.[42]

Purgatory Is Inconsistent With Other Catholic Doctrines

First of all, Catholic theology teaches that there will be no purgatory after the Second Coming[43] ***and*** that all believers need to suffer in purgatory for the temporal consequences of their sins. As such, it follows that purgatory is not necessary for those who die just before Christ returns. This would also be applicable to the countless millions of believers who will still be alive at that time.[44]

Furthermore, since God is absolutely just,[45] the consequences of these sins will only be able to have been removed if they've been endured by someone else, and this contains at least two problems for Catholic belief. For one thing, it reveals

that purgatory is not truly necessary for the person who commits the sin—someone else can substitute. For another, if substitutionary atonement for temporal consequences of sin is possible, then why not accept Christ's substitutionary atonement for this purpose (precisely what the Scriptures affirm; cf. Heb. 1:2–3)?[46]

In addition, those who live wickedly before their late-in-life or even deathbed conversion, but die at just about the time of the Second Coming, cannot suffer for sins, because there is no purgatory after Jesus returns. Regardless of whether they were baptized before they died, they will not have paid for temporal consequences. Again, since God is just and must punish sin, the death of Christ must have covered all the eternal ***and*** temporal consequences, and so there is no need for purgatory. This, of course, does ***not*** mean that in this life we don't endure hardships caused by our sins; God does use this world's circumstances and experiences to chasten and purify His own.[47] It ***does*** mean that there is no need for us to satisfy some outstanding justice in God, either in this life or in the next. Christ's ultimate sacrifice completely fulfilled God's justice on behalf of all the sins of the entire human race.[48]

Finally, the Catholic contention that purgatory is necessary for the payment of sin's temporal consequences is contrary to their own doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. If Mary could obtain complete sanctification at the moment of her ***conception*** without suffering the consequences of original sin, why cannot believers receive complete purification at ***death***?

Purgatory Involves the Unbiblical Belief in Praying for the Dead

Nothing was more repulsive to Protestant reformer Martin Luther than the sale of indulgences. Johann Tetzel (1465–1519), a Catholic salesman of indulgences, is said to have advertised that "when the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs." While current Roman scholars say this is an extreme, it did focus attention on belief in prayers for the dead and indulgences, which are closely associated with the doctrine of purgatory and the treasury of merit—in fact, parasitical on them, as there is no need to pray for the dead to be released from their sins unless there is such a place (or condition) as purgatory, and unless prayers can obtain merit on their behalf.

The Catholic Doctrine of Prayers for and to the Dead

Catholic dogma (*de fide*) states:

> The living Faithful on earth can come to the assistance of the souls in Purgatory by their intercessions (suffrages).... [By] suffrages are understood not only intercessory prayers, but also indulgences, alms and other pious works, above all the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. (in Ott, *FCD*)

The Council of Trent pronounced infallibly:

> There is a purgatory, and that the souls there detained are aided by the suffrages [prayers] of the faithful and chiefly by the acceptable sacrifice of the altar.... [The bishops are to] instruct the faithful diligently in matters relating to intercession and invocation of the saints ... to invoke them and to have recourse to their prayers, assistance and support in order to obtain favors from God through His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (*CCT*)

Biblical passages that Catholics venture in support of this doctrine are scant. There is the apocryphal 2 Maccabees 12:42–45, and Ott gives only 2 Timothy 1:18, while others appeal to 1 Timothy 2:1 and Matthew 17:3. We will examine each of these shortly.[49]

The primary arguments in favor of praying for the dead are taken from tradition. As though to make up for the lack of biblical support, Ott boasts that "tradition abounds in testimony in favor of the doctrine." Strangely, in addition to claiming the witness of Tertullian (c. 155–c. 225) and Cyprian, Ott cites what he admits is the "apocryphal Acts of Paul and of Thecla" in support of praying for the dead (ibid.).

A Protestant Response to the Catholic Doctrine of Prayers for the Dead

There have been different Protestant understandings as to the meaning of "the communion of saints." J. I. Packer (b. 1926) states that it can mean "the Creed's own elucidation of what the church is; namely, Christians in fellowship with each other—just that, without regard for any particular hierarchical structure" (***AC***, 76). "Communion of saints" also indicates the connection between the "church militant" (here on earth) and the "church triumphant" (in heaven; cf. Heb. 12:22–24); Peter Kreeft (b. 1938) notes that to these distinctions, Catholics add "the Church suffering" (in purgatory).[50] Communion of saints can also be understood as "[the sharing of holy things] (word, sacrament, worship, prayers), and to make the true but distinct point that in the Church there is a real sharing in the life of God" (Packer, op. cit).

It is within this framework that contemporary Roman Catholic apologists attempt to find a biblical basis for the practice of praying to the saints in heaven. Karl Keating states, "To fundamentalists the term communion of saints and its allied term, the Mystical Body of Christ, mean nothing."[51] He continues by mentioning the Pauline development of the unity of Christ's body;[52] however, admittedly, "Paul is writing about the members of the Church Militant [on earth], but his teaching on the Mystical Body [of Christ] implies that prayers unite us with the Church Triumphant [in heaven], too" (***CF***, 263–64). While perhaps we are united with the church triumphant in the sense of sharing the same goals—goals that departed believers had while they themselves were struggling in this "vale of tears"[53]—it seems a great stretch to go beyond this understanding and find biblical sanction for the reality of ***intercessory*** prayer between the two groups of believers.

2 Maccabees 12:45

The dispute is not over whether this text teaches praying for the dead—it says clearly, "It was a holy and pious thought [to] pray for them in death … [for] thus he made atonement for the dead that they might be freed from their sin." The debate is over whether 2 Maccabees belongs in the canon. We have already given our general objections to the Roman Catholic canonization of eleven apocryphal books at Trent and our specific objections to the status of 2

Maccabees,[54] so we will not repeat them now. It is sufficient here to say that there is no sound biblical, theological, or historical reason for accepting the inspiration of 2 Maccabees.[55] The ***dead*** are praying for ***us*** (cf. Rev. 6:10).[56]

2 Timothy 1:18

That Paul prayed for God to have mercy on Onesiphorus on the day of his reward does not at all support praying for the dead: ***Onesiphorus was still alive when Paul prayed for him***. Praying that someone alive will receive mercy on the Day of Judgment is a far cry from praying for him ***after*** he has already died.[57]

Protestant Arguments Against Praying for the Dead

Catholicism's Arguments Are Speculative and Inferential (Not Exegetical)

Consider this statement from one defender of praying to/for the dead: "(1) The Church is Christ's body. (2) Christ has only one Body; not one on earth and one in heaven. (3) Christians are not separated from each other by death. (4) Christians must love and serve each other" (Madrid, ***TR***, 8). Based on those four premises, the idea (conclusion) is that we must continue to pray for and ask for the help of those believers who have died.

From a biblical perspective there are several serious problems with this argument. While Protestants affirm the first and fourth premises, we have strong objections to the third and qualifications for the second.

First, the second premise, while true, is easily misconstrued. That there is only one body of Christ does not mean there is no real distinction between its visible and invisible dimensions.[58] Likewise, it does not mean that our duties to love can be performed the same way in each dimension. For example, I cannot (and need not) now perform my duty to physically care for my departed parents as I

could and did while they were living on earth. I also can no longer perform my duty to engage them in fellowship; they are in the invisible realm, so conversations and other interaction are not possible. Prayer has no place from the living toward the dead.

Second, the third premise is flatly false. God's Word says that death ***is*** separation from others on earth (believers included). Paul says the dead are "absent" from the visible bodily realm (2 Cor. 5:6 nkjv) and that they "depart" from this world (Phil. 1:23); he also comforted and assured the bereaved Thessalonian Christians that they would again one day be "with" believers who had already died (1 Thess. 4:17). It is simply false to claim that at death we will not be separated from other living believers.

Third, at least one implication of the fourth premise is inaccurate: while we must love and serve one another, we should not (and cannot) always do it the same way. Even on earth, when loved ones are unavailable, I cannot speak with them. According to Scripture, the dead are permanently unavailable until the Second Coming.[59]

Fourth, there are several other mistakes in this argument.

For one thing, it is beyond dubious to assume that because God has revealed to the dead ***some*** things that transpire on earth (e.g., Luke 15:10), they can hear us if we speak to them (or know our mind if we pray silently).

Further, it is highly questionable to assume that ***prayer*** and ***asking*** (others) are the same. Biblically, prayer is always to the Creator and never to a creature (even an angel). While prayer is not identical to worship, prayer is part of worship, and worship should always be directed to God alone.

Also, it is invalid to infer that because the saints in heaven may be praying ***for*** us we should be praying ***to*** them. There is no logical connection between the two—they would be praying to God, not to any created being. If anything, this proves the opposite of what Catholics believe.

Lastly, it is a false analogy to maintain that because Jesus' mother ***on earth*** interceded to Him at the wedding in Cana, believers on earth should ask Mary for intercession to God ***in heaven*** on their behalf. This says nothing of the fact that when Mary was approached (on earth), she pointed those in need ***to Jesus***, saying, "Do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5).

First, there are contradictory traditions, even from other early Fathers and apocryphal books.

Second, tradition, unlike the Bible, is not infallible.[60]
Third, that there were early traditions (e.g., from Tertullian) proves nothing. There were false traditions even earlier than that; for instance, John's gospel debunked a false tradition, emanating from a misunderstanding of Jesus' words, that John would never die (21:21–23). The apostles condemned many other false teachings in their day as well.[61] Some early traditions reflect apostolic truths; others are simply early errors.[62]
Fourth, and finally, if we are in any sense to be serving the dead (in light of their being our fellow believers), there are ways of honoring them and their memory without attempting to communicate with them.

Praying for the Dead Is Contrary to Death As Separation

The Bible speaks of death as separating the living from the deceased; death is "departure" from earth and being with Christ (Phil. 1:23; cf. 2 Tim. 4:6), the moment when we are "away from the body" (2 Cor. 5:8) and are separated from living loved ones until reunion at the resurrection (1 Thess. 4:13–18). In all of Scripture death is a veil, a chasm, that seals off the living from the dead (cf. Luke 16:26).[63] Any attempt to contact the dead is not only futile but forbidden (cf. Deut. 18:11); every such endeavor carries the possibility of demonic deception (cf. 1 Tim. 4:1).

Praying for the Dead Is Contrary to the Example of David

When David's baby was alive but seriously ill, he prayed fervently; when the baby died, David ceased praying immediately.[64] When asked why, he replied,

> While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept, for I said, "Who knows? The Lord may be gracious to me, and the child may live." But now he is dead; why should I

fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me. (2 Sam. 12:22–23 tlb)

David, who as a prophet of God claimed that "the Spirit of the Lord spoke through [him]" (23:2), obviously believed that prayers for the dead were ineffective; otherwise, he certainly would have attempted it in his desperate hour. In all of his many spiritual writings (cf. Psalms) about communicating with God, David never once suggested that we pray for the dead.

Praying for the Dead Is Contrary to the Example of Jesus

When Jesus lost his close friend Lazarus to death, He didn't pray for him;[65] He resurrected him with a command (John 11:43). Jesus prayed for the living: "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me" (vv. 41–42). Ironically, many reverse this by weeping for the living who stray while praying for the dead who are gone; ***Jesus wept for the dead*** (v. 35) ***and prayed for the living*** (op. cit.). Praying for the dead is a humanly initiated religious practice that opposes the teaching of sacred Scripture (cf. Matt. 15:6).

Praying for the Dead Is Contrary to the Sacrifice of Christ

As we have already noted, the whole idea that our prayers or works can do anything on behalf of the dead is contrary to the all-sufficiency of Christ's completed work on the cross. When Jesus died and rose again, the task of salvation was "finished" (John 19:30; cf. 17:4; Heb. 10:14), and when he purged our sins He "sat down" at the right hand of God (Heb. 1:3), since there was absolutely nothing more to accomplish for our salvation. The whole concept of praying for the dead so they might be freed from sin is an insult to Jesus Christ, who "freed us from our sins by his blood" (Rev. 1:5). Not only did He obtain

salvation for all our sins at once, but also, as our great High Priest (Heb. 7), He alone implements it for all time.[66]

Purgatory Is a Practical Denial of the Mediatorship of Christ

Despite theological protests to the contrary, any additional mediation with God is an affront to the all-sufficient, divinely appointed mediatorship of Jesus Christ: "There is … ***one mediator*** between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."[67] In Him,

> We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Heb. 4:15–16)

There is no reason to go to Mary or any other saint in heaven with our requests.[68]

Catholic apologists attempt to avoid the sting of this argument by making a distinction between ***Christ as the sole mediator*** and ***all believers as intercessors***. This does not help their cause (of proving we should pray to saints), because all the passages they employ are about direct intercession in prayer ***to God***, not to other creatures.[69] No biblical passage states or implies that we should pray to the saints; Catholic dogma, which maintains infallibly that we should, places tradition over Scripture, thereby proving the fallibility of the magisterium. Catholic rationalization for praying to the saints is also based on the seemingly plausible argument that because of their position in heaven, they may be better able to intercede. This, though, rejects the ministry of the Spirit, whose task it is to do this on our behalf. Who is better able to intercede for us than another person of the Trinity? "We do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be

uttered" (Rom. 8:26 nkjv); "through Him [Christ] we … have access by one Spirit to the Father" (Eph. 2:18 nkjv). Since beyond our explicit prayers to God, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us perfectly "in accordance with God's will" (Rom. 8:27), there is no need to call on anyone else in heaven to do so. ***It is wrong to expect any person to be more efficacious with God the Father than God the Son and God the Spirit*** (cf. 1 John 2:1–2).

Purgatory Is Pagan in Origin

If purgatory is not Christian in origin, then what is its source? Like so many extrabiblical Catholic doctrines, purgatory originated in pagan thought. Plato (c. 427–347 b.c.) taught similarly, four centuries before Christ:

> The soul which has been polluted, and is impure at the time of her departure, and is the companion and servant of the body always, and is in love with and fascinated by the body and by the desires and pleasures of the body … do you suppose that such a soul as this will depart pure and unalloyed? … That is impossible … and these must be the souls, not of the good, but of the evil, who are compelled to wander about such places in payment of the penalty of their former evil way of life; and they continue to wander until the desire which haunts them is satisfied and they are imprisoned in another body. (*P*, 81c–e)

THE HISTORICAL TESTIMONY AGAINST THE DOCTRINE OF PURGATORY

Early Fathers

Other than some pagan influence among certain church Fathers, there is little early support for the doctrine of purgatory,[70] and there is compelling evidence against it in the writers' emphasis on the all-sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice.[71]

Medieval Fathers

Some later Latin Fathers—Cyprian, Gregory, and Augustine—are cited in support of purgatory. However, the Reformers fiercely challenged the basis for these references and spoke out strongly against purgatorial doctrine.

Martin Luther (1483–1546)

Augustine, Ambrose, and Jerome held nothing at all of purgatory. Gregory, being in the night-time deceived by a vision, taught something of purgatory, whereas God openly commanded that we should search out and inquire nothing of spirits, but of Moses and the prophets. Therefore we must not admit Gregory's opinion on this point. (*TT*, 519)

"And their works do follow them" must not be understood of purgatory, but of the doctrine of good works, or of godly and true Christians, and of heretics. Arius, the heretic, has had his judgment; the fire of faith has declared it. For the last day will discover and declare all things. God has, in his word, laid before us two ways; one which by faith leads to salvation—the other, by unbelief, to damnation. (ibid.)

As for purgatory, no place in Scripture makes mention thereof, neither must we any way allow it; for it darkens and undervalues the grace, benefits, and merits of our blessed, sweet Savior Christ Jesus. The bounds of purgatory extend not beyond this world; for here in this life the upright, good, and godly Christians are well and soundly scoured and purged. (ibid.)

John Calvin (1509–1564)

[Catholicism's] purgatory cannot now give us much trouble, since with this ax we have struck it, thrown it down, and overturned it from its very foundations. I cannot agree with some who think that we ought to dissemble in this matter, and make no mention of purgatory, from which (as they say) fierce contests arise, and very little edification can be obtained. I myself would think it right to disregard their follies did they not tend to serious consequences.

But since purgatory has been reared on many, and is daily propped up by new blasphemies; since it produces many grievous offenses, assuredly it is not to be connived at, however it might have been disguised for a time, that without any authority from the word of God, it was devised by prying audacious rashness, that credit was procured for it by fictitious revelations, the wiles of Satan, and that certain

passages of Scripture were ignorantly wrested to its support. (*ICR*, 3.5.6)

When the expiation of sins is sought elsewhere than in the blood of Christ, and satisfaction is transferred to others, silence were most perilous. We are bound, therefore, to raise our voice to its highest pitch, and cry aloud that purgatory is a deadly device of Satan; that it makes void the cross of Christ; that it offers intolerable insult to the divine mercy; that it undermines and overthrows our faith. For what is this purgatory but the satisfaction for sin paid after death by the souls of the dead? Hence when this idea of satisfaction is refuted, purgatory itself is forthwith completely overturned. (ibid.)

If it is perfectly clear … that the blood of Christ is the only satisfaction, expiation, and cleansing for the sins of believers, what remains but to hold that purgatory is mere blasphemy, horrid blasphemy against Christ? I say nothing of the sacrilege by which it is daily defended, the offenses which it begets in religion, and the other innumerable evils which we see teeming forth from that fountain of impiety. (ibid.)

To the passage which they [the Romanists] produce from the history of the Maccabees, I will not deign to reply, lest I should seem to include that work among the canonical books. But Augustine holds it to be canonical. First, with what degree of confidence? "The Jews," says he, "do not hold the book of the Maccabees as they do the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms, to which the Lord bears testimony as to his own witnesses, saying, 'Ought not all things which are written in the Law, and the Psalms, and the Prophets, concerning me be fulfilled?' But it has been received by the Church not uselessly, if it be read or heard with soberness." Jerome, however, unhesitatingly affirms that it is of no authority in establishing doctrine; and from the ancient little book *De Expositione Symboli*, which bears the name of Cyprian, it is plain that it [Maccabees] was in no estimation in the ancient Church. (ibid., 3.5.8)

[Regarding

1 Corinthians 3:12–15

,] what fire [Catholics ask] can that be but the fire of purgatory, by which the defilements of sin are wiped away, in order that we may enter pure into the kingdom of God? But most of the Fathers give it a different meaning, viz., the tribulation or cross by which the Lord tries his people, that they may not rest satisfied with the defilements of the flesh. This is much more probable than the fiction of a purgatory. I do not, however, agree with them, for I think I see a much surer and clearer meaning to the passage.… In following out the thread of the metaphor, and adapting its parts properly to each other, he gave the name of fire to the examination of the Holy Spirit." (ibid., 3.5.9)

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758)

As the pope and his clergy robbed the people of their ecclesiastical and civil liberties and privileges, so they also robbed them of their estates, drained all Christendom of their money. They engrossed most of their riches into their own coffers, by vast revenues, besides pay for pardons and indulgences, baptisms and extreme unctions,

deliverance out of purgatory, and a hundred other things. See how well this agrees with the prophecies (

2 Thess. 2:3–4

;

Dan. 7:20–21

;

Rev. 13:6–7

;

17:3–4

). During this time also superstition and ignorance more and more prevailed. The Holy Scriptures by degrees were taken out of the hands of the laity, the better to promote the unscriptural and wicked designs of the pope and the clergy; and instead of promoting knowledge among the people, they industriously promoted ignorance. (*HWR*, 3.4.1)

They [Catholics] pay money to buy the souls of their departed friends out of purgatory; they worship the relics of dead saints, such as pieces of their bones, their teeth, their hair, pieces of their garments, and the like. And innumerable other such foolish delusions are they under. (*MNBTR*, 2.3)

The papists, many of them at least, make no doubt of the truth of those foolish notions of a purgatory, and the power of the priests to deliver them out of it, and give them eternal life, and therefore will not spare vast sums of money to purchase deliverance from those imaginary torments. How confident are many heretics in the grossest heresies! (ibid., 2.5)

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In view of purgatory's unbiblical nature, it is understandable that some contemporary Roman Catholics are deemphasizing certain aspects of traditional thinking. One insists that "in spite of some popular notions to the contrary, the Church has never passed judgment as to whether purgatory is a place or in a determined space where the souls are cleansed" (Hardon, ***CC***, 274). As to its importance, Catholics are confessing that "in the hierarchy of revealed doctrines, purgatory does not rank as high as the Trinity or the Incarnation" (ibid., 278).
A popular Catholic lay-evangelist wrote that some Catholics fall into the "legalism of Purgatory," thinking of it as a second chance. However, "Sacred Scripture indicates that there's really only one punishment for sin—and that's death." The Bible teaches "that we're off the hook. Jesus paid that awful price on the cross—our punishment was laid upon him."[72]
Another well-known charismatic lay-leader has mentioned changes in Catholic

practices that should gladden evangelical hearts:

> The reform of various rites, the restoration of the catechumenate for adult baptism, the beginning restoration of baptism by immersion are all hopeful signs.... [In some areas of Latin America,] infant baptism is being withheld if there is no assurance that the child will grow up in a community of faith and genuine Christian life.[73]

These speculations, welcomed at whatever level by Protestants as moves in the right direction, are quite divergent from traditional Catholic dogma and practice.[74] The biblical basis for these (purgatory and its accompanying doctrines) is found seriously wanting. In fact, these tenets are antibiblical, for they run contrary to such scriptural basics as the all-sufficiency and finality of Christ's atoning sacrifice[75] and the uniqueness of God as the sole object of our devotion and prayer.[76]

Conflicting traditions and human speculations are based often on apocryphal books that have been rejected from the canon by both Catholic and Protestant scholars. Consider the articulate observation of a contemporary Catholic about the effect that the practice of venerating and praying to the saints has had on the Church:

> I visited a prominent Catholic cathedral dedicated to St. Joseph ... and it sure seemed that one going through the cathedral could easily get the impression that St. Joseph was a Savior ... in a way that all but obscured the unique role of Jesus as Savior and Lord. (Martin, *HFG*, 136)

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CHAPTER TWELVE

ANNIHILATIONISM

Annihilationism is the doctrine that the wicked will not suffer an everlasting conscious hell.[1] Annihilationism is also called ***conditional immortality***; for instance, Anglican minister John Stott (b. 1925) holds that only believers will live forever, that immortality is a gift given only on the condition of belief.[2] Annihilationism holds that unbelievers, who will not have received God's gift of salvation, will be snuffed out of existence after the final judgment;[3] accordingly, they will experience no eternal conscious torment forever. It is alleged that this view of the unsaved's destiny most fully upholds God's mercy, that nonexistence is the best alternative for the unrepentant sinner. Annihilationists argue that while the lost cannot enjoy everlasting bliss with the righteous, they aren't deserving of conscious eternal wrath.

Annihilationism was embraced by Arnobius (fl. fourth century) but did not become popular until the nineteenth century, when it was propagated by Congregationalist Edward White[4] and then by Seventh-Day Adventist Le Roy Froom (1874–1970); Jehovah's Witnesses are also annihilationists. In the mid-twentieth century, Harold Guillebaud (1882–1964)[5] and Basil Atkinson (1895-

?)[6] defended conditionalism, and a few other evangelicals, such as John Wenham (b. 1913), John Stott, and Clark Pinnock (b. 1920) have embraced the view.[7]

As stated previously,[8] annihilationism was condemned as heretical by a Constantinople synod in 543, by the Second Council of Constantinople in 553, and by the Fifth Lateran Council in 1513 (see Wenham, ***GG***, 28, and Cross, ***ODCC***, 328). The traditional orthodox doctrine of hell as the eternal conscious punishment of the wicked has been upheld by most of the church's great fathers and theologians, including Tertullian (c. 155–c. 225), Augustine (354–430), Anselm (1033–1109), Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), Martin Luther (1483–1546), John Calvin (1509–1564), Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), Charles Hodge (1797–1878), William G. T. Shedd (1820–1894),[9] and B. B. Warfield (1851–1921). One of the orthodox position's best recent defenses is ***Hell on Trial*** by Robert A. Peterson (b. 1948), and there is no more magnificent literary expression of the doctrine than ***The Great Divorce*** by C.S. Lewis (1898–1963). The traditional doctrine of hell has evoked strong reactions from unbelievers and even believers. Bertrand Russell (1872–1970) declared,

> There is one *very serious defect* to my mind in Christ's moral character, and that is that He believed in Hell. I do not myself feel that any person who is really *profoundly humane* can believe in everlasting punishment.... [Indeed,] one does find repeatedly a *vindictive* fury against those people who would not listen to His preaching.... I must say that I think all this doctrine, that hell-fire is a punishment for sin, is a doctrine of *cruelty*. (*WIANC*, 593–94, emphasis added)

Of course, the atheistic Russell did not inform us by what standard he knew Christ's actions to be morally defective, inhumane, vindictive, and cruel. If all of these are absolute moral laws, then there must be an absolute Moral Lawgiver (God).[10] If they are not—or if Russell believed they are not—then his argument collapses into a groundless personal opinion.

Amazingly, some believers have parroted this emotive reaction in even more vivid terms, based on alleged moral repugnance. For instance, Pinnock wrote:

> Let me say at the outset that I consider the concept of hell as endless torment in

> body and mind an outrageous doctrine of the tradition which needs to be changed.... How can Christianity possibly project a deity of such cruelty and vindictiveness whose ways include inflicting everlasting torture upon his creatures, however sinful they may have been? Surely a God who would do such a thing is more nearly like Satan than like God. ("DFI," 246–47)

This caution by Millard Erickson (b. 1932) is to the point: One who makes such claims "had better be very certain he is correct. For if he is wrong, then he is guilty of blasphemy" (***EMH***, 152).

ANNIHILATIONIST APPEALS TO THE BIBLE: PRESENTED AND ADDRESSED

Le Roy Froom summarizes biblical arguments for annihilation in four points:

(1) Death by fire, or burning, set forth as the designated ***mode*** of final punishment (Ps. 21:9; Mal. 4:1, 3; cf. Rev. 20:14–15; Matt. 13:40, 42; 25:41, 46).
(2) Perishing as the ***result*** of such punishment (Ps. 37:28; cf. 2 Peter 2:1; John 3:14–15).
(3) Death, or cessation of being, as the ***end*** of such punishment (Ezek. 18:4, 20; Rom. 6:23; Rev. 21:8).
(4) Utter destruction as the permanent ***effect*** of such punishment (Ps. 55:23; 92:7; 145:20; cf. Matt. 7:13; 10:28). (***CFF***, 1.119ff.)

These and other arguments will be addressed in the following discussion.

Annihilationists present an array of New Testament terms that they insist show hell as a place of eternal extinction, not eternal suffering:

(1) ***analiskô***—to consume, destroy (2 Thess. 2:8).
(2) ***apôleia***—death, especially by violence, loss of things, ruin, waste (Phil.

3:19; 1 Tim. 6:9).

(3) ***apollumi***—to destroy utterly (twenty-three times), come to an end, ruin, to lose utterly … cause to perish (thirty-three times), bring to naught (Matt. 10:28; 21:7; Luke 17:27, 29; John 3:16; Rom. 2:12; 2 Cor. 4:3).

(4) ***apothnéskô***—die out, expire, cease (John 11:16, 26; Rom. 8:18).

(5) ***diaphtheirô***—to spoil throughout, corrupt utterly (Rev. 11:18).

(6) ***exolethreuô***—to destroy utterly, slay wholly, dissolve (Acts 3:23).

(7) ***katakaiô***—to burn up, or burn down (Matt. 3:12; Luke 3:17).

(8) ***katanaliskô***—to consume wholly or thoroughly (2 Thess. 2:8; Heb. 12:32).

(9) ***katargeô***—to render inactive, idle, bring to naught, make void, abolish (2 Thess. 2:8; 1 Cor. 15:26).

(10) ***kolasis***—punishment … a result, not a process (cf. Matt. 3:10; Luke 3:17).

(11) ***olethros*** (***olothreutés***)—death, ruin, that which causes death (2 Thess. 1:9).

(12) ***phtheirô*** (***kataphtheirô***)—to deprave, mar, spoil, corrupt (1 Cor. 3:17).

(13) ***phthora*** (***diaphthora***)—corruption, spoiling, destruction (Acts 2:27, 31; Gal. 6:8).

(14) ***thanatos***—extinction of life, death by judgment of court, or judgment of God against sin (the second death, Rev. 20:6, 14; 21:8; Rom. 6:21, 23). (ibid.)

While the crucial ideas behind these terms will be treated below, a few general comments are in order here.

First, many of these texts do not necessarily refer to hell.[11]

Second, not one text that definitely does refer to hell demands an annihilationist interpretation.[12]

Third, as will be shown, many clearly ***cannot*** support the annihilationist view in the way they are used by proponents.

In short, we will demonstrate that no definitive argument for annihilation can be based on these terms and texts. The conditionalists' statement that these terms always mean ultimate loss of life and final, complete termination of being is a serious overclaim.

The Use of the Term *Second Death*

Annihilationists point out the reference to the wicked's fate as the "second death" (Rev. 20:14). At death, a person loses consciousness in this world; hence, it is reasoned that at the "second death" he will lose consciousness in the world to come. Just as death cuts off all physical awareness in this life, even so the second death will sever all spiritual awareness in the next life. Ezekiel said, "The soul who sins shall die" (18:20 nkjv).

Response

For one thing, the second death is no more annihilation than is the first death. The first death is the separation of the soul from the body for a short time (until the resurrection),[13] not the soul's annihilation; the second death is the separation of the body ***and*** soul from God forever.

For another, once again, biblical "death" denotes conscious separation. Adam and Eve died spiritually the moment they sinned, yet they still existed and could hear God's voice (Gen. 2:17; cf. 3:10). Likewise, before one is saved, he is "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1 nkjv), yet he is still in God's image (Gen. 1:27; cf. 9:6; James 3:9) and is called on to believe (Acts 16:31) for salvation.[14]

Thus, to regard the biblical terms ***death*** or ***second death*** as annihilation is to misconstrue their meaning.

References to Being "Destroyed"

Annihilationists appeal to passages that speak of hell as a place of destruction as evidence for their view:

The nations were angry; and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the

dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great—and for destroying those who destroy the earth. (

Rev. 11:18

)

They argue that both the root word for ***destroy*** (Gk: ***diaphtheirô***) and the context in which it is used imply the annihilation of unbelievers' souls. The word means "to cause to wholly perish" (Froom, ***CFF***, 1.405), and the earth will be "destroyed" during the Tribulation.[15] The term ***exolethreuô*** is said to mean "utter destruction by death." Along with ***olethros***, conditionalists maintain that to take these terms in any other sense than annihilation is "to translate black as white" (ibid., 494).

Response

First of all, as to interpretation of the word ***destroy***, Greek authorities Arndt and Gingrich affirm that it means "spoil, destroy of rust-eating iron … of moths … that eat clothes … destroy persons and nations … ruin in the moral sense … be corrupted" (***GELNT***, 189). In none of these cases does it mean "annihilate" or "take out of existence."

In addition, the term is used four other times in the New Testament: once of a moth corrupting a garment (Luke 12:33); once of the outward body "wasting away" (2 Cor. 4:16) or "being worn down" (tcnt); once of corrupt minds (1 Tim. 6:5); and once of ships being broken up (Rev. 8:9). None of these imply annihilation.

What is more, even the context of the word's usage in Revelation 11:18 does not denote annihilation. "Destroying" the earth during the Tribulation will involve plagues, pollution, and purification to pave the way for the Millennium.[16] It does ***not*** mean "wholly perish" or "utterly destroy," let alone "obliterate from existence."

Also, even many of the annihilationists' illustrations of destruction do not prove

their point. Froom lists the following:

(1) a house falls (Matt. 7:26–27);
(2) tares are burned (13:30, 40);
(3) bad fish are cast away (13:48);
(4) harmful plants are rooted up (15:13);
(5) worthless trees are cut down (Luke 13:7);
(6) withered branches are burned (John 15:6);
(7) a debtor is held in prison (Matt. 5:26; 18:34);
(8) an offender is cast into outer darkness (8:12; 22:13; 25:30).

He concludes, "In each case (save the last two, given for another purpose) the destruction is declared complete, leading to utter and final disintegration" (***CFF***, 1.286–89).

This conclusion is wholly unwarranted.
First, some of these texts are not addressing hell (e.g., John 15:6), but the discipline of believers who do not abide in Christ.
Second, all are speaking of physical things that ultimately disintegrate, which misses the point, since the soul is not physical (cf. Luke 24:39).
Third, there is an equivocation in the verses that speak of burning, since the fire of hell is never quenched (Mark 9:43), while all earthly fires die out.
Fourth, most of the things "destroyed" do not cease to exist; rather, they fall, are cast away, rooted up, cut down, thrown in prison, or put out in darkness. None exemplifies annihilation.
Fifth, and finally, it begs the question to say that eventually all of these will disintegrate—of course they will, because they are all material. (Again, the soul is not.) Also, the material things take on a different mode of existence; they do not go out of existence. The illustrations used by conditionalists do not bolster but instead oppose their position.

The Words *Everlasting Destruction*

Some passages speak of destruction for the wicked:

> This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with *everlasting destruction* and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power. (
> 2 Thess. 1:7–9
>)

Annihilationists insist that the figure of "destruction" is incompatible with a continued conscious existence. The common meaning of the word, inside and outside Scripture, points to an object's obliteration; therefore, as applied to a conscious human being, it would mean a loss of consciousness.

Response

The term ***destruction***, as used of judgment on the wicked at death, does ***not*** mean extinction.

First, the very phrase itself (in 2 Thess. 1:9) does not fit with annihilationism: "Paul has in mind an irreversible verdict of eternal nonfellowship with God. A person exists but remains excluded from God's good presence" (McKnight, "ECEC" in Crockett, ***TNFTO***, 155–56).

Second, the same word for ***destruction*** (***olethron***) is used in 1 Corinthians 5:5 of the disfellowshiping (or ***disciplining***) of a church member's "flesh." Whatever ***flesh*** means here (whether body, old nature, etc.), it certainly was not annihilated when he was excommunicated—he was later returned to the fellowship of the church (cf. 2 Cor. 2:6).

Third, *destruction* does not mean extinction in Revelation 17 (vv. 8, 11), where the beast and the false prophet are thrown alive into the lake of fire and are still there a thousand years later (20:7). John says emphatically that they "will be tormented day and night for ever and ever" (v. 10).

Fourth, the Bible uses several main pictures to speak of hell: (1) darkness, (2) separation, (3) weeping, (4) gnashing of teeth, (5) punishment, (6) fire, (7) death, and (8) destruction. The first five in no sense coalesce with the idea of annihilation; and, when properly understood in context, neither do the last

three.[17] As applied to hell, then, ***destruction*** clearly does not mean annihilation but connotes the punishment of something still in existence. ***Punishment*** is precisely what Paul called the action taken on the excommunicated man (using the same word—cf. 2 Cor. 2:6; 1 Cor. 5:5).

Fifth, if ***destruction*** did mean "annihilation" when used of the unbeliever's post-death state, it would not be "everlasting" destruction, for annihilation is instantaneous; annihilation does not stretch over a long period of time, let alone forever, but only takes an instant and then is over. If someone undergoes everlasting destruction, then they must have an everlasting existence. (Analogously, just as the cars in a junkyard have been destroyed but are not annihilated—they are beyond repair or irredeemable—so the people in hell are not extinguished but are simply irredeemable and irreparable.)

Sixth, and finally, as Augustine observed, the terms ***eternal punishment*** and ***eternal life*** (see Matt. 25:46) are parallel, and it would be absurd to use them in the same sentence while meaning one is temporal and the other is eternal (***CG***, 21:21–24). Hence, the conditionalists' distinction between eternal consequences (which they accept) and eternal consciousness (which they reject) is contrived and not based on God's Word (see Harmon, "CAC" in ***UDH***, 210–12).

The Images of Burning

Conditionalists, arguing that biblical images of hell as fire support annihilationism, point to John's words: "His [Christ's] winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and ***burning up*** the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matt. 3:12). The notion is that the primary purpose of fire is to consume, not to punish, and that, thus, hellfire is designed for the consumption (not the punishment) of the wicked (e.g., see Stott, ***EE***, 316).

Response

This also is contrary to Scripture.
First, it does not mesh with the description of an unquenchable fire. If the fire never runs out, then neither does the fuel: no fuel (the wicked), no fire (hell).
Second, hell is a place where the "worm" never dies (Isa. 66:24; cf. Mark 9:43–48). If the fire consumed those in hell, they would die, so the fire of hell cannot be consumptive; it must be punitive.
Third, again, the comparison of eternal life and eternal punishment (in Matt. 25:46).[18]
Fourth, Jesus described hell as a "place of torment" (Luke 16:28). There is no evidence, here or elsewhere, that this is only to be understood as temporal, any more than heaven ("Abraham's Bosom") in the same text is to be understood as temporal.
Fifth, hell is described as a place of "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 13:40–42, 49–50), which indicates conscious pain.
Sixth, the lake of fire is where the devil, the beast, and the false prophet will be tormented forever (Rev. 20:15). John says that this is exactly where unbelievers will be sent (14:10), so there is no reason to believe their torment will not also be eternal. Annihilationists force an alien meaning into the text in maintaining that the lost will only be tormented so long as their suffering lasts. Not only are there no such words in the text, but the words of the text are directly contrary to the conditionalists' textual emendation.
Seventh, and finally, John's description of the new heaven and earth (after the lake-of-fire scene) reveals that the unsaved are still conscious; they are depicted as outside the gate of the heavenly city (22:15).

Torment Is Not Eternal, Only the Results Are

Conditionalism insists that while the ***result*** of judgment is eternal, the ***process*** of judgment is temporal. One text used to defend this is Revelation 14:10–11: "He [who worships the beast] will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And ***the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever***." The suggestion is that only the result of the fire (viz., the smoke) will exist forever, not the fire itself (Froom, ***CFF***, 1.411).

Response

For one thing, as the adage goes, “Where there’s smoke, there’s fire.” If there’s eternal smoke, there’s an eternal fire.
For another, John says the wicked will be “tormented” (Rev. 14:11).
Annihilation is not torment but the cessation of torment.
Significantly, other similar texts (e.g., 20:10) say clearly, “***They*** will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.”

The Reference to Going Into “Perdition”

The wicked are said to go into “perdition” (2 Peter 3:7 nkjv), and Judas is called the “son of perdition” (John 17:12 nkjv). The word ***perdition*** (Gk: ***apôleia***) simply means “perish,” which, conditionalists argue, indicates that the wicked will perish (go out of existence). They say Peter is declaring that the unrighteous should repent or else they will be annihilated (cf. v. 9).

Response

Perdition (***apôleia***) means “perish” or “come to ruin.” In 2 Peter 3:7 it is used in the context of ***judgment***, a term that implies consciousness.
That the wicked are said to go into “perdition” (and that Judas is called the “son of perdition”) does ***not*** mean they will be annihilated. Again, cars in the junkyard have perished in the sense of having been ruined, but they’re still cars, and they’re still in the junkyard. Jesus spoke of hell as a junkyard or dump where the fire would not cease and where a person’s resurrected body would not be consumed (cf. Mark 9:48). That the fire of hell is ceaseless (continual) is an indication that the punishment it inflicts is everlasting.

That Hell Is Like Never Being Born

Conditionalists bring up what Jesus said of Judas, that "it would be better for him if he had not been born" (Mark 14:21). Before one is conceived, he does not exist; for hell to be like the pre-birth condition, it must be a state of nonexistence. Consequently, Jesus was saying that nonexistence would have been better for Judas, and this is precisely what Judas, because of his great sin, was consigned to have—no more existence forever.

Response

First of all, even if taken literally, Jesus' declaration is not a comparison of Judas's perdition to his nonexistence before conception; it is a comparison to his existence in the womb before he was born. Jesus did not say it would have been better if Judas had never been ***conceived*** but if he'd never been ***born***.
Further, Jesus' statement may simply be a figure of speech (hyperbole or exaggeration) to indicate the severity of Judas's punishment.
What is more, His words cannot be a statement about the superiority of nonbeing over being, for, as we have seen, since nothing cannot be better than something, nonbeing cannot be better than being.[19]
Lastly, we've already noted that in a similar condemnation of the Pharisees, Jesus said Sodom and Gomorrah would have repented had they seen His miracles (Matt. 11:20–24). This does not mean they actually would have repented, or else God would surely have shown them these miracles (cf. 2 Peter 3:9).[20] There is no evidence in this text for annihilation of the wicked.

The Reference to the Wicked As Destined to *Perish*

Annihilationists also posit that the Old Testament speaks of the wicked perishing. For example, “The wicked will perish … they will vanish—vanish like smoke” (Ps. 37:20; cf. 68:2; 112:10). Peter also used this word of unbelievers in saying, “The Lord … is patient with you, not wanting anyone to ***perish***, [Gk: ***apollumi***] but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

Response

First, the same Old Testament word (Heb: ***abad***) used to describe the wicked perishing is also used to describe the righteous perishing (e.g., see Isa. 57:1; Micah 7:2). Even conditionalists admit that the righteous are not snuffed out of existence; as such, there is no reason they should conclude that the wicked are exterminated in the hereafter.
Second, the same word for ***perish*** is used to describe things that are merely lost but then later found (e.g., cf. Deut. 22:3), which demonstrates that they were still in existence.
Third, the parallel term (***apollumi***) can mean to “ruin, destroy, lose, kill, put to death” ***or*** “perish forever,” as in John 3:16[21] (Arndt and Gingrich, ***GELNT***, 94). Not only does this meaning not necessitate annihilation, but the context and other passages speak against this view. John says only a few verses later that those who are perishing have the wrath of God abiding on them (3:36), and, once again, the disobedient face “everlasting destruction” (2 Thess. 1:9). To perish cannot mean being annihilated, since that takes only an instant; Paul speaks of perishing as a present process as well (2 Cor. 4:4).

Verses That Supposedly Support Being Blotted Out of Existence

Annihilationists allege to have found verses that actually speak of God blotting the wicked out of existence; Froom offers several (***CFF***, 1.487). As we shall see, all fall short of proof for annihilation when considered in context.

Hebrews 9:25–26

[If Christ had needed to] enter heaven to offer himself again and again … then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to *do away with* sin by the sacrifice of himself.

In reply, the Greek word ***athétasis*** (***athetésin***), translated ***do away with***, means "annulment" (cf. 7:18), not annihilation; "removal" (or taking from one place to another), not taking out of existence (Arndt and Gingrich, ***GELNT***, 20).

Revelation 3:5

Jesus said, "He who overcomes will … be dressed in white. I will never ***blot out*** his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels." Here the word is ***exaleiphô***, which means to "wipe away," "wipe out, erase," or "remove" (ibid., 272), none of which means to annihilate from existence. Jesus is not talking about wiping out a ***person*** but his ***name***; anyway, whatever this means, He says God will ***not*** do it.

Revelation 18:21

"Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, and said: 'With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, ***never to be found*** again.' "Here the word ***eurethé***, from ***euriskô*** (***found***), along with ***never***, means "never to be found, to disappear, not ever to be discovered despite a thorough search" (ibid., 325). Not only does this not mean being snuffed out, but John is speaking of a city, not a soul. Material cities go out of existence; immaterial souls fashioned in God's image do not.

1 Corinthians 1:19

"I will ***destroy*** the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will

frustrate." This word for ***destroy*** is ***apollumi***, which means "to ruin, kill, put to death, lose, pass away" (ibid., 94). Here again, the term does not mean to put out of existence, and even if it did, God is speaking here not of destroying the so-called wise but of destroying so-called wisdom.

In brief, annihilationism is nowhere found in any of these passages. Every text is taken out of context in a vain attempt to support an unbiblical doctrine.

The Argument That the Nature of the Human Soul Reveals Its Mortality

Rehashing a two-part argument, conditionalists contend the soul's nature reveals that it is mortal.
(1) "The same Hebrew term ***living soul*** [***nephesh***] is applied to the lower animals. In fact, ***nephesh*** (***soul***) is four times applied to lower animals [which have mortal souls] before it is used of man—in Genesis 1:29, 21, 24, 39" (Froom, ***CFF***, 1.34).
(2) That eating from the tree of life was necessary for humans to live forever (3:22) shows they were mortal (op. cit., 1.35). Along with this are other indications that immortality is a gift, not an inherent human attribute.[22]

Response

First, the same word for ***soul*** is used of both animals and humanity; it means "life," which animals also have. However, animals do not have the same ***kind*** of life, for they are not made in the image of the eternal God.[23] The endless life of people is unique because they alone are in the image of the Eternal One.
Second, immortality is a gift of God that comes only (at the resurrection) to saved humans in bodily form. It does ***not*** thereby follow that humans have a mortal soul; once again, numerous passages[24] teach that the human soul

survives death and is conscious between death and resurrection.[25] Further, angels are never said to be immortal, yet they never die (Luke 20:36).
Third, the annihilationist fails to acknowledge that ***immortality*** and ***existing forever*** are not the same. As noted, angels will live forever but are never called immortal. The term ***immortality***, like ***eternal life***, has a positive quality that mere ***existence*** does not. Jesus defined ***eternal life*** as knowing God (John 17:3), and though unbelievers do not have this, by virtue of His image they will still exist forever.[26]

The Argument That Immortality Is a Gift Only for the Righteous

Annihilationists argue that immortality is intrinsic only to God (cf. 1 Tim. 6:16). The word ***immortality*** is never used of unbelievers, and believers receive it only as a gift (Rom. 2:7; cf. 1 Cor. 15:53–54). There is no scriptural affirmation that unbelievers will live forever, so they will have no continued life after death.

Response

We've already acknowledged that in terms of biblical usage ***immortality*** is intrinsic to God and a gift to believers in the resurrection. However, as with ***Trinity***, the created immortality of the human soul is a biblical ***teaching***, even though it is not a biblical ***term***. We've extensively demonstrated that every person's created soul[27] will consciously live forever in either heaven or hell.[28]

Also, even though the term ***immortal***[29] is biblically used ***only*** of God and His gift to believers, nevertheless, terms like ***everlasting*** (Matt. 25:41 nkjv) and ***eternal*** (Mark 3:29) ***are*** used of unbelievers. While their quality of existence will be nothing like that of the saved, the duration will be the same.

The Argument That Eternal Punishment Need Not Be Eternal Misery

As we've observed,[30] annihilationists say that punishment of the wicked is eternal in its results but not in its process—the effect is eternal but the duration is temporal. "Everlasting punishment is clearly not the same as being everlastingly punished. It is eternal loss of being" (Froom, ***CFF***, 1.295).

Response

God's Word says that those in hell will be "tormented day and night for ever and ever" (Rev. 20:10). Hell is a place where "the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:48); thus, the fuel is never burned up. The flames of hell eternally burn, and those who have rejected God will eternally suffer.

The Argument That the Nature of Christ's Death Supports Annihilationism

Froom insists,

> [Death] means cessation of life, not eternal life in torment.... [It is a] strange contention of some that to perish is to live on forever! [For] if the death that threatened Adam were eternal torture, then it would have necessitated that our Savior, as man's complete Substitute, must be tormented eternally in order to pay his designated debt. (*CFF*, 1.78)

Response

This contention confuses the ***value*** and the ***duration*** of Christ's death. Being by

nature the infinite God,[31] Christ's death had infinite value, even though His suffering and death occurred in a finite amount of time. Time is not a mandatory measure of worth—birth, for instance, happens over a relatively short span but produces something of extraordinary value. One death in limited time achieved something of limitless value for all eternity.

The fallacy in this conditionalist argument is akin to the claim that punishing someone forever is overkill for sins he committed in a lifetime. This is ***not*** overkill because sin against the Infinite has infinite significance and endless ramification. In the same sense, Christ's finite suffering has infinite significance because of the suffering's infinite value.[32]

The Argument That All Life and Activity Are Suspended in Sheol

Conditionalists argue that ***sheol*** (Gk. ***hades***) suspends all life and activity: "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom" (Eccl. 9:10). ***Sheol*** is a place of death, darkness, and silence; in complete contrast to the state of the living (cf. Deut. 30:15, 19; 1 Sam. 2:6–9), ***sheol*** is the state of the nonliving.

Response

For one thing, clearly Solomon was not claiming in Ecclesiastes that there is no life after death. Indeed, he speaks of death as when "man goes to his eternal home" (12:5) and when "the spirit returns to God," who gave it (v. 7).

For another, Solomon's words about the lack of activity in ***sheol*** refer to the body in the grave, not to the spirit in the spirit world. He is not speaking of the cessation of ***all*** activity but merely ***earthly*** activity.

John Stott's References to the Reality of Hell

Noted scholar John Stott refers to the reality and horror of hell with biblical language that for years kept most evangelicals from realizing he does not believe in the biblical doctrine:

> We surely have to say that this banishment from God will be real, terrible … and eternal. The New Testament contains no hint of the possibility of a later reprieve or amnesty.… The biblical phraseology includes … "eternal judgment" (Heb. 6:2 and possibly Mark 3:29), "everlasting contempt" (Dan. 12:2), "eternal punishment" (Matt. 25:46), "everlasting destruction" (2 Thess. 1:9) and "eternal fire" (Matt. 18:8; 25:41). (*EE*, 314)

This all sounds accurate until we hear Stott deny what he claims is "traditional orthodoxy" in favor of "annihilation" (ibid., 314–15). He concludes, "I question whether 'eternal conscious torment' is compatible with the biblical revelation of divine justice" (ibid., 319).

Response

First, given Stott's belief that the wicked will be annihilated and will not endure eternal separation from God, his use of this biblical language is misleading and misapplied; he seems to be affirming scriptural teaching but is actually redirecting it.

Second, Stott significantly misuses language in speaking of the "reality" of

nonexistence. Nonexistence is nothing, and nothing has no reality—it is by definition non-reality. Talking about the alleged non-reality of hell as real and terrible is meaningless.

Third, while Stott claims to be "a committed evangelical" (ibid., 315), his view on hell is not compatible with Scripture's affirmations. Nor is he, by his own words, committed to "traditional orthodoxy" (ibid., 314–15); in addition to being denounced by other creeds,[33] his position was condemned by the Church's Fifth Lateran Council. (His own Anglican Church is a Catholic branch.) Stott's annihilationist views are neither orthodox Catholic nor orthodox Protestant.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL ARGUMENTS FOR ANNIHILATIONISM

In addition to the biblical arguments, many conditionalists offer philosophical reasons for rejecting eternal conscious punishment. Most of these—granting a theistic perspective[34]—are a variation on one theme.

The Argument That Eternal Punishment Is Contrary to God's Justice

The Bible teaches that God will judge the wicked "according to what they have done" (Isa. 59:18) and that God "will give to each person according to what he has done" (Rom. 2:6). This is what justice demands, no more and no less. However, eternal judgment for temporal sins is not justice; a penalty infinite in duration for sins finite in duration is a monstrous injustice. Only annihilation after temporal judgment would represent justice.[35]

Response

First, eternal punishment is inflicted on a sinner who does not repent,[36] and since he continues in his sin up to death and on into eternity, he is reasonably punished by God forever.
Second, no sin is acceptable as long as God exists, and God is eternal. Hence, punishment for sin must also be eternal; temporal punishment would diminish God's justice and holiness.[37]
Third, as observed earlier,[38] God's justice demands eternal punishment because "the heinousness of any crime must be gauged according to the worth or dignity of the person it is committed against" (Edwards in Davidson, "RD" in ***JETS***, 50). Sin against an infinite God is an infinitely wicked sin worthy of infinite punishment (see Edwards, ***WJE***, 2.83; cf. Aquinas, ***ST***, 4.99.1).
Fourth, and finally, everlasting punishment is not only just, but it is also necessary. Only eternal punishment will suffice for sins against the eternal God. Sins committed in time are sins perpetrated against the Timeless One.

The Argument That Eternal Punishment Is Contrary to God's Mercy

God is a God of mercy (Ex. 20:6),[39] and it is merciless to allow people to suffer consciously forever. If we put hopeless, suffering creatures out of their misery, why wouldn't an all-merciful God do the same for His creatures?

Response

First, the very concept of an ultimately merciful being supposes that this being has an absolute moral standard[40] that has been violated, and that merciful forgiveness is needed to rectify the situation.[41] Indeed, the moral argument for God's existence[42] demonstrates this very fact. But if God is the ultimate

standard for what is morally right (just), then we cannot impose our concept of justice upon Him.

Second, in reply to the above illustration, while it is true that suffering animals are often put down to alleviate their pain, again, we don't do the same thing to people ***precisely because they are not animals***. Animals are neither immortal[43] nor created in the image of God (cf. Gen. 1:27). Humans are made in God's image[44] and, therefore, should be treated with the greatest respect for their dignity as God's image bearers (cf. 9:6; James 3:9). Not allowing their continued existence in their freely chosen destiny,[45] however painful it may be, would be to snuff out God's image in them.

Third, exterminating a creature in God's immortal image would be to assault God's own likeness (which includes unending existence[46]). Annihilationism would be God attacking Himself in effigy, and God cannot be against God.[47]

Fourth, everlasting conscious suffering is not contrary to God's mercy;[48] God's mercy and God's allowing His creatures to undergo pain are not incompatible (cf. Edwards, ***WJE***, 2.84). God's mercy is not an emotion that overcomes His justice,[49] and since none of God's attributes is in conflict with any other,[50] we can be fully assured that He is both absolutely merciful ***and*** absolutely just.

Fifth, and finally, annihilating a human being would violate what God determined is most precious—the gift of freedom to choose one's destiny.[51] Since free will (as part of God's image) is morally good, taking it away would be a moral evil. This is what annihilation would achieve—the eternal destruction of human freedom. Annhilationism has it backward: What is truly inhumane (anti-human) is to destroy a person's humanness.

The Argument That Eternal Punishment Is Contrary to the Universal Nature of God's Victory

While the annihilationist disagrees with the universalist contention that all will be saved;[52] nonetheless, he concurs that the passages describing God's universal victory over evil demand that there be no evil left in the universe.[53] For example, in the end everyone will bow the knee to Christ (Phil. 2:10); the world will be reconciled to Christ (2 Cor. 5:19); all will be "in Christ" (Eph. 1:10 nkjv); death and sin will be destroyed (1 Cor. 15:26); and everyone will be subject to Christ (v. 15:28). Even though universalism's interpretation of these texts is incorrect,[54] they do indicate that ***sin*** will be completely defeated, which conditionalists insist cannot occur unless all ***sinners*** are destroyed.

Response

The annihilationist conclusion does not follow from these "universal victory passages." Some only refer to the fact that salvation is universally ***possible*** (e.g., Rom. 5:18–19; 2 Cor. 5:19); Christ's death for all means salvation is universal in extent but limited in application, since not all will believe.[55] Other passages do not refer to the salvation of all but the subjugation of all (e.g., Phil. 2:10), while others apply to believers and not unbelievers (e.g., Eph. 1:10).

Some texts do speak of the unilateral defeat of all death (e.g., 1 Cor. 15:26); this is fulfilled in the resurrection of all persons, saved and unsaved (cf. John 5:29; Rev. 20:4–5). The other verses that speak of God's triumph over all evil teach the ***separation***, not the annihilation, of all evil (e.g., Matt. 13:41–42; 25:31–41). As has been repeatedly demonstrated, no passage speaks of the annihilation of evil beings: Evil is defeated by everlasting imprisonment and quarantine. Once again, for God to annihilate His image in fallen beings would not be a victory but a defeat, an attack of God upon Himself.

BIBLICAL ARGUMENTS AGAINST ANNIHILATIONISM

In addition to the lack of any good arguments in favor of annihilationism, there are numerous arguments that support the doctrine of eternal conscious punishment.[56]

The Rich Man in Hell Was in Conscious Torment

> [The rich man cried out,] "Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire."
>
> But Abraham replied, "Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony" (
>
> Luke 16:24–25
>
>).

The rich man then begged that his brothers be warned "so that they will not also come to this place of torment" (v. 28). This passage contains not annihilation, but constant, conscious suffering and torment.

Hell Is a Place of Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth

Jesus spoke repeatedly of the people who eventuate in hell as being in continual agony: They "will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."[57] This is obviously a place of conscious sorrow; the unconscious do not weep, and those who weep are conscious.

Hell Is a Place of Everlasting Torment

John affirmed that hell is a place of eternal torment (Rev. 20:10). No unconscious person can experience torment, and eternal torment indicates that the everlasting state of woe is conscious and continuous.

The Beast and False Prophet: Conscious After One Thousand Years of Torment

There is a clear biblical example of still-conscious beings who have endured a thousand years of hell's torment. The beast and false prophet "were thrown ***alive*** into the fiery lake of burning sulfur" (Rev. 19:20) before the "thousand years" (20:2). Yet after this time the devil "was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet [still] ***are***" (v. 10 nkjv). Not only were they alive when they entered, but they were still alive after a thousand years of conscious torment. This alone is a definitive argument against annihilationism.

Hell Will Endure As Long As Heaven Endures

Hell is said to be of the same duration as heaven, viz., "everlasting" (Matt. 25:41 nkjv); the same Greek word (***aiônion***) is used to describe both.[58] If there is an eternal heaven, there must be an eternal hell; no eternal hell, no eternal heaven. Since heaven's bliss is conscious, hell's woe is conscious.

Punishment Can Only Be Experienced by Those Who Are Conscious

That the wicked receive "everlasting punishment" shows that they must be conscious. One cannot suffer punishment unless he consciously exists to be punished (cf. 2 Thess. 1:9). Further, again, God's justice cannot be upheld if

those who have chosen evil and refused Him are unconscious (annihilated).

Hell Is a Place of Unquenchable Flames

Jesus called hell a place of unquenchable flames (Mark 9:43–48), where the bodies of the wicked will never die (cf. Luke 12:4–5). It is nonsensical to posit everlasting flames and bodies without souls to experience torment. There is simply no ground for the implausible annihilationist speculation that "the unquenchable fire and undying worms mean only fire which is unquenchable and worms which are undying ***until their work of destruction is complete***" (Wenham, ***GG***, 36, emphasis added). No such words are biblically stated ***or*** implied; to the absolute contrary, the flames will never go out, and the worms will never die (op. cit.).

PHILOSOPHICAL ARGUMENTS AGAINST ANNIHILATIONISM

Annihilation Is Contrary to the Nature of God As Love

Annihilation would be demeaning both to the love of God[59] and to the nature of human beings as free moral creatures.[60] It would be as if God said, "I will allow you to live only if you do what I say. If you don't, I will snuff out your very existence!" Eternal existence is an eternal testimony to the freedom and dignity with which God created humans; eternal bliss is the destiny of the redeemed, and eternal suffering is the destiny of the unrepentant.

Annihilationism Is Contrary to the Nature of Humanity

It would be contrary to the created nature of humans to exterminate them, since we are made in God's everlasting image and likeness (Gen. 1:27). God is ultimate freedom,[61] and in His infinite wisdom[62] He bestowed freedom upon His human creatures.[63] To renege on this gift would be for Him to attack what is good in our nature—a good that He determined was best for us to receive.

Moral Justice Demands Degrees of Punishment

To equally punish a "white lie" and genocide would be unjust; murder should receive greater punishment than petty theft.[64] However, there is no evidence that judgment proportionate to the sin is always meted out in this life; the wisest man who ever lived complained of this life's inequities (Eccl. 3:16–22). Annihilation is the great equalizer, having upon all who are unreconciled with God the same eternal effect—nothingness. Not all sin is equal, though, and all will not receive the same eternal result. Annihilationism is contrary to moral justice, which demands that the punishment fit the crime.

There Are No Degrees of Annihilation

The Bible reveals degrees of eternal punishment in hell (Matt. 5:22; Rev. 20:12–14). Because "degrees of annihilation" is implausible—nonexistence would be the same for everyone—annihilationism is irrational. God's Word also gives no indication about post-death degrees of temporary conscious punishment and then annihilation; it speaks of immediate, post-death, "eternal," "everlasting" punishment.[65]

Annihilationism Is Illusory

Anything based on wish-fulfillment is an illusion.[66] At the base of annihilationism is the desperate wish to avoid suffering—no one wants to suffer, let alone to suffer forever. Annihilationism, like universalism,[67] is pie in the sky: That it would be nice if it were true doesn't make it true. Again, C.S. Lewis said about the latter,

> I would pay any price to be able to say truthfully "All will be saved." But my reason retorts, "Without their will, or with it?" If I say "Without their will," I at once perceive a contradiction; how can the supreme voluntary act of self-surrender be involuntary? If I say "With their will," my reason replies "How, if they *will not* give in?" (*PP*, 106–07).

In our fallenness we would love to believe that there really are no consequences for our sins, either in this life or the next, so we need help to be cured of such psychological diseases. The antidote is the truth, which sets us free (John 8:32).

HISTORICAL ARGUMENTS AGAINST ANNIHILATIONISM

The historical evidence against annihilationism is the same as the historical argument for eternal conscious punishment—that is, the historical evidence against annihilationism is identical to the evidence for hell, already summarized;[68] annihilationism is opposed by most orthodox teachers in church history, from the beginning to the present.

We saw earlier that annihilationism was roundly condemned by the early church. In one example, the last of the nine anathemas of Emperor Justinian (c. 483–565) against Origen (c. 185–c. 254) reads: "If anyone says … that the punishment of demons and of impious men is only temporary and will one day have an end … let him be anathema" (in Roberts and Donaldson, ***ANF***, Vol. 14). Before the Reformation, the Fifth Lateran Council (1513) also condemned the denial of hell (see Cross, ***ODCC***, 328).

CONCLUSION

When examined carefully and in context, none of the above passages proves annihilationism. Certain words used may ***permit*** that meaning, but nowhere do they ***demand*** it regarding eternal punishment. In view of comparison with other clear passages, conditionalism must be fully rejected, for it rests on a sentimental (rather than scriptural) basis, rooted more in emotion than in reason. Numerous passages plainly state that those who have chosen wickedness will suffer consciously and eternally.[69]

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE INTERPRETATION OF PROPHECY

Eschatology (the study of Last Things) is notorious for divergent views. Much of this is due to the different methods of interpreting prophecy employed by opposing positions. The basic debate is between what are commonly known as the ***literal*** and ***allegorical*** schools of interpretation.

The issue is actually more complicated, since, as we shall see, both sides lay claim to the literal historical-grammatical method (of interpretation). As such, the debate often reduces to exactly what is meant by that term or to which view has the most consistent use of the method itself. Nonetheless, in learning to understand the various views on prophecy, it is useful to set forth the differences between the bases of these two main hermeneutical schools. Some scholars/groups who lay claim to a basic literal method actually utilize an allegorical element of interpretation with crucial prophetic passages.

Our conclusions about biblical prophecy are profoundly affected by which method is used. For example, if language about a "thousand years" of Christ's reign (Rev. 20:1–6) is taken ***literally***, a premillennialist position is favored. If this is taken ***allegorically***, then an amillennialist or postmillennialist perspective results.[1] Accordingly, the important question is: Which method is correct? Again, it complicates matters that even those who allegorize certain prophetic

passages claim adherence to the historical-grammatical method of interpretation. (Some do admit to enhancing and expanding it to include an allegorical, symbolical, or typological understanding of certain texts.) The issue, then, boils down to the ***understanding and/or application*** (rather than the name) of the method of interpreting (hermeneutics). Bernard Ramm (1916–1992) asserted:

> In fundamental theory there is no difference between [Louis] Berkhof's *Principles of Biblical Hermeneutics* [1873–1957, amillennial] and [Lewis Sperry] Chafer's *The Science of Biblical Hermeneutics* [1871–1952, dispensational].[2] Both agree that the historical-grammatical method is basic to understanding the Bible. (*PBI*, 224)

The key words are ***"in fundamental theory,"*** for there is a tremendous difference ***in practice*** between these views; hence, the various components of the literal method must be spelled out carefully. We will examine three primary approaches: (1) the literal method, (2) the allegorical method, and (3) the expanded literal method.

Preliminary Definitions

Since not everyone defines these crucial terms the same way, we need to establish definitions before proceeding with a discussion of hermeneutics.
Mind is an entity that can think, that can generate and understand thought.
Meaning is an intelligible form or pattern of thought generated by a mind.
Language is an intelligible form or pattern of thought expressed in words, symbols, or other means of expression (e.g., gestures or sign language).
Intention is what a mind meant to express (whether it succeeded or not).
Significance is the importance or value assigned to a meaning by a mind.
Implications are thoughts logically implied in other thoughts, whether or not the one expressing the thoughts is aware they are implied.
Application is how meaning is applied to specific situations. ***Legitimate*** application is the restricted way a given meaning can be appropriately applied to specific situations.
A ***referent*** is an object to which a thought refers or may refer.

BIBLICAL PROPHECY: THE LITERAL SCHOOL OF INTERPRETATION

What the Literal Method *Is*

Literal

The word ***literal*** as used in hermeneutics comes from the Latin *sensus literalis*, meaning the literal sense of the text, as opposed to a nonliteral or spiritualized sense. William Sanford LaSor (1912–1991) observed, "A 'literal' interpretation means the understanding which any person of normal intelligence would get, without any special spiritual gifts and without any 'code' or 'key' " (in Ramm, ***H***, 99). In application to prophecy, John Walvoord (1910–2002) adds correctly:

> If a person does not interpret the plain statements of prophecy literally, there is no rule by which any consensus of meaning can be established; the existence of a wide diversity of interpretations shows the failure of this approach. (*ET*, 10)

Normal

Another way to describe Scripture's literal meaning is as the normal, everyday, common understanding of its terms. There is nothing irregular or unusual about the way the words are being used; they are given the meaning that they normally have in common communication. As stated by Charles Ryrie (b. 1925), the correct means of interpretation is "the basic hermeneutical principle of literal, normal, or plain interpretation" (***DT***, 85).

Historical

A common way of describing the literal means of interpretation is the ***historical-grammatical method***. The word ***historical*** in this term means the sentences should be understood in their historical setting; they should not be taken out of the space-time, cultural context in which they were uttered. Dwight Pentecost (b.

1915) describes this point well:

> [The exegete] will have to transfer himself mentally into the first century [when interpreting the New Testament].... He must place himself on the standpoint of the author, and seek to enter into his very soul, until he, as it were, lives his life and thinks his thoughts.... [This is in order to] guard carefully against the rather common mistake of transferring the author to the present day and making him speak the language of the twentieth century. (*TC*, 37)

Grammatical

The term ***grammatical*** indicates that the true meaning of a sentence is rooted in its grammar, emerging from the structure wherein all parts of speech—including nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, articles, prepositions, etc.—are placed in a form from which a specific meaning can be derived. Alleged textual meaning that ignores and/or is opposed to grammatical structure is not the correct meaning. The historical-grammatical method involves giving each word "the same exact basic meaning it would have in normal, ordinary, customary usage, whether employed in writing, speaking or thinking" (ibid., 9).

Contextual

Another important term in describing the literal hermeneutic is ***context***: Every sentence should be understood in the context of the paragraph, the paragraph in the setting of the book, and the book in view of the whole Bible. Charles Feinberg (1909–1997) noted: "No prophecy of the Word is to be interpreted solely with reference to itself … but all other portions of the prophetic revelation are to be taken into account and considered" (***PA***, 39, as cited in ibid.). Therefore, meaning is discovered by context, from the immediate to the remote. A text taken out of its context is a pretext; the real meaning is what a text has in its context.[3]

Authorial

Also, the literal meaning is the author's—the author gives the meaning to the

text. The reader's obligation is to ***discover*** the meaning that the author ***determined***. Consequently, what is meant in the text is what the author meant by it, not what the reader desires it to mean. The true meaning of a biblical passage is not what it means to me, but what was meant by the one who wrote it.[4]

Exegetical

Further, the true meaning of a text is the one read out of it (***exegesis***), the one that the author put in it. It is not a meaning read into it (***eisegesis***) by the reader —the reader, who must seek the meaning of the author, has no right (according to the literal hermeneutic) to read his meaning into a text. The reader's task is to ***discover*** the meaning already in a text, not ***determine*** what he thinks it ought to mean.

Singular

What is more, according to the literal method, there is only one textual meaning: the one expressed in it by its author. That is, every text has one meaning (*sensus unum*), not many meanings (*sensus plenior*). Since the very same words of the Bible are coauthored by the divine Author and the human writer, this one meaning expressed in the text is the same for both writers.

Objective

Finally, the literal method insists that the meaning in the text is the same for everyone, not just for some. The meaning is fixed, not fluid; it is determined, not dynamic.

What the Literal Method *Is Not*

As we've previously noted,[5] ***the literal method of interpretation does not mean that everything in the Bible is true literally; rather, it means that everything in***

the Bible is literally true.[6] Also, it does not mean that the Bible contains no figures of speech, like metaphors and anthropomorphisms. (That these can be used to utter a literal truth will be demonstrated in the following discussion.) E. R. Craven (1824–1908) said:

> The *literalist* (so called) is not one who denies that *figurative* language, that *symbols*, are used in prophecy, nor does he deny that great spiritual truths are set forth therein. Rather, his position is simply that the prophecies are to be normally interpreted (i.e., according to the received laws of language) as any other utterances are interpreted—that which is manifestly figurative being so regarded. (as cited in Poythress, *UD*, 91)

It Does Not Eliminate Spiritual Application

Denying allegorism as a basic hermeneutical method (***interpretation***) does not mean there are no legitimate spiritual ***applications***; the literal meaning, once determined, can be applied in legitimate spiritual ways.[7] Sometimes the New Testament does this in its use of the Old Testament: Moses spoke of not muzzling an ox when it treads the grain (Deut. 25:4), and a principle of "the laborer is worthy of his hire" is applied by Paul to urge paying ministers of the gospel (1 Cor. 9:9, 13–14). The same truth, "blessed are the poor," is applied by Jesus to those who are spiritually poor (Matt. 5:3) and to those who are financially poor (Luke 6:20).

The limit or boundary on such spiritual applications is the essential meaning of the text. For example, Hosea said of Israel (God's "son"), "Out of Egypt I called my son" (Hos. 11:1), thereby limiting the use of this text to one who is appropriately called the "Son" of God. Matthew applied this to Christ in the New Testament (2:15), a most appropriate application, since He is the personal Son of God.

To use a common illustration, a chair is made to sit on, but to use it otherwise doesn't destroy either its original purpose or its structure; for example, a chair can be used to stand on or used to prop open a door. On the other hand, taking a chair outside of its feasible usages would turn it into something other than a chair—for instance, it cannot be used as kindling wood without destroying its form, that is, its "chairness." There is a difference between the ***interpretation*** of a text (which is one) and the ***application*** of a text (which are many).

Also, while there is only ***one interpretation*** of a text—the one literally meant by the author—there are ***many implications***. This is why New Testament use of the Old Testament sometimes seems removed from a proper interpretation; the New Testament is often not giving an interpretation, but an implication or application of that text. ***A text's correct interpretation is the historical-grammatical interpretation***.

It Does Not Eliminate Figures of Speech

The Bible's statements about the eye, arms, or wings of God should not be taken as true literally. God does not really have these physical features, for He is pure Spirit (immaterial; cf. John 4:24); hence, He is not actually material. Even so, we could not know what is ***not*** literally true of God unless we knew what ***is*** literally true. For example, if it were not literally true that He is pure Spirit and that He is infinite,[8] then we would not be able to say that certain attributes metaphorically ascribed to Him (such as materiality and finitude) are not literally true.

Likewise, the literal method of interpretation does not take Jesus' statement "I am the true vine" (John 15:1) as physically actual. That He is a vine is literally true, but it is not true literally (i.e., physically). Literally and physically Jesus was a human being, and His hearers understood this; since a vine is not a person, it follows that Jesus is not literally a vine. Nevertheless, there is a literal truth behind this metaphor, viz., that as we are branches on the vine (v. 5), our source of spiritual life literally (actually) comes from Christ.

Of course, it can be difficult to determine when a passage should not be taken literally. Pentecost offers the following guidelines for our assistance in knowing when a text should be interpreted figuratively:

> (1) when it is obviously figurative;
> (2) when the New Testament authorizes the figurative sense; or
> (3) when literal interpretation would contradict non-figurative portions of Scripture. (in Terry, ***BH***, 40)

As the dictum goes,

When the literal sense makes good sense,
seek no other sense,
lest it result in nonsense. (Anonymous)

With an illustration, we might say, “When the literal sense does not make good sense (such as God, a pure Spirit, having eyes, ears, and arms), then we should seek some other sense lest it result in nonsense.”

It Does Not Eliminate the Use of Types

The literal hermeneutic also does not eliminate instances of typology. Clearly, the New Testament affirms that Christ is the fulfillment of Old Testament types that prefigured Him and that passed away when He fulfilled them. For instance, Paul said plainly, “Christ, our Passover [Lamb] was sacrificed for us” (1 Cor. 5:7 nkjv). Hebrews speaks of the entire Levitical sacrificial system as being fulfilled by our great High Priest:[9] “This Man [Christ], after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God.… For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified” (10:12–14 nkjv). These types found their fulfillment in the antitype (Jesus); they were only the shadow of the substance found in Him (Col. 2:17). This fulfillment is in no sense a spiritualization or allegorization of any literal thing or event; it is a literal fulfillment of the literal type by a literal antitype.

It Does Not Eliminate the Use of Symbols

The literal hermeneutic does not eliminate usage of symbols. The Bible is ***filled*** with symbols; even so, each symbol is emblematic of something literal. Take, for example, Revelation, which contains symbols from beginning to end, yet every one of them represents something literal and is so interpreted by the book itself. For example, John said the “seven stars” in Christ’s right hand were “the angels [messengers] of the seven churches” (1:20); “the seven lampstands” were “the seven churches” (ibid.); the “bowls full of incense” were “the prayers of the saints” (5:8); “the waters” were “peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues”

(17:15 nkjv); and so forth.

Jesus told Peter he would give him the "keys" to the kingdom (Matt. 16:18). These keys were ***symbolic*** of Peter's God-given authority to open the door of the Good News to the Jews (Acts 2) and the Gentiles (Acts 10), which he ***literally*** did;[10] seeing the keys as a symbol does not spiritualize away the literal truth that Peter actually opened the "gospel door" to both literal Jews and literal Gentiles. Likewise, John's mention of the "keys" to the bottomless pit (Rev. 20:1) gives us no license to spiritualize away Satan's existence (vv. 2–3).

Ramm noted that symbolic language is often used within the context of literal truths: "The literalist in prophetic interpretation admits the presence of poetic and figurative elements, and the amillennialists[11] who think they deny this are wrong" (***PBI***, 243). LaSor adds a key observation:

> Every formula or equation in mathematics, chemistry, physics, symbolic logic, and many other subjects, is written in symbols and is interpreted literally. [Thus, the use of the symbolic] does not necessarily imply a departure from the literal meaning. (in Ramm, *H*, 101)

In the same way, we encounter symbols in road signs all the time, but we never doubt that they signify literal realities.

It Does Not Eliminate the Use of Parables and Allegories

Though the many parables of Jesus are not to be taken literally, they convey a literal point nonetheless. Sometimes Jesus interpreted a parable and directly stated its literal meaning (cf. Matt. 13:18–23); Paul used an allegory and labeled it as such (Gal. 4:24). Different literary genres ***must*** be distinguished—taking them all literally will obscure textual meaning. However, determination of genre is not a decision made before the total historical-grammatical context is thoroughly examined. Likewise, since Scripture is the best interpreter of Scripture, taking into consideration its overall context, we can often discover internally whether or not the author meant the text to be taken literally.

For example, there are clues both inside and outside the book of Jonah that it

isn't allegorical. The name of an actual prophet known from another historical book is used (cf. Jonah 1:1; 2 Kings 14:25), as are the real cities of Nineveh and Tarshish (Jonah 1:2). In Scripture's broader context, Jonah appears elsewhere in a prophetic ministry (2 Kings 14:25), and Jesus refers to him as a historical figure (Matt. 12:39–41).

The same is true of Adam and Eve in Eden, since the text reveals a real place with real rivers (Gen. 2:8–14), real children (4:1–2; 5:1–4), and real physical results of their actions on the world (cf. Rom. 5:12).[12] Hence, there is no reason to take this narrative as an allegory.

These principles should never be forgotten:

First, without a literal understanding of the matter, we cannot determine what is allegorical; we cannot know what is not literal unless we know the literal.

Second, again, every parable or allegory conveys a literal truth (Matt. 13:18–23).

Third, genre decisions should not be made in advance of looking at the total context via the historical-grammatical hermeneutic. We also must not import ideas alien to Scripture into "up-front genre decisions," for this is no more than a covert way to insert theological biases under the guise of adding a "literary" element to the historical-grammatical hermeneutic.[13] For example, to decide, ***a priori***, on the basis of alleged similarities with other types of literature, that a biblical text must be allegorical because it contains miracle stories is to force antisupernatural bias upon it[14] rather than interpreting the supernatural message contained in it.

Reasons for a Literal Approach to Interpretation

Dwight Pentecost lists six reasons for adopting a literal interpretation:

(1) Literal interpretation is the normal (standard) approach in all languages.
(2) All secondary meanings depend on the literal meaning.
(3) The greater part of the Bible makes sense when taken literally.
(4) Literal interpretation will take the secondary meaning when demanded.
(5) Literal interpretation is the only "sane and safe check on the imagination of man."

(6) Literal interpretation is the only one in line with the nature of inspiration.[15] (from ***TC***, 10)

To this may be added,

(7) Any other approach is self-defeating, for it claims that the literal truth is not the proper way to interpret, even though it expects its reader (listener) to take ***its*** words literally.

BIBLICAL PROPHECY: THE ALLEGORICAL SCHOOL OF INTERPRETATION

Most Christian writers and teachers have not accepted the allegorical method of interpretation as the basic and primary approach to biblical hermeneutics. However, many have employed it, particularly with regard to prophecy. The following are some of the most egregious examples.

Augustine (354–430)

Augustine, the "medieval monolith," substantially engaged in the allegorical method. This approach was supplementary—Augustine did believe that a text's literal interpretation is basic to its meaning (cf. ***OCD***, II, III)—but he nevertheless engaged in extensive allegorization of Scripture. In this sense, the allegorical method became more of a textual application than its real interpretation, but Augustine was inconsistent at this point (as were other biblical interpreters). For example, even though he wrote ***Literal Commentary on the Book of Genesis***, he engaged in fanciful spiritualization of literal realities, such as claiming that when God created light and separated the light from the darkness, "for our part, we understand these [as] two societies of angels—the one enjoying God, the other swelling with pride" (***CG***, 11.33).

Origen (c. 185–c. 254)

Origen was one of the earliest to engage in widespread use of the allegorical method as a basic hermeneutic, notoriously allegorizing away literal truth (such as the existence of Adam and Eve—***DP***, 4.1.16). Origen's treatment of Genesis 24:16 is an evocative illustration: He claimed that " '[Rebecca] was a virgin' means that Christ is the husband of the soul when it is converted, and that Satan becomes the husband of the soul when it falls away" (cited in Ramm, ***H***, 970).

Christian Science

Cults, especially New Age and pantheistic types, are infamous for their allegorical approach to God's Word; Mary Baker Eddy's (1821–1910) entire ***Science and Health With Keys to the Scriptures*** uses allegorical interpretation.

Eddy denied the reality of Satan, the material world, all evil, death, and hell.[16] Broadly, Christian Science rejects any literal interpretation that contradicts its assumed pantheistic and spiritualistic foundation. This includes all evangelical doctrines, including the Virgin Birth, Christ's deity, the (substitutionary)

Atonement, Christ's bodily resurrection, and the literal Second Coming.[17]

What the Allegorical Method Represents

The allegorical method is the literal method's antithesis (opposite); a passage's basic sense is taken spiritually, esoterically, or even mystically. For example, according to allegorical understanding, Adam and Eve are often taken not as literal persons but as symbolic representations. The devil is not a real being but a myth. (And so forth.)

As to the following characteristics of allegorism, most evangelicals do not embrace them when interpreting Scripture's historical and narrative sections.

The problem is that some do when it comes to the prophetic sections. This, as will be shown, is inconsistent and untenable.

Meaning Is Not Literal

First and foremost is that an allegorical interpretation is not literal. Literal interpretation is perceived as carnal and materialistic—some would even argue that it's like reading the letter of the law while neglecting its actual intent.

Meaning Is Spiritual

The meaning of a text is not literal but spiritual. Meaning is not found in the literal sense, but in a "more profound" spiritual sense that goes beyond a passage's surface (literal) understanding. Meaning is not in letters and words, but in the spirit behind them.

Meaning Is Deeper

Scripture's true meaning is "deeper" than the common, everyday understanding of it (just as the soul is deeper than the body). Dwight Pentecost likewise observed that allegorical interpretation is "the method of interpreting a literary text that regards the literal sense as the vehicle for a secondary, more spiritual and more profound sense" (***TC***, 1).

Meaning Is Fuller

The allegorical method emphasizes a fuller meaning than the one intended by the human author. Often this takes the form of asserting that the divine author intended something more, and that so to grasp the full and complete meaning of the text we must go beyond what the human author had in mind to reach the mind of God. This is usually called *sensus plenior* (multiple meanings), in contrast to *sensus unum* (one meaning).

Meaning Is Beneath the Text

Another allegorical-method claim is that the Bible's real meaning is not ***in*** the text but ***beneath*** it. Truth is not in the grammar but beyond the grammar. The text itself is only the shell; the pearl of truth, the real meaning, comes from a deeper and more significant level.[18]

Why the Allegorical Method Is Wrong

There are many reasons for rejecting the allegorical method as such, and additional reasons for rejecting it when applied to prophetic Scripture.

The Allegorical Method Is Self-Defeating

The allegorical method of interpretation is self-defeating, for the very claim that "all meaning is allegorical (nonliteral)" is itself a claim to have the literal truth about this matter. To put it another way, no allegorist wants us to take his claims allegorically—he wants his writings to be interpreted literally.

The Allegorical Method Is Impossible

Even liberal theologian Paul Tillich (1886–1965), who championed symbolic talk about God,[19] acknowledged that allegorical interpretation was not possible to do completely (cited by Kaufmann, ***CRP***, 195–96). One cannot say that everything about God is symbolic (nonliteral), since we cannot know what is ***not*** literally true about God unless we know what ***is*** literally true. Tillich's solution to the dilemma was to say it is literally true that God is Being and that all other statements are symbolic. However, to say God is Being is to make many other statements as well, since being is all-encompassing, with numerous characteristics.[20] Tillich was right on the basic idea, namely, that a totally allegorical (symbolic) approach to God is impossible.

The Allegorical Method Doesn't Have Objective Criteria

There are no objective criteria by which we can determine a text's allegorical meaning—it is purely subjective, leaving us with no knowable objective meaning.[21] Again, it's self-refuting to claim there is no objective meaning, because that very statement claims to be objectively meaningful. Allegorism is a way to "pervert the true meaning of Scripture" rather than to interpret it; "the basic authority in interpretation ceases to be the Scriptures [and is instead] the mind of the interpreter" (Pentecost, ***TC***, 5).

The Allegorical Method Is Contrary to Common Sense

An old dictum says: "If you lack knowledge, go to man for help. If you lack wisdom, go to God. But if you lack common sense, neither God nor man can help you." So it is with the allegorical method of interpretation, which is contrary to common sense—without common sense in approaching a text, almost anything goes. For example, if one uses common sense and approaches the Bible like the newspaper, he will never become an allegorist. Merrill Tenney (1904–1985) wrote:

> The futurist school of thought,[22] because of its insistence upon an interpretation as literal as possible, has been a healthy antidote to an overbalanced symbolism that has tended to make Revelation mean everything except the obvious. (*IR*, 145)

The Allegorical Method Is Inconsistent

Few allegorical-method interpreters of prophecy are consistent, and many who take the rest of Scripture literally insist that prophecy is allegorical. LaSor responded that "prophecy is to be interpreted according to the same principles that apply in all biblical study.… The interpretation of messianic prophecy should follow the same rules that apply for all prophecy" (in Ramm, ***H***, 94–95). ***The rules of hermeneutics don't change when we turn to a new page***, as Reformed theologian John Gerstner (1914–1996) illustrated when he admitted to not being a complete literalist:

> We *all* agree that most literature, including the *Bible*, is usually meant to be understood according to the literal construction of the words which are used.... There is a small area of Scripture, mainly in the area of prophecy, where there is a lively debate as to whether one interprets literally or figuratively.... We are all literalists up to a certain point.[23]

Other adherents to allegorism are inconsistent in that they will take some parts of a single passage as literal and some parts as allegorical. For instance, of one text, they regard the first resurrection as spiritual and the second resurrection as literal (Rev. 20:4–6; e.g., Augustine, ***CG***, 20.6–7).

The Allegorical Method Is Not Biblical

From an evangelical point of view, perhaps the most telling argument against allegorism is that it is unbiblical. With the exception of one New Testament passage that clearly labels itself as a nonliteral allegory (or illustration—Gal. 4:21–31), there are no allegorical interpretations in the Bible.[24] The Old Testament historical text is consistently literal, from Adam and Eve (cf. Rom. 5:12; 1 Tim. 2:13–14) to Noah and the Flood (cf. Matt. 24:37–38) to Jonah and the great fish (cf. 12:40), et al. George Peters (1825–1909) summed it up forcefully:

> Where a literal construction will stand, the furthest from the letter is commonly the worst. There is nothing more dangerous than this licentious and deluding art, which changes the meaning of words ... making anything what it pleases, and bringing in the end all truth to nothing. (*TK*, 47)

The Allegorical Method Is Contrary to the Literal Fulfillment of Messianic Predictions

The ultimate proof that Old Testament prophecies should be taken literally and not spiritually (or allegorically) is that of its 113 messianic predictions that Christ has already fulfilled (see Payne, ***EBP***, 665–68), ***all*** were fulfilled literally. To mention just a few, Jesus literally was the seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15), the offspring of Abraham (15:1–6), of the tribe of Judah (49:10), the son of David (2

Sam. 7:12ff.), born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14) in the city of Bethlehem (Micah 5:2); He suffered for our sins (Isa. 53), died around a.d. 33 (cf. Dan. 9:24–27), and rose from the dead (Ps. 16:10; cf. Acts 2:30–32). ***If the predictions surrounding Christ's first coming are to be taken literally, then by logical extension there is no justification for spiritualizing predictions about His second coming***.[25] A case in point demonstrating literal understanding of the Old Testament by the New is our Lord's use of Isaiah's prophecy, when He stood up to read:

> The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. (
> Luke 4:18–19
> ,
> nkjv
> , citing
> Isa. 61:1–2
>)

All of this was literally true of Jesus' ministry. Thus, He finished, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (v. 21), that is, ***literally*** fulfilled.

Note this: When sharing the fulfillment of this passage, Jesus stopped in the middle of a sentence (from Isaiah). The rest of that prophecy refers to His second coming and was not yet fulfilled: "… to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor ***and the day of vengeance of our God***." If the allegorists can be believed, we must assume that the rest of this sentence (the clause Jesus did not apply to His earthly [adventive] ministry) is spiritual and not literal.

ANSWERING OBJECTIONS

Two texts are most often used to oppose the literal hermeneutic, which allows for only one meaning (with many applications).

Objection One: Based on John 11:49–52

Then one of them [the Sanhedrin], named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, “You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.”

He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one.

Those who claim that the divine author intended more in a given text than did the human author claim this as a proof that we must go beyond the meaning in the mind of the human to the intention of God to find a biblical text’s complete meaning.

Response to Objection One

A closer examination reveals that the text does not support the objection.
First, Caiaphas was not a prophet God was using as a channel through whom He conveyed some higher intention than that of Caiaphas. The passage asserts that Caiaphas uttered it “as high priest” but not as a prophet.
Second, Caiaphas’s statement was made in sarcasm and was introduced by scoffing: “You know nothing at all!” It was put forth not by a prophet, but by one who was about to sentence the sinless Son of God to a cruel execution.[26]
Third, the use of this statement by John (under inspiration) is not in the same spirit and context and has a different meaning. After all, the same words in different contexts can have different meanings; for instance, Paul’s citation from a ***pantheistic*** poet that “we are also His [God’s] offspring” (Acts 17:28) was given in a ***theistic*** sense.
The worldview’s context makes a world of difference in meaning. Meaning is not discovered by finding the intention of the author behind the words. We do not know the mind of the author’s statement except insofar as he has expressed it in the text, and the only way we can discover the text’s meaning is in its historical-grammatical (biblical) context.
Fourth, and finally, that Caiaphas did not speak “of himself” means he did not speak on his personal authority; rather, “as high priest” he predicted that Jesus’

death would deliver Israel ***politically*** from ***Rome's*** wrath for not killing a person who claimed to be "King of the Jews" (as would later read the accusation on His cross). In short, Caiaphas's context was political; John finds his statement ironic, since in truth Jesus was dying for the Jews in a ***redemptive*** sense—John was concerned about how by Christ's death we could be delivered from ***God's*** wrath.

Objection Two: Based on 1 Peter 1:10–12

> Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven.

From this some infer that God intended more by prophecies than the human authors did, so that they even searched their own writings for what was meant by God in what they wrote, over and above what they meant.

Response to Objection Two

This is ***not*** what Peter said. As Walter Kaiser (b. 1933) notes, "We may be certain that the prophets' areas of ignorance about their own prophecies existed exactly where our ignorance occurs: ***the time*** of Christ's coming." That is, they were not ignorant about what it meant but as to its time referent. And,

> If the prophets were short in this one area [time], they were certain in five other areas. They knew for sure that they were announcing (1) the Messiah, (2) Messiah's suffering, (3) Messiah's coming in glorious splendor to reign, (4) the sequence of those two events—suffering first and then glory, and (5) a message that had relevance not only for the Old Testament saints, but for another day as well. [27]

The human authors meant exactly the same thing God meant by their words; they coauthored those words with Him. However, since God knew more about

the topic and knew more of its implications, they searched their own writings to see if they could ascertain hints as to the time implied.

BIBLICAL PROPHECY: THE EXPANDED HISTORICAL GRAMMATICAL SCHOOL(S) OF INTERPRETATION

As noted earlier, the issue at hand is more complicated than can be resolved by a contrast between the classical literal and allegorical methods of interpretation. Both amillennialists[28] and progressive dispensationalists[29] employ what may be called an expanded or revised version of the historical-grammatical method, which they believe is the way to understand crucial prophetic passages about Israel. Classical dispensationalists[30] strongly oppose this revision, calling it a distortion of the true historical-grammatical method.[31]
Of the different versions of an "expanded" literal hermeneutic, basically, two are noteworthy.

The Traditional Covenantal View

Traditional covenantalism, represented by Oswald T. Allis (1880–1973) in ***Prophecy and the Church***, foundationally includes the following premises.

Rejection of Strict Literal Interpretation

Allis characterizes literal interpretation as arguing:

> [Some say,] "God must have said just what He means, and must mean just what He has said; and what He has said is to be taken just as He has said it, i.e., *literally*." But [in contrast] the New Testament makes it plain that the literal interpretation was a

stumbling block to the Jews. It concealed from them the most precious truths of Scripture. (*PC*, 258)

Acceptance of Sensus Plenior

Sensus plenior (Lat: "the fuller sense") conceptualizes a deeper sense to these prophetic texts than what the author supposedly intended. The Bible is coauthored,[32] and God intended more by each text than the human author did.

Interpretation of the Old Testament in Light of New Testament Fulfillment

The assertion that "Israel always means Israel" and that kingdom prophecies regarding Israel enter the New Testament "absolutely unchanged" leads at once and inevitably to the conclusion that the "kingdom of heaven" which John the Baptist announced as "at hand" was an earthly, political, national kingdom of the Jews.[33]
But since Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament, these passages should be understood as fulfilled spiritually. (ibid., 256)

Christological Interpretation of the Old Testament

Just as Christ is the fulfillment of Israel's sacrificial system, even so He is said to be the fulfillment of the Abrahamic and Davidic land- and throne-promises through which Messiah will have a political reign.[34] Hence, believers should see the Old Testament promises to Israel through this spiritual lens, and they will thereby observe that the New Testament church is the ***spiritual*** Israel, a continuation of the Old Testament ***ethnic*** Israel. No future literal fulfillment of these Old Testament prophecies can be expected.

Retroactive Interpretation

A common thread in these points is a retroactive method of interpretation: Rather

than the Old Testament being interpreted within its own context,[35] the New Testament is read back into the Old Testament. For example, in the historical-grammatical context, it is clear that Abraham's descendants would unconditionally inherit the Promised Land, from the Euphrates to the Mediterranean;[36] when these texts (Gen. 12–18) are read retroactively through a New Testament lens, the literal promise is canceled and replaced by a spiritual fulfillment in the church.

Response to Traditional Covenantalism

The hermeneutic of traditional covenantalism is plainly not an exegesis of the text (reading the meaning ***out of*** it), but an eisegetical exercise (reading another meaning back ***into*** it). The net result, covenantal amillennialism,[37] is unsupported by contextual, historical-grammatical interpretation.

Traditional covenantalism allows no literal national future for Israel, posits the church as the spiritual fulfillment of Old Testament predictions about Israel, and leads to an allegorical interpretation of the "thousand years" in Revelation 20. The Millennium,[38] rather than being a literal thousand years, is supposedly symbolic of the church age. Regarding the two resurrections of Revelation 20,[39] there is only one literal ***physical*** resurrection, the second one (v. 5), of "the rest of the dead" (the unregenerate). The "first resurrection"—the one explicitly called a resurrection (v. 6)—is not physical but spiritual, viz., the believer's regeneration.

Whatever this method may be called, from a traditional historical-grammatical perspective it is allegorical, a seriously errant way of interpreting crucial prophetic texts about Israel's future.[40] As traditional covenantalism admittedly fails to take these predictions literally, it is a symbolic understanding of them; consequently, it is at best an inconsistent use of the historical-grammatical hermeneutic and at worst subject to myriad criticisms against the allegorical

method.[41]

The Modified Covenantal View

Chastened by the faults of inconsistency and allegory in the traditional covenantal hermeneutic, some contemporary amillennialists have attempted to redeem their view by another approach: a modification that allows for a future literal fulfillment of land- and throne-promises made to Israel. This position is represented by Anthony Hoekema (1913–1988) and Vern Poythress (b. 1944), and the basic elements of their modified covenantal approach are the same as the traditional:

(1) Both reject a strict literal view of interpretation.
(2) Both accept the *sensus plenior*.
(3) Both interpret the Old Testament in light of New Testament fulfillment.
(4) Both view the Old Testament Christologically (fully fulfilled in Christ).
(5) Both engage in a retroactive method of reading New Testament truth back into the Old Testament (see Poythress, ***UD***, 8, 45–47, 76–91, 116).

However, the modifiers maintain all this with an innovative, sophisticated twist that allows them to admit a literal future for ethnic Israel (as dispensationalists have long defended) ***without*** giving up belief in a spiritual fulfillment of these Old Testament predictions in the church. The modified covenantal model holds that there will be no literal thousand-year reign of Christ,[42] since all these prophecies will be fulfilled ***in the new heaven and new earth***.[43]
This alteration builds on the concept of typology, meaning that the literal understanding serves as a springboard for a typological understanding. Poythress argues for traditional covenantalism with the following points.

The Traditional Covenantal View Is Wrong About Israel's Future

All prophecies are relevant to the church; all apply to us in some fashion, directly and indirectly. But not all are fulfilled in the church as such. Some are not at present fulfilled at all in the church. Some are only partially fulfilled in the church. In studying some prophecies we come to think that their full realization is still future. In principle, this fuller realization could take place either in the final golden age, described in

Revelation 21:1–22:5

, or in a “silver” age, commonly called “the Millennium” (*UD*, 47).

All Old Testament Promises Are Fulfilled in Christ, the True Israelite

One proceeds by way of Christ himself, the center point of fulfillment of the promises. Christ is an Israelite in the fullest sense. In fact, though all Israel be rejected for unfaithfulness (

Hos. 1:9

), yet Christ would remain as the ultimate faithful Israelite, the ultimate “remnant” (cf.

Isa. 6:11–13

;

11:1

). [Consequently,] as

2 Corinthians 1:20

says, “No matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes’ in Christ” (ibid., 126; cf. 69, 106).

The Church (in Christ) Participates Equally in These Promises

Now to which of these promises are Christians heirs in union with Christ? Theologically, it is hard to resist the answer “All of them.” After all, “in Christ all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority” (

Col. 2:9–10

). Thus, one cannot neatly divide between heavenly and earthly blessings because there is only one Christ, and we receive the whole Christ. (ibid., 69)

A Typological Fulfillment in the Church Does Not Cancel a Future Literal Fulfillment in Israel

A partial or initial spiritual fulfillment of these Old Testament promises in the church does not overthrow direct literal guarantees therein; the typological ***complements*** (not cancels) the literal. That there are two senses in a text does not mean one must nullify the other (cf. ibid., 35, 45, 47, 91, 115); one ***supplements*** the other and brings it to a higher level of fulfillment.

Thus grammatical-historical interpretation, constrained as it is to interpret the prophets against the background of Moses, will go ahead and introduce the symbolic and typological element directly into prophetic utterances about the future. (ibid., 113)

There Is Only One Salvific Head (Christ) and One People of God

Because Christ is an Israelite and Christians are in union with Christ, Christians partake of the benefits promised to Israel and Judah in Jeremiah [31]. With whom is the new covenant made? It is made with Israel and Judah. Hence, it is made with Christians by virtue of Christ the Israelite. Thus one might say that Israel and Judah themselves undergo a transformation at the first coming of Christ, because Christ is the final supremely faithful Israelite. Around him all true Israel gathers. (ibid., 106)

Both the Church and Israel Will Experience a Literal Future Fulfillment of Old Testament

Promises Made to Israel

The conclusion Poythress draws from these premises is that rather than (as traditional covenant theologians have argued) the church's spiritual fulfillment canceling or replacing the literal fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy about Israel, the church today is a partial, initial spiritual fulfillment. The future will provide more fully realized and literal fulfillment in which Israel and the church will share equally.

Since Christians share in Abraham's inheritance of the heavenly city now, they will share in it then also. It is legitimate to distinguish Jew and Gentile as peoples with two separate origins. [Nevertheless,] their destiny (if they come to trust in God's promises) is the same: they share in the inheritance of the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven. Hence the two parallel destinies, heavenly and earthly, fall away.

... Gentile Christians must also participate [in Israel's blessings], because they are coheirs with their union with Christ the Jew (Eph. 3:6). (ibid., 123)

Response to Modified Covenantalism

While it is more intricate and developed than the traditional view, modified covenantalism is no less problematic, being constructed on the foundation of the same faulty hermeneutic.[44] The adjustments made by Hoekema and Poythress have not forwarded their cause for several reasons.

First, modified covenantalism is a major concession to the contrary hermeneutical approach—the literal method. It acknowledges that dispensationalists were right all along when they contended for a literal future fulfillment of Old Testament promises to Israel.[45] Covenant theologians who grant this point have already conceded too much if they do not wish to uphold overall consistency and go the rest of the way with dispensationalists.

Second, distinguishing Jews and Gentiles as peoples with separate origins (ibid.) is also a concession to dispensationalism. If the two groups do have separate origins, then concluding that they also differ by nature and destiny[46] is an easy step, especially when it is acknowledged that the promises made to Israel (strictly in historic context) offered them a literal, political, messianic kingdom.

Third, it is neither helpful nor unique to argue (as modified covenantalists do) that Israel and the church do not have different destinies. Some dispensationalists (e.g., Erich Sauer) ***have*** long affirmed this view (ibid., 125), and other traditional dispensationalists agree that there is one overall people of God who have more in common than differences (e.g., see Pentecost, ***TC***, 576). Regardless, having one large family does not mean all live in the same house or have the same occupation. They may live in different areas—some may be ministers and some farmers—but all are still children of the same parents. Likewise, there need not be only one heavenly and earthly destiny within the one family of God.[47] The rest of this debate is largely semantic[48] and, in any

event, does not provide a unique feature for the covenantal view.
Fourth, adding typology to the historical-grammatical method is a category mistake. There ***are*** Old Testament types that find a spiritual fulfillment in the New Testament. For example, the Passover lamb was a type of Christ (John. 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7), and Hebrews 7–10 speaks of Christ fulfilling the typology of the Old Testament levitical system just as the Old Testament "shadows" of sabbaths and festivals are fulfilled in the "substance" of Christ (Col. 2:17). However, using typology of the levitical system in a way the New Testament explicitly approves is one thing; using it as a way of interpreting Old Testament prophecies made to Israel is another.
Fifth, it is inconsistent to agree (as both traditional and modified covenant amillennialists do) that the literal method of interpreting Old Testament prophecy is legitimate while simultaneously spiritualizing the Revelation 20 prophecy about the "thousand years" and the "first resurrection," claiming that neither are literal.[49]
Sixth, and finally, a significant remaining difference between the modified covenant view and the essential dispensational view is both interpretational and theological. By its illegitimate retroactive hermeneutic, the former destroys the distinctiveness of both Israel and the church.

The Hermeneutical Problem

Even with all its qualifications, the stark fact remains: Modified covenantalism, no less than the traditional covenantal view, embraces an inconsistent and unacceptable historical-grammatical method of interpretation that ends in the allegorization of many Old Testament prophecies about Israel.
First of all, modified covenantalism spiritualizes predictions meant for Israel, applying them to the church today. For instance, Zechariah's oracle (6:12–13) that the Messiah "will build the temple of the Lord" (see Poythress, ***UD***, 114) supposedly is fulfilled in the church. Contextual (exegetical) examination reveals that this passage is meant for national Israel (to whom it was directed); only by illegitimately reading back ***into*** the Old Testament an originally unintended meaning can one reach this conclusion.
What is more, modified covenantalism further violates the historical-grammatical hermeneutic with New Testament texts on the church, insisting that

the church and Israel are on identical footing in their inheritance of promises.[50] Many Old Testament predictions proclaim that Israel will have a unique place in the messianic kingdom, ***functionally*** superior to that of the Gentiles.[51] Moses said to Israel:

> The Lord set his affection on your forefathers and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, *above all the nations*, as it is today.... He has declared that he will set you in praise, fame and honor *high above all the nations he has made* and that you will be a people holy to the Lord your God, as he promised. (Deut. 10:15 ; 26:19)

Paul added,

> What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? *Much in every way*! First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of God.... Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! (Rom. 3:1–2 ; 9:4–5)

Truly, God made Israel a special people and has granted to them a distinctive role in His coming messianic kingdom. Isaiah recorded:

> This is what the Lord says: “The products of Egypt and the merchandise of Cush, and those tall Sabeans—they will come over to you and will be yours; they will trudge behind you, coming over to you in chains. They will bow down before you and plead with you, saying, ‘Surely God is with you, and there is no other; there is no other god’ ” (Isa. 45:14).

Indeed, Israel will take a lead role in teaching God’s Word to the nations:

In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. (
Isa. 2:2–3
)

So while all God's people share equally in His salvation ***personally and spiritually***,[52] nonetheless, there will be a special future place for Israel ***collectively and nationally***.[53]

The Theological Problem

There is also a serious theological issue with the modified covenantal view: It ignores the church's status as a "new creation" of God (2 Cor. 5:17), which differentiates Israel from the Gentiles. Paul said, "… by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself ***one new man out of the two***, thus making peace" (Eph. 2:15). Paul distinguishes three groups in 1 Corinthians 10:32: "Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether [1] Jews, [2] Greeks [non-Jews] or [3] the church of God." And, in contrast with the church, which is grafted in, national Israel is still a distinct entity (cf. Rom. 11:25–26).

Further, modified covenantalism ignores the separate natures of Israel and the church in the one overall people of God, one heavenly (the church) and the other earthly (Israel).[54] The universal church is the body of Christ, which began at Pentecost[55] and wherein the unity of Jew and Gentile in one non-ethnic spiritual body is a mystery not known in Old Testament times.[56]

In addition, modified covenantalism gives the church coequal ethnic status with national Israel. Conversely, the New Testament is explicit that the church is not

an ethnic group[57] and, hence, has no status as such alongside another ethnic group (Israel). There is no ethnic, social, or generic status in Christ (the church—Gal. 3:28); accordingly, to read church/Israel equality back into Old Testament passages that placed Israel in a functionally superior position in the coming kingdom results from eisegesis. Hermeneutically, once again, this fundamentally violates a tenet of the historical-grammatical method.

BIBLICAL PROPHECY: THE PROGRESSIVE DISPENSATIONAL SCHOOL OF INTERPRETATION

Not only are there modified forms of ***covenantal*** hermeneutics, but there are also mutant forms of ***dispensational*** interpretation. One of these is called "progressive dispensationalism" (see Blaising and Bock, ***PD***), which adopts a hermeneutic with strong similarities to modified covenantalism. Progressive dispensationalists admit they hold a "mediating" position with covenant amillennial views.[58] Focus will be on the hermeneutic presented by Craig Blaising (b. 1949) and Darrell Bock (b. 1952) in ***Progressive Dispensationalism***, with some reference to ***The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*** by Robert Saucy (b. 1937).[59]

What Progressive Dispensationalism Represents

Rejection of the Sensus Unum

Blaising and Bock reject that "***meaning*** is what the author intended to say in the original setting in which his text was produced;[60] ***significance*** refers to ***all subsequent uses*** of the text." In other words, in regard to the traditional formula, they reject that "there is only one interpretation of that original meaning [*sensus*

unum] and many applications (significances)"; these are "helpful" but "simplistic" (***PD***, 64). There are, then, many meanings in a text, not just one, and we are to look for "a deeper understanding" (*sensus plenior*) than the author's expressed meaning, for "an authorial unity remains [in Scripture] that transcends the human authors" (ibid., 65, 67).

Rejection of the Author's Meaning

Blaising and Bock also reject the historical-grammatical limitation of a text's meaning to what the author meant by it:

> Textual meaning is not really limited to reproducing what the reader thinks the author might have meant. [The proper] understanding [of a text] often emerges from events and their sequel, rather than being simply inherent in the events themselves. (ibid., 64)

They then provide an illustration that betrays confusion between the ***original, singular authorial meaning*** and ***subsequent significance derived from seeing the application (significance) of that one meaning***. The idea is that God means more by the text than the human author did:

> The reality of a mediated text about events and the presence of a divine author carries with it important implications for meaning in the biblical text.... These factors allow a text to speak beyond its human author. [Thus, a] connection to the original passage exists, but not in a way that is limited to the understanding of the original human author. (ibid., 66–67)

Rejection of a Fixed Objective Meaning

"Since Scripture is about linked events and not just abstract ideas, [the] meaning of events in texts has a dynamic, not a static quality" (ibid., 64). By the use of pejorative terms like ***abstract*** and ***static***, Blaising and Bock barely conceal their abandonment of historical-grammatical, objectively fixed meaning.[61] The

literal position is described as a “type of pharisaism” in contrast to “pluralism” and relativism (ibid., 71).

Rejection of the Interpreter’s Attempted Neutral Role

Robert Thomas (b. 1928) points out that the historical-grammatical hermeneutic, as expressed by Milton Spenser Terry (1840–1914) in his classic ***Biblical Hermeneutics***, maintains that the interpreter endeavors to take a neutral stance toward the text so as not to read his own views into it: We “should aim rather to place ourselves in the position of the sacred writers” (“CPDH” in Walvoord, ***ET***, 417). Bernard Ramm cites Martin Luther in this regard: “The best teacher is the one who does not bring his meaning into the Scripture but gets his meaning from Scripture” (***BH***, 595). Likewise, John Calvin asserted, “The Holy Scripture is not a tennis ball that we may bounce around at will. Rather it is the Word of God whose teaching must be learned by the most impartial and objective study of the text” (op. cit., 417–18).

Blaising and Bock instead hold that one’s theological pre-understanding should be allowed to influence his textual interpretation: “Each of us has our own way of seeing, a grid for understanding that impacts what we expect to see in the text, the questions we ask of it, and thus the answers we get” (***PD***, 59). Although more implicit, Robert Saucy appears to hold a similar view, allowing his “progressive” idea of dispensations to color his view (***CPD***, 32).

Modification of the Historical-Grammatical Hermeneutic

In order to accomplish the goal to produce an “interactive,” “progressive,” and “dynamic” view of interpretation (op. cit., 77), Blaising and Bock make a severe alteration in the literal hermeneutic: adding the category of “literary-theological” to historical-grammatical.

> [This] literary theological level highlights the fact that there is an abiding message and unity in the text, which is laid out literarily in various ways called genres. Each genre presents truth in its own way and makes unique demands for how it should be read. (ibid.)

In other words, an up-front, ***a priori*** choice of genre becomes hermeneutically

determinative of textual meaning. Blaising and Bock's exhortation to "***Be Genre Sensitive***" means that "the study of genre moves us into the area of interpretation that helps us unify the pieces of the message" (ibid., 85). In actuality, this method often becomes an interpretive grid through which views and conclusions from "contemporary scholarship" that are foreign and contrary to the text (as read by the standard method) can be read into it. Bock goes so far as to recommend a so-called "complementary" reading of the text, from the standpoint of later events, that allows "multiple meaning" by adding new ones (ibid., 64–67): "Does the expansion of meaning entail a change of meaning? … The answer is both yes and no. On the one hand, to add to the revelation of a promise is to introduce 'change' to it through addition" ("CMA" in ***TJ***, 71). Saucy gives an example of how this works through his claim that there are multiple meanings in Psalm 110: The Son of David reigns on two thrones, one in heaven (now) and later, during the Millennium, one on earth (***CPD***, 69–75). Of course, Saucy would not see this as an actual ***change*** in the prophecy, but as two ***stages*** encompassed in the original prediction—an inaugural stage in Christ's ascension and a final one in the Millennium. However, this ***does*** involve a real change, since the Messiah is seated in heaven at God's right hand only after His ascension (***now***, cf. v. 1); ***later*** He will be seated on David's earthly throne (after His return), during the Millennium. The original phrase "sit at my right hand" (in heaven) does not in its historical-grammatical sense also mean "on earth" (in Jerusalem); the latter is not announced until verse 2, which declares: "You [Messiah] will rule in the midst of Your enemies" with "the rod of Your [God's] strength out of Zion [Jerusalem]" (nkjv). This can only mean later, when Christ comes back to earth (since His "enemies" are not in heaven).[62]

This is not to say that the authority given Christ by the phrase "at My right hand" extends through the Millennium, at the "end" when "he hands over the kingdom to God" (1 Cor. 15:24), and nowhere does this verse say that Christ assumed David's throne when He was seated in heaven at the Ascension. To read this back into the text from alleged New Testament fulfillment is eisegesis. It is not the historical-grammatical method of understanding a verse in its context, but a revised hermeneutic that allows for alteration of meaning, whereby a later throne on earth is identified with an early one in heaven. This is not merely an "expanded" and "multileveled" use of the New Testament; it is a ***revision*** of the Old Testament author's textual meaning.

Acceptance of a Retroactive Hermeneutic

Bock also accepts a modified form of covenantal (retroactive) interpretation that Thomas calls "anachronistic," one that "read[s] New Testament revelation back into the context of the Old Testament under the banner of grammatical-historical methodology" ("CPDH" in ***ET***, 421). Ironically, Blaising and Bock criticize the covenantal amillennial view for "reading the New Testament back into the Old" (***PD***, 97), but the progressive genre-driven hermeneutic has a retroactive move of its own, reading the Old Testament in light of New Testament events.

For example, Bock claims that the New Testament makes an "expansion of promise" or "additional inclusion" to Old Testament prophecy. As a dispensationalist, he rejects the cancellation of any yet-unfulfilled promise to Israel;[63] however, as a ***modified*** dispensationalist, he insists that the New Testament makes changes in these promises ***as meant by the original author***. This is achieved through denial of the *sensus unum* and embracing of the *sensus plenior*, that God meant more by the original text than the human author did.

Adoption of an Implicit Covenantal Hermeneutic

Ironically, the very people Bock is hoping to influence by his modified dispensational method believe that he has logically given up the farm. Poythress writes: "I am personally glad to see the moves that they [progressive dispensationalists] are making.… However, their position is inherently unstable" (***UD***, 137). Why? Because their hermeneutic leads into a covenantal view. Only time will tell whether the logic will work its way out historically, but since a bad methodology leads to a bad theology, one cannot help but wonder how long it will take progressive dispensationalists to become theologically covenantal.[64] Thomas pinpoints the issue when he says this hermeneutic "amounts to an allegorical rather than a literal method of interpretation" ("CPDH" in ***ET***, 422). This symbolic (typical) element is made possible by a revision of the historical-grammatical hermeneutic: "These texts have a message that extends beyond the original setting in which they were given" (Blaising and Bock, ***PD***, 64).

An Evaluation of the Progressive Dispensational Hermeneutic

Since there is little new in this method that has not already been evaluated above, we will briefly summarize the problems, many of which are common to covenantal views as well.

Rejection of the Human Author's Meaning Is Self-Defeating

The claim that a text's meaning need not be limited to what the author meant by it is itself a textual claim (statement) demanding we limit our interpretation of that claim to what its author means. Hence, it is self-defeating.

Rejection of Objective Meaning Is Self-Defeating

Likewise, rejecting objective meaning for a "non-static" view is self-defeating, for the very statement "Meaning is not objective" presents itself as an objectively meaningful statement. The proponent of an unfixed view of meaning hangs on his own semantical gallows.[65]

Rejection of One Meaning (Sensus Unum) Is Self-Defeating

Furthermore, the rejection of singular textual meaning is self-defeating. Once again, the very statement "Texts may have more than one meaning" implies that ***it*** has only one meaning, and its author would object if the reader supplemented additional unintended meaning to his words.

God Cannot Mean More Than the Human Author Does

In addition, it makes no sense to say that God meant more by a given text than the human author did. God knows more about that ***topic***, and God sees more ***implications*** in it, but He cannot ***mean*** more by it—the Bible is an inspired book

in which God and the human author affirm the same text.[66]

Progressive Dispensationalism Confuses Meaning and Significance

The basic convolution here is made possible by rejecting the difference between meaning (***sense***) and significance (***implications***). There is only ***one meaning*** in a text—the one meant by the author. Simultaneously, there are ***many implications and applications*** of that text; God is aware of these, and subsequent readers can be aided by later revelation to see them.
This reality is explained by the doctrines of progressive revelation and progressive understanding of revelation.[67] With further revelation on a given topic, and, prophetically speaking, through its fulfillment, we better comprehend (and see more implications in) the original text. ***We cannot legitimately get more meaning out of a text than the author put into it; the original meaning cannot be altered***. Any attempt to deny this brings affirmation of it in the very denial.

ANSWERING SOME OBJECTIONS TO THE LITERAL HERMENEUTIC

Objections to the literal historical-grammatical hermeneutic can be placed in two broad categories: biblical and nonbiblical. Regarding the former, many have been leveled at the literal interpretation of Scripture in general and of prophecy in particular. The main ones will be discussed here, while some will get more extensive treatment later.[68]

The Argument From 1 Corinthians 10:4

One example given of the New Testament allegorizing an Old Testament passage is Paul's statement about the children of Israel in the wilderness: "They drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ" (nkjv).

Covenantalists conclude that Paul is making Christ a spiritual fulfillment of the literal rock that followed Israel in the wilderness.

Response

This is a misunderstanding: The Rock that followed Israel was a literal rock, just as the manna they ate was literal food from heaven. The Greek word ***spiritual*** (***pneumatikos***) does not refer to the rock's nature, but to its source (God), who is spiritual. Just as a spiritual person (cf. 2:14–15) is a literal physical person whose life is dominated by the Spirit, even so the literal rock in the wilderness was dominated by the Spirit—it "followed them" for forty years with an endless source of water. ***The rock was a Christophany***—that is, a literal manifestation of Christ and His supernatural power—as was the Angel of the Lord, who appeared in physical human form (e.g., cf. Gen. 18:2, 8, 22). There is no spiritualization in 1 Corinthians 10:4; a literal rock, from which literal water came, was literally a manifestation of Christ.[69]

The Argument From Romans 4:13, 16

> It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.... Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.

On this basis it is argued that Abraham has spiritual children, that the promise to him has a fulfillment in all of us, Jew or Gentile, who have faith in Christ—we are all Abraham's spiritual seed.

Response

This is true, but it does not result in the conclusion that the unconditional promises God made to Abraham's ***literal*** seed (the nation of Israel) are not literally true and will not literally be fulfilled. That Abraham has two "seeds," one physical and one spiritual, does not mean the latter replaces the former; ***the spiritual seed is parallel, not a replacement***. There is a future for Abraham's physical descendants;[70] indeed, as will be shown,[71] all outstanding land- and kingdom-promises to Israel will be fulfilled at the Second Coming.[72]

The Argument From Galatians 6:16

Paul's reference to the "Israel of God" is often taken by allegorists to mean "spiritual Israel," and that this is a proof that Paul is using the term ***Israel*** in a spiritual sense of the church.

Response

This interpretation is by no means necessary. In fact, given the context (which is how we discover meaning[73]), it should be taken of Israelites (Jews) who are true believers, which fits also with Paul's usage in other places. Consider the following evidence for not taking this as referring to a so-called spiritual Israel (the church).

First, Paul says nothing of a spiritual Israel; his reference to "Israel of God" delineates literal Israelites who have accepted the message of God's grace. This blends with his language in a similar allusion to literal Israelites who are false teachers, in contrast to "we … the circumcision [Jews], who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh" (Phil. 3:3

nkjv). “Israel of God” and “the circumcision [Jews], who worship God” are the same group: Jews saved by God’s grace rather than by circumcision.
Second, this fits with the context, in which Paul is contending with those who taught legalistic messages of works, false teachers who were Israelites (Jews) not of God; that is, their teaching was contrary to the true gospel. In Galatians Paul refers to them as those who “try to compel you to be circumcised” and “keep the law” (6:12–13 nasb).
Third, Paul’s language here matches his consistent use of ***Israel*** as a reference to literal Jews, the physical descendants of Abraham and David (e.g., cf. Rom. 9:3–4; 10:1). ***There is not one New Testament example of the word*** Israel ***being used in a spiritual sense; it always refers to ethnic Israel***.[74] A. B. Davidson (1831–1902) summed it up well:

> Certainly the extreme anti-literal interpretation which considers the names Zion, Jerusalem, Israel, and the like to be mere names for the Christian Church, without reference to the people of Israel, does no justice either to the spirit of the Old Testament and its principle, or to the principles on which the apostle reasons. (*OTP*, 490 in Ramm, *PBI*, 254n)

The Argument From Matthew 2:15

Hosea (11:1) spoke of God bringing Israel out of Egypt. Regarding Matthew’s citation of this passage as a fulfillment of bringing baby Jesus out of Egypt, allegorists argue that this is not a literal use of Hosea’s prophecy.

Response

Again, while the New Testament sometimes gives an application (rather than an interpretation) of an Old Testament passage, it never spiritualizes away the literal truth of an Old Testament text. There is a central generic core truth in the prophecy: God’s “son” (whether Israel, the messianic nation, or Jesus, its Messiah) was delivered from Egypt to provide salvation for God’s people. Hosea

applied this to the messianic nation and Matthew to the Messiah; both were God's "son," and both were delivered from Egypt. The meaning cannot change, even though the application can; this is an instance of the "one meaning, many applications" dictum of the historical-grammatical hermeneutic.

The Argument From 1 Peter 2:9

In Old Testament context (Ex. 19:6), the term ***holy nation*** is used of Israel; Peter here seems to use it in a spiritual sense of the church.

Response

First, Peter does not offer this as a spiritual fulfillment of what God promised Israel.
Second, this does not even appear to be a citation of the prophecy that Israel was to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:6 nkjv). Peter says much more: Believers are "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His [God's] own special people" (nkjv).
Third, at best, Peter borrows some of the Old Testament's language and appropriately applies it to New Testament believers, who, after all, are part of God's people as well.[75]
Fourth, and finally, even if this were a literal, word-for-word quotation of the earlier text, it would not justify an allegorical or spiritual interpretation of it, nor an identification of the New Testament church with Old Testament Israel. That two entities have a common description of some characteristics does not mean they are identical. New Testament believers are just as literally God's people and priests as were Old Testament believers; in no sense does this text show that Peter is spiritualizing a text once intended for literal Israel and now identifying it with a spiritual Israel (the church). At most, Peter is borrowing language used of God's people in the Old Testament and applying it to God's people in the New Testament.

The Argument From Hebrews 8:7–13

Jeremiah 31:31 informs us that God said, “I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel.” The writer of Hebrews asserts that this applies to the New Testament church, and allegorists use this to justify understanding Old Testament predictions for Israel as being spiritually fulfilled in the church.

Response

This does not follow for several reasons.
First, for whomever the promise was intended, its fulfillment is ***literal***, for those in the New Testament age and/or for those in the Old. New covenant benefits are literally (not allegorically) the possession of all believers.
Second, that the church is also the beneficiary of the new covenant does not mean there will not also be a literal fulfillment of it in national Israel. Applying the benefits to one group does not mean they are thereby cancelled for the other; it means that the same thing literally promised for Israel (to be fulfilled in the future) is also presently true of New Testament believers.
Third, while the covenant was ***made*** with Israel, it is also appropriately ***applied*** to the church (8:7–13); the benefits of Christ’s death were intended by God from the very beginning for both.[76] The New Testament is ***not*** spiritualizing a promise that will not be literally fulfilled.[77]

The Argument From Luke 3:5

Citing Isaiah 40:4, Luke recorded the words of John the Baptist: “Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall

become straight, the rough ways smooth." Since no such topographical changes occurred when John preached, it is objected by some covenant theologians that this is an example of the New Testament spiritualizing an Old Testament prediction. Certainly, the New Testament does not take it literally.

Response

Of course the New Testament does not take it literally, and for very good reason: it was never intended to be taken literally. These are figures of speech, and ***the literal method of interpretation insists that figures of speech be taken figuratively—this is*** literally ***the way they were meant to be understood***.[78] Again, the use of symbols and metaphors is by no means incompatible with the literal hermeneutic. If it were, we would be compelled to hold that the Old Testament is often mistaken in other texts (many of which are nonprophetic), such as when it speaks of jubilant mountains (Isa. 49:13), rejoicing fields, and singing trees (Ps. 96:12); joyous deserts (Isa. 35:1), singing stars (Job 38:7), and handclapping trees (Isa. 55:12).

The Argument From Acts 2:17–20[79]

In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. *I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord*.

The critic of the strictly literal method of interpretation notes that in no sense was the italicized section literally fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost.

Response

First, while Peter quotes the whole text from Joel 2, only the first part of it was fulfilled at Pentecost and following; the rest refers to Christ's return. Clearly, the signs in the heavens did not occur at Pentecost.
Second, since the first part of the text was literally fulfilled, there is no reason to believe that the second part will not also be literally fulfilled at the Second Coming.[80] This ***supports*** the literal method.

The Argument From Galatians 3:29

Paul wrote to the Galatians, "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." He mentions also in Romans 4:13–16 that believers in Jesus are the spiritual seed of Abraham. However, in Genesis 15:5 (from which this is taken), God is speaking about the physical descendants of Abraham, who will be numberless.

Response

This text is a literal fulfillment of what God promised Abraham from the beginning, namely, that "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen. 12:3). As we've noted, Paul makes it clear that Abraham has both physical and spiritual descendants (Rom. 4:16), so the New Testament is not spiritualizing the prediction but confirming what God pledged. Indeed, God promised that the only physical descendants who are true heirs of the promise are those who receive the promise by faith (9:6); "in other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring" (v. 8). God literally fulfilled what He had promised: only

those (Jew ***or*** Gentile) who believe will be recipients of His promise.[81] Most of the other objections to a literal hermeneutic have already been addressed. To put them in terms of the response, the literal method does not exclude the use of symbols, figures of speech, types, poetry, or parables—these all are based on and convey a literal truth. Neither does it mean that a text has only one application or implication, nor that further revelation cannot add to our comprehension. The following are in addition to these misunderstandings of the literal method.

The Objection to the Term *Literal*

Some protest that the term ***literal*** is misleading because it is best understood in contrast to ***figurative*** or ***symbolic***, which the literal method claims to embrace. Poythress argues that "it is a confusing term, capable of being used to beg many of the questions at stake in the interpretation of the Bible.… We had best not use the phrase [literal interpretation]" (***UD***, 96).

Response

First, it is not the ***term*** but the ***truth*** of this method that is important. If a better term can be found, so much the better, as long as the truth is retained.
Second, because the term has a solid origin and a venerable history, it should not be discarded lightly. Again, it comes from the Latin *sensus literalis*, which has a classical, commonly understood, and stable meaning.
Third, it is an appropriate term in contrast to the nonliteral and allegorical interpretations to which it is opposed. If understood in the sense that all the Bible is literally true but not all is true literally, then ***literal*** seems to be the best term available.
Fourth, proposed alternatives are often cumbersome and complex; putting together terms suggested by revisionists would yield something along the burdensome lines of "the historical-grammatical-exegetical-biblical-contextual-

literary-theological-canonical method" (Blaising and Bock, ***PD***, 77, 100–101). *Fifth*, and finally, those who object to ***literal*** often have an agenda by which—under a new added word or phrase—they can change the meaning of the classical hermeneutic into something else that suits their theological biases. Certainly, words like ***dynamic, organic, progressive***, and ***holistic*** are inferior candidates, covering a multitude of hermeneutical sins; best to stick with what has withstood the test of time and leave the rest to exposition.

The Objection That *Literal* Is a Question-Begging Term Favoring Dispensationalism

Poythress contends that many dispensationalists use ***literal*** historical-grammatical as a "question-begging" method to support their system of belief (***UD***, 94). Since dispensationalists favor literal interpretation of Old Testament predictions about Israel, it's understandable that they would desire to use a literal hermeneutic to reach this conclusion.

Response

This objection reverses cart and horse: ***Because*** dispensationalists nonnegotiably maintain literal interpretation of Scripture, they are forced to acknowledge a literal national future for Israel.[82]

In actuality, the charge of choosing a hermeneutic to fit preconceived theology can more appropriately be applied to the covenant approach. Most covenant (specifically) and amillennial (generally) theologians use the literal method to interpret the rest of Scripture but then inconsistently switch to an allegorical or symbolic method when it comes to texts that, if interpreted literally, would contradict their preestablished system.[83]

BIBLICAL PROPHECY: CHARACTERISTICS OF CONSISTENT LITERAL INTERPRETATION

Many methods of interpreting prophecy claim to be literal, but not all are consistently literal. There are several characteristics of a consistent method.[84]

It Interprets Prophecy Literally (Not Allegorically)

A consistent hermeneutic ***must*** be literal—there is no more reason to change one's hermeneutic when it comes to prophetic Scripture than there is for one to change to an allegorical hermeneutic when he moves from a newspaper's local news to the weather forecast. Statements about the future do not preclude literal predictions, as noted by Milton Terry: "While duly appreciating the peculiarities of prophecy, we nevertheless must employ in its interpretation essentially the same great principles as in the interpretation of other ancient writings" (***BH***, 418).

Back to the newspaper analogy: Someone might retort that this may be true of the news and weather, but not of the funnies—literal interpretation doesn't apply here, does it? The answer is yes: It is literally a comic section. The genre has changed, and all readers know it; the characters are not real people, but the points made are what the creator of each strip or frame believes are the literal truths he wishes to convey. Even comedy, like parable or symbolism, contains literal truth; in fact, we usually laugh at it ***because*** it conveys literal truth with which we identify.

It Interprets Prophecy Contextually

A consistent literal hermeneutic also takes prophetic statements contextually. For example, if a passage is speaking of literal national Israel, then we have no right

to take it as meaning the New Testament church.[85] This is often done with regard to Israel's land-promises, given unconditionally to Abraham, specified geographically, and granted to them "forever."[86] This has never been fulfilled in either the duration sense of ***forever*** or in the extended sense of the land dimensions. Even in Joshua's day, when God fulfilled the Mosaic guarantee of their conquering and possessing the Promised Land, they did not have the land all the way to the Euphrates (Josh. 21:43–45; cf. Gen. 15:18);[87] furthermore, after this time there is reference to the Abrahamic promise's fulfillment as yet future (cf. Amos 9:14–15). A consistent literal hermeneutic acknowledges that these land-promises have not been fulfilled and, therefore, will be in the future, with a restored national Israel.

It Interprets Prophecy With a Single Meaning (*Sensus Unum*)

Does a text have one interpretation or many? The *sensus unum* view insists there is only one (the one intended by both God and the human author), and the *sensus plenior* view claims there is more than one (the one intended by the human author and the one intended by God). Raymond E. Brown (b. 1928), tracing the *sensus plenior*, explains:

> The *sensus plenior* is that additional, deeper meaning, intended by God but not clearly intended by the human author, which is seen to exist in the words of a biblical text (or group of texts, or even a whole book) when they are studied in the light of further revelation or development in the understanding of revelation. (cited in Ramm, *H*, 106–07)

We have already demonstrated that a text has only ***one interpretation***, but that it may have ***many implications/applications***; while both God and the human author affirmed the same meaning/interpretation,[88] the human author may or may not have had all of the implications/applications in mind. However, maintaining a deeper meaning than what the prophet had in mind[89] in the sense

of either a double meaning or of God meaning more is a badly mistaken hermeneutic; likewise, reading back into a text retroactive meaning derived from later revelation is a serious interpretational error.

According to the doctrine of verbal inspiration, a given text's meaning is the meaning expressed by both God and the human author. Biblical inspiration means that in any given text, whatever the author affirms, God affirms, and whatever the author denies, God denies—no more and no less.[90] There cannot be two meanings to the same set of words in the same context; meaning is discovered by context, and there is only one context for these same words.[91] Once again, we can learn more about a ***topic*** through further revelation, but the further revelation does not add any meaning to a previous ***text***. It has no retroactive right to be read back into previous revelation. The previous revelation is not dependent on subsequent revelation for its meaning or for any alleged deeper meaning.[92] Taken in this sense, the *sensus plenior* is misdirected.

It Recognizes Figures of Speech Within the Literal Meaning

The following examples help to illustrate that literal textual meaning does not eliminate the use of parables, metaphors, figures of speech, and even symbols (etc.) within literal interpretation.

Parables

Jesus told many parables, some of which were prophetic, but even though the literary genre was parabolic, nonetheless, there was a literal truth conveyed. While the parable is symbolic, it is symbolic of an actual reality. For instance, Jesus' parable of the tenants (Luke 20:9–18) clearly foretells His rejection by the Jews, His crucifixion, and His return to earth. The "servants" of the owner (God) that were beaten by the tenants (vinedressers—Jews) were prophets; the son of the vineyard owner who was killed by the tenants was Christ; the destruction of

the tenants is the Second Coming.[93] Jesus drove home the point by quoting Psalm 118:22 about rejecting the "chief cornerstone" (nkjv). Literal truths about the future, taught through a parable.

Metaphors and Similes

Scripture is replete with metaphors and similes: God is metaphorically represented as a "rock" (Ps. 31:3) and a "strong tower" (Prov. 18:10). While these are not true literally, they are literally true: the immutable God literally is as solid as a rock.[94] In no way does usage of metaphor/simile eliminate literal biblical truth but, rather, reinforces it through lively, descriptive, evocative terms.

Symbols

Many symbols are used in the Bible. As noted above, Revelation is full of them, as are the books of Zechariah and Daniel. Gentile nations are seen by God as wild beasts (Dan. 7) or as a metallic man (Dan. 2) who will be broken in pieces by a great stone (Christ) at His return (vv. 44–45). But none of these symbols spiritualizes away the literal nations and persons of which they are symbols—the literal hermeneutic does not eliminate the text's literal meaning. Symbols help to express truth in a vital and colorful way, just as do other figures of speech like ***hyperbole, satire***, and ***anthropomorphism***.

Poetry

Some of the Old Testament's magnificent prophecy is expressed in poetic form. This, again, in no sense diminishes the literalness of its referent. God, humans, animals, hills, and trees are all literal realities; speaking of them poetically does not make them figurative. Poetic language, rather than de-literalizing or dematerializing its object, makes it even more vivid (see Ramm, ***PBI***, 228), as the remarkable prophecies of Isaiah demonstrate.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR STANDARD HERMENEUTICS

The literal historical-grammatical method of interpretation is firmly rooted in church history. Even those (like Augustine) who were prone to allegorize admitted that literal interpretation was the foundation on which the others should be built. Since the literal method is rooted in aristotlelianism (just as the allegorical method is based in platonism), we'll begin with citations from the fountainhead.

Aristotle (384–322 b.c.)

It is no accident that the grandfather of the literal method was empirical in his epistemology,[95] for those who hold that knowledge begins in sensory experience are not easily swayed to allegorism. Aristotle affirmed not only the grammatical sense of meaning but also that there is only one meaning (*sensus unum*) to an affirmation:

> Just as all men have not the same writing, so all men have not the same speech sounds, but the mental experiences, which these directly symbolize, are the same for all, as also are those things of which our experiences are the images. (*OH*, 16a.4–8)

> The first class of simple propositions is the simple affirmation, the next, the simple denial: all others are only one by conjunction.... We call those propositions single which indicate a single fact, or the conjunction of the parts of which result in unity: those propositions, on the other hand, are separate and many in number, which indicate many facts, or whose parts have no conjunction. (ibid., 17a, 15–18)

Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)

> These things are such as fall [plainly] under our observation, and are clearly and unambiguously in express terms set forth in the Sacred Scriptures. And therefore the parables ought not to be adapted to ambiguous expressions. (*AH*, 2.27)

> [On Antichrist's number of 666,] it is therefore more certain, and less hazardous, to await the fulfillment of the prophecy, than to be making surmises, and casting about for any names that may present themselves, inasmuch as many names can be found

possessing the number mentioned; and the same question will, after all, remain unsolved. (ibid., 5.30.3)

Tertullian (c. 155–c. 225)

Tertullian chides allegorists for distorting the literal truth of prophecy:

For some, when they have alighted on a very usual form of prophetic statement, generally expressed in figure and allegory, though not always, distort into some imaginary sense even the most clearly described doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. (*ORF*, 19)

Let me dispel at once the preliminary idea on which they rest—their assertion that the prophets make all their announcements in figures of speech. Now, if this were the case, the figures themselves could not possibly have been distinguished, inasmuch as the verities would not have been declared, out of which the figurative language is stretched. And, indeed, if all are figures, where will be that of which they are the figures? How can you hold up a mirror for your face, if the face nowhere exists? (ibid., 20)

Hippolytus (c. 170–c. 235)

These words he [Noetus] cites without understanding what precedes them. For whenever they [Noetus and his followers] wish to attempt anything underhand, they mutilate the Scriptures. But let him quote the passage as a whole, and he will discover the reason kept in view in writing it. (*EWFHAHON*, 4)

Origen (c. 185–c. 254)

In spite of his well-known allegorization of some of Scripture, Origen had an underlying literal hermeneutic. He also understood some basic hermeneutical principle like the following:

It belongs only to those who are wise in the truth of Christ (and to all them it does belong) to unfold the connection and meaning of even the obscure parts of prophecy, comparing spiritual things with spiritual, and interpreting each passage according to the usage of Scripture writers. (*DP*, 7.11)

Augustine (354–430)

It is well known that Augustine widely allegorized Scripture, including prophetic passages such as Revelation 20 on the Millennium (see ***CG***). However wrong he was in practice, though, in principle Augustine held the literal to be the basis of the allegorical (which was a spiritual application of it):

> I do not censure those who may have been able to carve out some spiritual interpretation from every historical fact recounted, so long as they take good care, and foremost to adhere to the historical fact. (ibid., 17.3)

> No one should object to such reflections and others even more appropriate that might be made concerning the allegorical interpretation of the Garden of Eden, so long as we believe in the historical truth manifest in the faithful narrative of those events. (ibid., 13.21)

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)

Aquinas's commentary on Aristotle's ***On Interpretation*** perpetuated the peripatetic's literal *sensus unum* hermeneutic:

> An affirmation signifies something about something, and the subject is either the name or that which has no name, and one thing must be signified about one thing in an affirmation. (*AOI*, II.1.125, 127)

Martin Luther (1483–1546)

The Reformation might have been aborted had not Luther relied on the heart of literal interpretation: "The words [of Scripture] are to be considered according to the intention of the speaker" (***BTW***, 129).

John Calvin (1509–1564)

Calvin's commentaries on Scripture, and his basic theology built on them, are known for their exemplary use of the literal hermeneutic:

We must consider, I say, how far interpretation can be permitted to go beyond the literal meaning of the words, still making it apparent that no appending of human glosses is added to the Divine Law, but that the pure and genuine meaning of the Lawgiver is faithfully exhibited. (*ICR*, 2.8.8)

George Peters (1825–1909)

Where a literal construction will stand, the furthest from the letter is commonly the worst. There is nothing more dangerous than this licentious and deluding art, which changes the meaning of words … making anything what it pleases, and bringing in the end all truth to nothing. (*TK*, 1.47)

"The only true standard of interpretation is the grammatical (aided by the historical)" (ibid., 9).

Milton Terry (1840–1914)

First we should ascertain the historical position of the prophet; next the scope and plan of his book; then the usage and import of his words and symbols; and, finally, ample and discriminating comparison of the parallel Scriptures should be made. (*BH*, 418)

"A new language was not made for the authors of Scripture; they conformed to the current language of the country and time" (ibid., 73).
"If the literal meaning of any word or expression makes good sense in its connections, it is literal; but if the literal meaning does not make good sense, it is figurative" (ibid., 40).
"[The interpreter is to] proceed on the presupposition that the word is literal unless there is a good reason for deciding otherwise" (ibid.).
"The interpreter must have strict regard (1) to the historical standpoint of the writer or prophet, (2) to the scope and context, and (3) to the analogy and import of similar symbols and figures elsewhere used" (ibid., 356–57).

Merrill Tenney (1904–1985)

The futurist school of thought, because of its insistence upon an interpretation as literal as possible, has been a healthy antidote to an overbalanced symbolism that has tended to make Revelation mean everything except the obvious. (*IR*, 145)

"Symbols as a whole are not taken from fanciful or imaginary sources, but are related to ideas that would be readily recognized by the readers" (ibid., 193).
"The more literal an interpretation that one adopts, the more strongly will he be construed to be a futurist" (ibid.).

Charles Feinberg (1909–1997)

"No prophecy of the Word is to be interpreted solely with reference to itself … but all other portions of the prophetic revelation are to be taken into account and considered" (***PA***, 39).
"[When] the symbols are explained in the immediate context, in the book in which they occur, or elsewhere in the Word, no room [is] left to the imaginations of man to devise explanations" (ibid., 55).

Bernard Ramm (1916–1992)

"The interpreter should take the literal interpretation of a prophetic passage as his limiting or controlling guide" (***PBI***, 253).
"The literal interpretation is the point of departure for prophetic interpretation" (ibid., 258).
"The literal fulfillment of some of the prophecies within the Old Testament period indicates the validity of that principle" (ibid., 261–62).

John Walvoord (1910–2002)

If a person does not interpret the plain statements of prophecy literally, there is no rule by which any consensus of meaning can be established; the existence of a wide diversity of interpretations shows the failure of this approach. (*ET*, 10)

Dwight Pentecost (b. 1915)

"No question facing the student of eschatology is more important than the question of the method to be employed in the interpretation of prophetic Scriptures" (***TC***, 1).
"The observance of these sound rules of prophetic interpretation [literal, grammatical, historical, etc.] will lead one into a correct [i.e., futuristic] interpretation of the Scriptures" (ibid., 64).
The literal method involves giving each word "the same exact basic meaning it would have in normal, ordinary, customary usage, whether employed in writing, speaking or thinking" (ibid., 9).

> The interpretation of prophecy requires attention to the same considerations in regard to words, context, grammar, and historical situations that are the accepted principles in respect to any field of interpretation. (ibid., 64)

> It is impossible to mix the methods of interpretation in the field of prophecy. One method must be adopted and used throughout. It may be safely stated that the problem in the interpretation of prophecy is this problem of consistency. (ibid.)

Charles Ryrie (b. 1925)

> [Dispensational futurism] is built on a consistent use of the literal, normal, or plain method of interpretation without the addition of any other principle.... Classical dispensationalism is a result of consistent application of the basic hermeneutical principle of literal, normal, or plain interpretation. No other system of theology can claim this. (*DT*, 85)

CONCLUSION

The basic disagreement in biblical interpretation is between the literal and allegorical methods, and examination of the latter unveils foundational flaws. The allegorical method as such is an invalid hermeneutic because all true meaning is literal meaning;[96] also, any allegorical (nonliteral) means of

interpretation presupposes a literal meaning, since one cannot know what is not literal unless he knows what is literal. The allegorical hermeneutic, including its covenantal mutations, is self-defeating, without objective criteria, contrary to common sense, inconsistent, and unbiblical.

Within the camp of literal interpreters are some who claim to utilize a literal hermeneutic but do not do so consistently in all sections of the Bible, particularly prophecy. This inconsistency is due to a covert use of the allegorical approach in search of an alleged "deeper meaning" or by reading back spiritual meaning into literal Old Testament predictions. By contrast, the historical-grammatical method, an unwavering literal hermeneutic, brings much consensus among those who adhere; this will be made manifest in the following discussions.[97]

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

No study of the Last Things is complete without a treatment of the kingdom of God; in fact, God's kingdom (with its many dimensions) is so essential to our understanding of eschatology that we will discuss it first. From this beginning we'll be able to expand on elements including the nature of Israel, the nature of the church, the relationship between them, and the relationship between present and future kingdom aspects. This chapter is based on an exhaustive study of the more than three hundred biblical references to ***kingdom***, in addition to relevant passages that refer to God's kingdom by other names.

BIBLICAL USAGE AND HISTORICAL APPLICATION OF *KINGDOM*

Various Hebrew words for ***kingdom*** are used 146 times in the Old Testament. The vast majority refer to earthly political kingdoms; only a few are about God's kingdom, and these are later in the Old Testament: For example, Chronicles has one; Isaiah has two; Psalms has five; Daniel has the most Old Testament references to God's kingdom, with seven (Heb: ***malku***).

The Greek word for ***kingdom*** (***basileia***), used 161 times in the New Testament,

is employed three times of the devil's domain,[1] seven times of earthly kingdoms,[2] and three times in a general sense.[3] Of course, the rest are not ***all*** of the New Testament references to God's kingdom, only those that actually use the word ***kingdom***.

The root meaning of the term ***kingdom*** is a kingship, a royal reign (Arndt and Gingrich, ***GELNT***, 134); it involves the sovereign authority of a ruler, the activity of a ruler, as well as the realm and benefits of the ruler (Kittel, ***TDNT***, 1.579–80). In short, ***kingdom*** is a reign or dominion, whether of God, the devil, or human potentates. ***Kingdom***'s theological meaning includes several dimensions, including God's overall reign in the universe, His present spiritual reign in His people, and His future messianic reign on earth.

Alva McClain (1888–1968) offers three essential elements of a biblical definition of kingdom: "First, [there is] a ruler with adequate authority and power; second, a realm of subjects to be ruled; and third, the actual exercise of the function of rulership" (***GK***, 17). God's kingdom is also called the kingdom of heaven (cf. Matt. 3:2; 10:7), my Father's kingdom (Matt. 26:29), the kingdom of God's dear Son (cf. Col. 1:12), and the kingdom of our father David (Mark 11:10).

Of the numerous views on the kingdom, McClain lists eight (***GK***, 8–14):

(1) the national kingdom (of Israel), held by Philo (b. c. 25 b.c.);
(2) the millennial kingdom, held by the early Fathers;
(3) the celestial kingdom (heaven), held by the later church;
(4) the ecclesiastical kingdom (the church), held by Augustine (354–430);
(5) the spiritual kingdom (God rules in hearts), held by A. B. Bruce (1831–1899);
(6) the moral kingdom (the reign of moral law), held by Immanuel Kant (1724–1804);
(7) the liberal social kingdom (progressive social improvement), held by Walter Rauschenbush (1861–1918); and
(8) the eschatological kingdom (unfulfilled expectations of Jesus), held by Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965).[4]

GOD'S ETERNAL PLAN FOR HIS KINGDOM

Because God is eternal,[5] so are all of His plans. That God's rule of the universe is from the very beginning of its creation[6] is another way of speaking about His sovereignty.[7] His earthly reign, and particularly that of Messiah, is one planned from all eternity: "The King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, ***the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world***' " (Matt. 25:34, on the Eschaton).
God's kingdom means God's ***reign***, and the various times, spheres, and purposes of His overall reign have taken on different forms. We must distinguish these forms in order to have a proper understanding of this topic.

God's Universal Kingdom

In harmony with what McClain calls "the universal kingdom of God" (op. cit., 22), the Bible speaks of God's all-encompassing, invisible, everlasting reign over the entire universe. God is sovereign over all creation, including good and evil angels and good and evil human beings.[8] God reigns supreme: "Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations. The Lord is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made" (Ps. 145:13).

God's Messianic Kingdom

The messianic kingdom is a visible, earthly, political kingdom promised to Israel in which Christ, her Messiah, will reign from a throne in Jerusalem over the whole earth, with His apostles and other disciples serving Him. This rule will

bring both peace and justice for all people and will last "a thousand years."[9] McClain calls this "the mediatorial kingdom," God's reign through a divinely appointed representative (op. cit., 41), set up by God in Israel and culminating in the messianic reign.

God's Spiritual Kingdom (in the Broad Sense)

Beginning with Jesus' announcement of the mystery of the kingdom and the parables connected to it (see Matt. 13ff.), God established a spiritual reign that represents professing Christendom; the wheat (true believers) and the weeds therein will not be separated[10] until the end of this kingdom at Christ's second coming.[11] This rule is called "the kingdom of heaven" in Matthew and "the kingdom of God" in parallel passages (Mark 4, Luke 13, et al.).

Some have suggested that, in this case, ***heaven*** is a softened reference to ***God*** for Jews who reverenced His name and would not speak or write it.[12] Even if so, however, Matthew does occasionally use "kingdom of God";[13] furthermore, he uses the term ***God*** almost fifty times in his gospel.

Others hold that "kingdom of heaven" (found only in Matthew) should be used of this broader spiritual kingdom with both good and evil beings in it, and that "kingdom of God" refers only to the narrower sense of a kingdom containing only saved persons. This seems to be incorrect for the following reasons.

First, the Synoptic Gospels[14] use "kingdom of heaven" and "kingdom of God" interchangeably. In Matthew 3:2 John says, "Repent for the kingdom of ***heaven*** is near," and in Mark 1:15 he says, "The kingdom of ***God*** is near. Repent and believe." In Matthew 5:3 Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of ***heaven***," and in Luke 6:20 he says, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of ***God***." More likely, Matthew's unique "kingdom of heaven" was accounted for by a Jewish tendency to use euphemistic terms for God's revered name. ***Or***, with Matthew's strong emphasis

on the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, perhaps he wished to make the more direct messianic connection in the minds of his audience with the use of Daniel's phrase "God of heaven" (Dan. 2:44–45).

Second, the kingdom parables recorded by Mark and Luke (which use "kingdom of God") contain evidence of earthly evil therein, ***before*** the final harvest:

(1) In the parable of the sower (Mark 4; Luke 8), at least three of the soils involved people who did not continue to believe.[15]

(2) In the parable of the mustard seed (Mark 4; Luke 13), "the kingdom of God" represents the tree of Christendom that shelters many creatures (Mark 4:32).

(3) The parable of the leaven (Luke 13) depicts the growth of yeast, which is often a scriptural picture of evil.[16]

"Kingdom of heaven" cannot be distinguished from "kingdom of God" by claiming that one still includes evil and the other does not; in addition to interchangeability, both are used in parables that include evil under "the kingdom of God."[17]

Third, that Matthew's gospel also uses "kingdom of God" (e.g., 12:28; 19:24; 21:32, 43) suggests that he may regard them interchangeably, for he makes no distinction with "kingdom of heaven." Again, it seems likely that his use of the latter regards its messianic connection to Daniel, who said that "the God of heaven" will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed (Dan. 2:44).

God's Spiritual Kingdom (in the Narrow Sense)

The invisible spiritual reign of God is in the hearts of believers, beginning when the first person was saved and continuing throughout eternity. God's spiritual kingdom excludes all the unsaved, for one can enter only by believing and being

born again:[18]

"I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.... I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again' " (
John 3:3–7
).

If no one can enter "the kingdom of God" unless he is born again, then this kingdom must be distinguished from the above use of the same phrase,[19] which includes both the saved and the unsaved. Those who profess faith and yet do not possess true faith are still part of God's broader kingdom (cf. Matt. 7:21–22). Since the narrow sense of God's spiritual kingdom is ultimately the equivalent of heaven, which is treated elsewhere,[20] we will not discuss it further except to contrast it with the broad sense of God's kingdom.

"The Kingdom of God"		
	Broad Sense of the Term	Narrow Sense of the Term
Duration	From Christ's first coming to Christ's second coming	From the first saved person into eternity
Subjects	The saved and the unsaved	The saved only
Location	On earth	On earth and in heaven
Entrance	Profession of faith	Possession of faith

God's Spiritual Reign in the Church

Because "kingdom of God" is also used of the New Testament church, some conclude that the two are identical, but they do not have the same scope. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (for example) are in God's kingdom (cf. Luke 13:28), and the church did not exist in the Old Testament (Eph. 3:3–6)—it is a mystery only later revealed (Col. 1:26–27) that began at Pentecost (Acts 2), when believers were baptized into Christ's body (1:5; cf. 1 Cor. 12:13).[21] Peter used "the keys of the kingdom" (cf. Matt. 16:19)[22] to open the door of the gospel to the Jews (Acts 2; cf. 11:15) and to the Gentiles (10:1ff.); even people saved in New Testament times before Pentecost were in God's kingdom but not in the church. ***The kingdom of God is broader than the church***. All who are in the church are in the kingdom of God, but not all in the kingdom of God are in the church—again, such as Old Testament saints, John the Baptist, and other believers who died before the message of Pentecost came to them (cf. Acts 1:5, 19:1–7).

God's Overarching, Constant, Invisible, Universal Reign

Before we discuss the messianic kingdom and its future implications, we'll quickly look at God's universal kingdom. This divine reign is the foundation for all other spheres of His sovereign rule, including not only the physical and animate creation but also all angels and all human beings.[23] "Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O Lord, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all" (1 Chron. 29:11; cf. Prov. 21:1).

In one sense, ***everything*** is in God's kingdom, for since He reigns over the entire universe and nothing is out of His control, it is appropriate to speak of

everything as under His dominion.[24] We have already seen (above) that this is clearly taught in the Old Testament; it is also implied in several New Testament passages.[25] God's universal reign is

(1) from heaven, where He is exalted above all (1 Chron. 29:11);
(2) majestic (Ps. 145:5, 11–12);
(3) eternal (Ps. 145:13); and
(4) extended over all earthly kingdoms (Ps. 103:19).

In later Judaism the understanding of this last aspect was part of the outward messianic kingdom proclaimed by John, Jesus, and the apostles.

THE MESSIANIC KINGDOM

As noted above, one extremely important application of the biblical "kingdom of God" is to the visible, earthly, political reign of the promised Jewish Messiah. Even in God's all-encompassing, invisible, universal reign, there is one distinct aspect focused on human kingdoms: "The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and ***his kingdom rules over all***" (Ps. 103:19). Daniel further developed this into a revelation of the basis for Christ's teaching about a future political messianic kingdom on earth.[26] Only an unacceptable allegorical interpretation of these texts[27] can avoid this conclusion.

The Nature of and Biblical Basis for the Messianic Kingdom

The scriptural grounds for belief in a literal, political messianic kingdom span from one end of God's Word to the other.[28] Shortly we'll survey the main

supporting texts; for now, a brief description of its various dimensions. McClain lists six aspects of the messianic kingdom:

(1) the spiritual dimension;
(2) the political dimension;
(3) the ecclesiastical dimension;
(4) the economic (social) dimension;
(5) the physical dimension; and
(6) the moral dimension (***GK***, 66–85).

While some of these aspects will be stressed more than others in the following discussion, they are all part of the messianic kingdom, which will be an overarching religious, moral, political, and economic system.

Genesis 49:10

"The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his."
A descendent of Judah will come to rule.
Even before this, the promise of a Messiah was given to Adam and Eve after the Fall (in 3:15); however, little (if anything) can be deduced from this text about Messiah having a future earthly political reign—it reveals that He is to "crush the head" of the serpent and thereby bring spiritual deliverance for Adam's race. The same can be said for other passages narrowing down the messianic line by giving the blessing through Shem (9:26) and Abraham, who was promised to be a channel of blessing to all nations (12:3), and to have a land in which they would live (13:15, 18; 15:7, 18). While land ownership might imply some kind of ruler, nothing is said about this until Abraham's son Isaac had Jacob; Jacob had twelve sons, one of whom was named Judah.

Exodus 19:6

When God ratified the Mosaic covenant[29] with His people, He said, “You will be for me a ***kingdom of priests*** and a holy nation.” This records the establishment of a theocracy:[30] Israel accepted the role of being directly ruled by God. They were God’s kingdom on earth, and He was their King.

Deuteronomy 17:14–20

Long before Israel had an earthly king,[31] Moses was told that there would later be rulers connected with the unconditional land-promises God gave to Abraham:

> When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, “Let us set a king over us like all the nations around us,” be sure to appoint over you the king the Lord your God chooses.
>
> He must be from among your own brothers.... He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold. When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees.... Then he and his descendants will reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel. (cf. Gen. 35:11)

Even under Moses the kingdom did have a political dimension, though this would become more apparent in the later monarchy.[32] Furthermore, ***while rule was to be based on God’s law, it was a political rule nonetheless***. Indeed, Israel was promised:

> If only you fully obey the Lord your God and are careful to follow all these commands I am giving you today. For the Lord your God will bless you as he has promised, and you will lend to many nations but will borrow from none. *You will rule over many nations but none will rule over you*. (Deut. 15:5–6)

2 Samuel 7:11–12, 16–17

David desired to build a house for the Lord, but God declared that instead He would build the house of David, a dynasty from which Messiah would come and reign on David's throne.

> The Lord himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom.... *Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever*.

While the immediate context refers much of this prediction to Solomon, David's son (cf. v. 14), it is clear from the use of ***forever*** that further descendants were in mind as well, and other passages confirm that this passage is a prophecy that Messiah would come through the line of David and reign on David's throne.[33] When Jesus was heralded at His triumphal entry, the Jerusalem crowd shouted, "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!" and "Hosanna in the highest!" (Mark 11:10) and "Hosanna to the Son of David" (Matt. 21:9). They were expecting the start of the promised messianic kingdom.

Like the Abrahamic covenant,[34] this Davidic covenant, which was an extension of it, was irrevocable, "everlasting," based on "the sure mercies of David" (Isa. 55:1–3 nkjv). Israel ***would*** sin and need repentance, but God promised,

> I have found David my servant; with my sacred oil I have anointed him. My hand will sustain him; surely my arm will strengthen him.... My faithful love will be with him, and through my name his horn [strength] will be exalted....
>
> I will also appoint him my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth. *I will maintain my love to him forever, and my covenant with him will never fail. I will establish his line forever, his throne as long as the heavens endure*. If his sons forsake my law and do not follow my statutes, if they violate my decrees and fail to keep my commands, I will punish their sin with the rod, their iniquity with flogging; but *I will not take my love from him, nor will I ever betray my faithfulness*.
>
> I will not violate my covenant or alter what my lips have uttered. Once for all, I have sworn by my holiness—and I will not lie to David—that his line will continue forever and his throne endure before me like the sun; it will be established forever like the moon, the faithful witness in the sky. (
>
> Ps. 89:20–37
>
>)

God put His name on the line. The Davidic kingdom—a political, religious, moral, visible, earthly kingdom—would be restored and remain forever.

Isaiah 9:6

Isaiah wrote of the coming Messiah: “To us a child is born, to us a son is given, and ***the government will be on his shoulders***. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father [Father of eternity], Prince of Peace.” Christ’s deity ***and*** political reign are mentioned here. He is not only divine (“Mighty God”) and human (“to us a child is born”), but He will reign as the God-man, for “the government will be on his shoulders.”

Isaiah 11:11–12

In order to accomplish this literal political restoration of the Davidic kingdom, God will again bring His people to their land.

In that day *the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the remnant that is left of his people* from Assyria, from Lower Egypt, from Upper Egypt, from Cush, from Elam, from Babylonia, from Hamath and from the islands of the sea.

He will raise a banner for the nations and gather the exiles of Israel; he will assemble the scattered people of Judah from the four quarters of the earth.

Not only is this a literal prediction of a literal return to a literal land, it has been literally fulfilled in part since May 15, 1948, when Israel was declared a nation. Millions of Jews from all over the globe have already returned. If this has been literally fulfilled, why should there be any doubt about the restoration of the messianic political kingdom as well?

Isaiah 24:23

Even the center of Messiah’s reign is specified: “The moon will be abashed, the sun ashamed; for ***the Lord*** Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem,

and before its elders, gloriously."
Zechariah speaks of Messiah's return to the place He left:

On that day *his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives*, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south. (
Zech. 14:4
)

Again, when the literal sense makes good sense, seeking other sense results in nonsense. God's angels at Christ's ascension presented it literally:

"Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same *Jesus*, who has been taken from you into heaven, *will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven*" (
Acts 1:11
).

Since they saw Him go visibly, physically, and gloriously, He will return visibly, physically, and gloriously. If the King, joined to and inseparable from His kingdom, will return as such, why should we expect any less of His kingdom?

Isaiah 32:1

"***A king will reign in righteousness*** and rulers will rule with justice." The Old Testament repeatedly reminds us that the messianic kingdom will be ***monarchial***. Messiah will sit on David's throne (cf. 2 Sam. 7:12ff.), and "the government will be on his shoulders" (Isa. 9:6): "Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Zech. 9:9). "I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill" (Ps. 2:6); He is "King of kings and Lord of lords" (Rev. 19:16).

Jeremiah 31:31–33

"The time is coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the [Mosaic] covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the Lord. "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people."

This covenant, the new covenant, contains some significant implications concerning the messianic reign.

First, the new covenant is new in relation to the time-bound Mosaic covenant, which it replaced, but it gives no implication of annulling the unconditional, timeless Abrahamic and Davidic covenants.[35]

Second, the New Covenant is a continuation of God's promises that there would be a moral and spiritual restoration of national Israel, called "the house of Israel" (v. 31). As such, the New Covenant is an implied promise of the restoration of the whole messianic kingdom.

Third, God's promise is unconditional and irrevocable:

"Only if these decrees vanish from my sight," declares the Lord, "will the descendants of Israel ever cease to be a nation before me.... Only if the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth below be searched out will I reject all the descendants of Israel because of all they have done" (vv. 36–37).

Ezekiel 11:23

Tragically, the early kingdom, set up as a vehicle through which Messiah could reign, was destroyed by the Babylonians. Ezekiel records the final moment when God's glory, the visible symbol of His presence in the kingdom, departed: "The glory of the Lord went up from within the city and stopped above the mountain east of it." Even the secular Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (c. 37–100) recorded the regal absence (***JW***, 5.5.5).

Hosea 3:4

At this point political supremacy was transferred to the Gentiles. Hosea foretold: "The Israelites will live many days without king or prince," and from here onward it was a matter of prophesying a coming messianic kingdom.

Amos 9:11

God will rebuild in direct continuity with the Davidic kingdom that was defeated: "In that day ***I will restore David's fallen tent. I will*** repair its broken places, restore its ruins, and ***build it as it used to be***." There is no sense in which a merely spiritual restoration can meaningfully fulfill this prediction.

Micah 4:7–8

The restored kingdom will not be only spiritual and moral but also political:

> I will make the lame a remnant, those driven away a strong nation. The Lord will rule over them in Mount Zion [Jerusalem] from that day and forever. As for you, O watchtower of the flock, O stronghold of the Daughter of Zion, *the former dominion will be restored to you; kingship will come to the Daughter of Jerusalem*.

Daniel 2:44

After speaking of four great successive earthly kingdoms—Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome—and ten kings to come after them, Daniel declares that "In the time of those kings, ***the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that*** will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It ***will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever***."
What stands out here is that, given Jesus' teaching is rooted firmly in the Old Testament (cf. Matt. 5:17–18) and that John and Jesus used a phrase reminiscent of Daniel's,[36] it is difficult to believe there is not within these words an affirmation of an outward, literal, political kingdom. Also, in Matthew 19:28, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve

thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Again, the literal sense[37] of a visible, outward political kingdom seems clearly to be in view; this is the common (if not universal) biblical use of terms like ***tribes*** and ***Israel***.

Daniel 4

The whole point of Nebuchadnezzar's humiliating experience was for him to realize, as he would eventually confess: "***The Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men*** and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men" (v. 17).

At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. (v.

34

)

This is obviously said in the context of an earthly political kingdom.

Daniel 7

Between the second chapter of Daniel's references to a political kingdom of God and Daniel 7, which picks up and expands on the same theme, ***all*** the references to the word ***kingdom*** refer to a literal, earthly, political reign.[38]

Matthew 26:63–64

This text is of supreme importance because Christ used it of Himself before the Jewish High Priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." Jesus' forthright answer is absolutely astounding: "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: In the future ***you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One***

and coming on the clouds of heaven.” Given the messianic political context in Daniel, there seems to be no way to consistently utilize historical-grammatical interpretation of Scripture without concluding that this will be a literal messianic kingdom.

Daniel 9:24–27

Seventy “sevens” are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy. Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven “sevens,” and sixty-two “sevens.”

It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. After the sixty-two “sevens,” the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed.

He will confirm a covenant with many for one “seven.” In the middle of the “seven” he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.

Meditating on the “seventy years” of the Babylonian captivity (v. 2), Daniel was told that there would come seventy “sevens” (of years) relating to Messiah. More specifically, he was informed that after sixty-nine “sevens,” or 483 years, Messiah would die (v. 26), but only after He had made “reconciliation for iniquity” (v. 24 nkjv) and sealed up “vision and prophecy” about His coming (ibid.).

Then the time interval is specified: Daniel was told there would be sixty-nine “sevens” between “the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem” and the coming of “the Anointed One, the ruler” (v. 25). The first date is generally held to be 445/444 b.c.[39] Given that the 483 years (69 × 7) are probably Jewish lunar years of 360 days (30 days × 12 months), the extra five days for each 365-day Gregorian-calendar year yields a total of about six years (more than 2,400 days) that must be added to the 483. From the year of Cyrus’s decree, 444 b.c. (and the 6+ years for the extra calendar days, yielding roughly

450), minus the 483 years foretold by Daniel, we reach the date of Christ being crucified (the Anointed One being cut off), about a.d. 33.[40]

We may now summarize some of the salient points from the above texts about the messianic kingdom.

The Old Testament Foretold That a Literal Messiah Would Come to Reign

According to ***The Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy*** by J. Barton Payne (1922–1979), some one hundred thirteen prophecies of the coming Messiah were fulfilled by Jesus of Nazareth in the New Testament.[41] Many of these are connected to the claims that He will one day set up a messianic government in Jerusalem and reign over the whole earth.

Jesus Said He Is the Fulfillment of Daniel 7

As mentioned previously, Jesus cited this messianic passage at His trial before the Jewish high priest (Matt. 26:64).

Jesus' Favorite Term for Himself (Son of Man) Is Rooted in This Claim

It is Christ's claim to deity in His identity as the Messiah of Daniel 7 (cf. Matt. 26:63–64). Daniel even calls Him "the Ancient of Days" (7:22), which an earlier reference applied to God (vv. 9, 13). Jesus' insistence that it pointed to Him as "the Son of God" indicates that He knew it as a reference to deity, and the reaction of Caiaphas removed all doubt: "The high priest tore his clothes and said, '***He has spoken blasphemy***!' " (Matt. 26:65).

Daniel 2 Prophesies the Messiah's Destruction of World Powers

This literal, visible, political messianic rule will come only after the four kingdoms and the ten kings (v. 44 cf. 7:24) have all been crushed by a great Stone (Christ, v. 45).

This Future Divine Reign Will Never End[42]

He [the Messiah to come] was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. *His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed*.... The saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever—yes, *for ever and ever*. (

Dan. 7:14

,

18

; cf. v.

27

)

The Messiah's Kingdom Is Given to Him by the Father

In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man [the Messiah], coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days [God the Father] and was led into his presence. He [the son of man] was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. (vv.

Dan. 7:13–14

)

All Other Earthly Kingdoms Will Serve Under the Messianic Kingdom

The sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him. (v.

27

)

Messiah Will Bring Righteousness and Justice to the Earth

The messianic reign means that Jesus Christ will rule in righteousness and justice forever on David's throne.[43]

The Messiah Will Reign With the Saints

Christ will not rule alone; the "saints of the Most High" will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever … for ever and ever" (v. 18); "the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom" (v. 22).

The Issue of "Forever"

Before moving on to the New Testament's teaching on the coming messianic kingdom, one problem should be addressed. Throughout these texts (above), Messiah's kingdom is said to last "forever," whereas there are Old Testament hints that it will not be forever: "In that day the Lord will punish the powers in the heavens above and the kings on the earth below. They will be herded together like prisoners bound in a dungeon; they will be shut up in prison and be punished ***after many days***" (Isa. 24:21–22).
McClain (***GK***, 216) believes that the "many days" correspond to the Millennium;[44] whatever the case, the New Testament says that the messianic reign has an actual ending point:

> He [Messiah] must reign *until he has put all his enemies under his feet*. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.... When he has done this, *then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him*, so that God may be all in all. (1 Cor. 15:25–28)

John also declares that the messianic reign is temporary, affirming six times that it is a thousand years long (Rev. 20).[45]

In response, three brief comments are in order.

First, the Hebrew word (***olam***) often translated ***forever*** can (and sometimes does) mean "a long period of time" rather than "eternal"—the mountains, for example, are called "everlasting" (Micah 6:2). The context determines the meaning.

Second, even though Christ's reign is less than literally eternal, the results of it are everlasting. Further, it does continue forever in that it is subsumed under the Father's direct control. Accordingly, His reign—both directly and indirectly —***will*** be forever.

Third, it is not uncommon for future events to be initially lumped together,[46] and then for further revelation to show that they are separable. Isaiah 66 (see vv. 22–24) joins Messiah's reign (a thousand years, Rev. 20) to the eternal state of the New Heaven and New Earth (Rev. 21). The actual result of a literal thousand-year reign will be an unending kingdom.[47]

Many other Old Testament passages about the messianic reign could be cited: "The Lord of hosts will reign" (Isa. 24:23 nkjv); He "will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth" and who will have Judah saved and "Israel will dwell safely" in the land (Jer. 23:4–6 nkjv); He will judge all nations and establish permanent peace (Micah 4:1–7) with a universal dominion from Jerusalem (Zech. 9:9–10). As we'll discover, this picture of the coming Messiah, seen through the historical-grammatical (literal) hermeneutic, is the same one presented in the New Testament as being yet future in the time of John the Baptist, Jesus, Peter, Paul, and John.[48]

The Manner of the Arrival of the Messianic Kingdom

Before examining New Testament texts on the messianic kingdom, let's note the manner of its arrival, which, according to both Testaments, will not be gradual or natural but sudden and catastrophic.

Malachi 4:1–6

“Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire.… Then you will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things,” says the Lord Almighty.… “See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.”

Zephaniah 1:12–18

“At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps and punish those who are complacent, who are like wine left on its dregs, who think, ‘The Lord will do nothing, either good or bad.’ Their wealth will be plundered, their houses demolished.… The great day of the Lord is near—near and coming quickly.

“Listen! … That day will be a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness.… In the fire of his jealousy the whole world will be consumed, for he will make a sudden end of all who live in the earth.”

Joel 3:1–2

“In those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. There I will enter into judgment against them concerning my inheritance, my people Israel, for they scattered my people among the nations and divided up my land.”

Isaiah 63:1–4

Who is this coming … with his garments stained crimson? Who is this, robed in splendor, striding forward in the greatness of his strength? “It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save.” Why are your garments red, like those of one treading the winepress? “I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with me. I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing. For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and the year of my redemption has come.”

Zechariah 14:1–9

A day of the Lord is coming when your plunder will be divided among you. I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city.

Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle. On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two.…

Then the Lord my God will come, and all the holy ones with him. On that day there will be no light, no cold or frost. It will be a unique day, without daytime or nighttime —a day known to the Lord. When evening comes, there will be light.… The Lord will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name.

Nothing like this happened when Jesus came the first time; the promised messianic kingdom was not set up during the Advent. Jesus promised that at His second coming the kingdom would be inaugurated with amazing events.[49] Consider two later texts:

Matthew 24:3, 27–31

As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, *"when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"* …

[He answered,] "As lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather. Immediately after the distress of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other."

Matthew 26:63–64

At His trial the high priest said to him, “I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.”

“Yes, it is as you say,” Jesus replied. “But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.” Jesus clearly linked Himself with the coming kingdom’s Messiah (Dan. 2 , 7), the One who would come as the Great Rock hewn out of the mountains without hands (i.e., He is uncreated [50]) and crush this world’s kingdoms.

The Time of the Messianic Kingdom

Now that we have established the nature of and biblical basis for an outward, political earthly messianic reign, we can discuss the time of its fulfillment. Has it yet occurred? If not, when will it occur?

The Messianic Kingdom Was Not Fulfilled in the Old Testament

It is clear that no such political messianic kingdom was yet fulfilled by the Old Testament’s end.

First, the Old Testament states no such fulfillment and, on the contrary, is still expecting the Messiah right down to its finish (cf. Mal. 4:1–6).

Second, orthodox Judaism (which still awaits its Messiah, and which regards the Old Testament alone as Holy Scripture[51]) denies that the kingdom-predictions have been fulfilled.

Third, since the time of Messiah’s coming is dated by Daniel as being the first

part of the first century a.d.,[52] the fulfillment could not have occurred before then.

The Messianic Kingdom Was Still Anticipated in the New Testament

The New Testament contains this same Old Testament messianic anticipation of a literal, political earthly kingdom that fulfills all the prophecies about it. For instance, Joseph of Arimathea was waiting for the culmination of the kingdom (Mark 15:43; Luke 23:51), and Jesus said John the Baptist died before becoming a part of it (7:28; cf. 16:16).

The Messianic Kingdom Was Announced as "at Hand" ("Near") in Jesus' Early Ministry

From the very beginning of the Gospels there are verbal announcements of the messianic kingdom: The angels spoke it to Zechariah (1:11–17), to Mary (vv. 26–35), to Joseph (Matt. 1:20–25), and to the shepherds (Luke 2:8–15); it was anticipated by the Magi (Matt. 2:1–6) and celebrated by Elizabeth (Luke 1:39–45) and Mary (vv. 46–55) and Zechariah (vv. 67–79; see McClain, ***GK***, 268). It was announced by John the Baptist, the King's herald (Matt. 3:1–2; 12:28), by our Lord himself (4:17), by His twelve apostles (cf. 10:5–7), and later by the seventy (cf. Luke 10:1–12).

The Announced Kingdom Was Identical to the One Promised in the Old Testament

McClain demonstrates that the kingdom John and Jesus announced was the same as that which God had earlier promised (***GK***, chapter 21).

First, the absence of any formal definition in its announcement assumes that the Jewish hearers (readers of the Old Testament) were expected to know what it meant.[53]

Second, Jesus never intimated that His kingdom was any different than what the Old Testament presented; by contrast, He insisted that there was complete

continuity in His teaching (Matt. 5:17–18).
Third, the terms ***Son of Man*** and ***kingdom of heaven***, used by Jesus regarding the kingdom, are rooted in the Old Testament messianic predictions.
Fourth, Jesus constantly appealed to the Old Testament to support His claims to the messianic kingdom.[54]
Fifth, the gospel record persistently connects the kingdom proclaimed by Jesus with that of Old Testament prophecy.[55]
Sixth, messianic events predicted by the prophets have ***literal identity*** with the life of Christ.[56] Again, with all of these literally fulfilled, why should anything else be expected for the rest of the messianic oracles concerning a literal, political earthly kingdom?[57]
Seventh, and finally, all the basic elements of the Old Testament prophetic kingdom are found in Christ's message and miracles:

(1) the ***spiritual*** element of repentance in His teaching (Matt. 3:2);
(2) the ***moral*** element in His Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7);
(3) the ***social*** element in His concern for children, widows, and the poor (Mark 12:40–44; Luke 10:29–37);
(4) the ***ecclesiastical*** element in His faithful adherence to true Jewish religion (Matt. 5:17–18; 8:34), including feasts (Luke 22:7–16) and regular synagogue attendance (4:16);
(5) the ***political*** element in that He would "reign over the house of Jacob forever" (1:31–33) and from a throne in Jerusalem with His apostles on twelve thrones (Matt. 19:28);
(6) the ***physical*** element in all the miracles in His life being in the physical world, as with His healings of others.[58]

Christ's Miracles Confirmed the Proclamation That His Messianic Kingdom Was "at Hand"

Jesus' ministry as the messianic King was also supported by His many

miracles,[59] as the Jewish ruler Nicodemus recognized: “Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him” (John 3:2). Peter later reminded the Jews: “Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know” (Acts 2:22).

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them.... Many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. ... [He] went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.... Many followed him, and he healed all their sick. (
Matt. 4:23–24
;
8:16
;
9:35
;
12:15
; cf.
15:30
)

Not only did Jesus perform miracles to confirm His messianic credentials, but He also gave His apostles the ability to do the same:

This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will. (
Heb. 2:3–4
; cf.
Matt. 10:1
)

This Messianic Kingdom Was Not Established During Jesus’ Day

John the Baptist preached the messianic kingdom as a future but impending

event: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is ***near***” (Matt. 3:2; 4:17). Then he died, having not seen the kingdom (11:1–5; 14:1–12). That the kingdom is still future is further shown in Jesus’ model prayer: “Our Father … your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven (6:9–10; Luke 11:2). This is plainly about a kingdom that had not yet come and that was not only spiritual but would be accomplished “on earth.”

Jesus also said, “Many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 8:11). Considering His teaching that this could not happen without a physical resurrection,[60] which didn’t happen in His day, there must be a literal fulfillment of this ***after*** His first coming.[61] Indeed, He spoke of it as future at the Last Supper: “I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father’s kingdom.”[62] At no time up to the Ascension[63] did He or His disciples literally do this; hence, one must either give up a consistent literal interpretation of Scripture or accept that this is yet future.[64]

Several textual factors support future fulfillment.

First, “the renewal of all things” (Matt. 19:28) indicates it will be in the end times, not during Jesus’ years on earth.

Second, never is the word ***tribes*** (ibid.) as applied to Israel used to mean anything but literal tribes of people.

Third, sitting on a throne and judging Israel (which Jesus elsewhere said He would do—see John 12:48–49) is a prophetic (messianic) fulfillment.

Fourth, again, the prophecies in Daniel, with a literal political context, spoke of the time when “the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it ***forever***” (7:18; cf. v. 22).

Late in His earthly life, Jesus taught a parable (geared to correct a false belief) showing that the promised messianic kingdom would not appear during His ministry. “While they were listening to this, he went on to tell them a parable [of the minas (three months’ wages)], because he was near Jerusalem and ***the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once***” (Luke 19:11). Sentences like “a certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return” (v. 12 nkjv) and the “enemies of mine, who did not

want me to reign over them" (v. 27 nkjv) show the parable's messianic nature, as John Walvoord (1910–2002) and Roy Zuck's (b. 1932) ***Bible Knowledge Commentary*** well summarizes:

> Jesus was going away to receive a kingship. When He returned, He would establish His kingdom. Until that time His followers were to fulfill their responsibilities He gave them. On His return He would reward the faithful [servants] commensurate with their service to Him, and His enemies would be judged before Him. (2.253)

The messianic kingship will arrive at the Second Coming.[65]

The Delay of the Messianic Kingdom

It is evident from the foregoing discussion that the visible, political messianic kingdom promised in the Old Testament and announced in the Gospels was not realized during the life of Jesus but was proclaimed by Jesus and the apostles as future. What happened?

The New Testament account of why the messianic kingdom-promises are yet unfulfilled is presented with freshness and clarity: "He [Jesus] was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him" (John 1:10–11). After His rejection by the Jews, just before His crucifixion, Jesus declared: "Therefore I tell you that ***the kingdom of God will be taken away from you*** and given to a people who will produce its fruit" (Matt. 21:43). He said that His followers "will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles ***until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled***" (Luke 21:24). Israel rejected her Messiah, and the kingdom was taken from Israel ***temporarily***.[66]

Tracing the Rejections in the Gospels

The outline of Matthew's gospel serves as a background for understanding Israel's rejection of the messianic kingdom.[67]

I. The Person of the King (1–3a)
A. His Ancestry—to Abraham and David (1a)
B. His Advent—by the Virgin Mary (1b-2)
C. His Ambassador—John the Baptist (3a)

II. The Preparation of the King (3b-4)
A. His Baptism (3b)
B. His Temptation (4a)
C. His Proclamation (4b)

III. The Principles of the King (5–9)
A. His Manifesto (5–7)
B. His Miracles (8–9)

IV. The Presentation of the King (10–16a)
A. His Proclamation (10)
B. His Rejection (11–12)
1. Doubts of John the Baptist (11a)
2. Condemnation for Unbelief (11b)
3. Rejection by the Religious Establishment (12)

V. The Parables and Miracles of the King (13–16a)
A The Mysteries of the Kingdom (13)
B. The Miracles of the Kingdom (14–16a)

VI. The Passion of the King (16b-27)
A. Revelation of (16b-17a)
B. Instruction of (17b-20a)
C. Rejection of (20b-23)
D. Vision of (24–25)
E. Crucifixion of (26–27)

VII. The Power of the King (28)
A. Resurrection (28a)
B. Requirements (28b)

After citing Christ's ancestry back to Abraham, who received an unconditional land-promise, and David, who received an unconditional promise of the coming Messiah-King,[68] Matthew speaks of His virgin birth as prophesied by Isaiah (Isa. 7:14), who revealed that His name would be ***Immanuel*** ("God with us") and who would be the "mighty God" and would reign "upon the throne of David" with "no end" (9:6–7 nkjv). Matthew then turns to John the Baptist, who himself had been foretold (Mal. 3:1). When the King was introduced and anointed (Matt. 3), His message was immediately proclaimed: The long-awaited messianic kingdom promised to David has arrived in the person of Jesus. It was "at hand" ("near"); all Israel needed to do was repent of their sins and accept their Messiah-King (v. 2).

Instead, they rejected Him, and Jesus pronounced coming judgment: "Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent" (11:20). An apex of unbelief was reached when He healed a demon-possessed blind and deaf man, for "when the Pharisees heard this, they said, 'It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons.' To which Jesus replied, 'I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven' " (12:24, 31).

Subsequently, in parables, Jesus announced the "mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" (13:11 nkjv) that will dominate the interregnum between His rejection and His return.[69] This mystery form of the kingdom would intervene until the Second Coming, when Jesus will set up the long-promised messianic form, and the central feature of this time period is the church, a mystery unknown in the Old Testament but now revealed to the apostles.[70] In the wake of Israel's rejection, Christ announced, "I will build my church" (16:18), and began to announce His ultimate rejection—His death at the hands of the Jewish nation (17:9, 22–23), using a messianic passage: "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?" (21:42, from Ps. 118:26).

Through the Messiah's rejection, God would temporarily set aside His dealings with national Israel and attempt to provoke her to jealousy by centering on the Gentiles' salvation. Israel would not be restored as a nation until the "fullness of the Gentiles" (Rom. 11:25 nkjv) was complete, for, said Paul, "I do not want you

to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in" (ibid. niv).

The Parables of the Kingdom

Jesus explained the situation to His disciples: "The knowledge of the secrets [mysteries] of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them [outsiders]" (Matt. 13:11). Here Jesus cited Isaiah 6:9–10, a text used five times in the New Testament, always in connection with Israel's rejection of her King.[71] The judicial blindness that resulted from Israel's unbelief was a judgment from God.[72]
This kingdom mystery is unfolded in these parables:

(1) the sower
(2) the wheat and the tares
(3) the mustard seed
(4) the yeast
(5) the hidden treasure
(6) the pearl
(7) the net.

Their respective meanings can be understood this way:

(1) The gospel will be rejected by most people.[73]

(2) Both disingenuous professors of faith and genuine possessors of faith[74] will coexist to the end.
(3) Christendom would grow rapidly from a tiny beginning.
(4) Persons with false faith will grow in number.

(5) Christ came to purchase His treasured possession (Israel).
(6) Christ gave His life to provide redemption for the church.
(7) Angels will separate the saved from the lost when Jesus returns (see Walvoord and Zuck, ***BKC***, 2.52).

The Parable of the Talents (Pounds)

The parable of the talents (Luke 19:11–27) is of special interest to the concept of the kingdom as it unfolds between Christ's two comings (see McClain, ***GK***, 342–43).
First, the nobleman (Christ) goes into a far country (heaven) for two purposes: to receive a kingdom and to return (v. 12).
Second, there are two classes of people: servants and citizens.
Third, each servant (Gentile) accepts an equal amount of money and the duty to invest it until Christ returns (v. 13).
Fourth, the citizens (Jews) hate him and repudiate his claims to rule over them (v. 14).
Fifth, having received the kingdom that is His, the nobleman (Christ) will return to earth to reward His servants according to their service in His absence (vv. 15–27).
Sixth, at his return He will execute judgment on the citizens who rejected Him (v. 27).
Seventh, the interim between His two comings is not given (though it is called a "long time" in a similar parable—see Matt. 25:19).

The Gospel of the Kingdom

From the standpoint of individual salvation, there is one gospel (Gal. 1:8; cf. 3:8), based on God's grace (Eph. 2:8–9), made possible only by the death and resurrection of Christ (1 Cor. 15:1–6).[75] Nevertheless, the ***revealed content*** of the gospel varied from age to age in the progress of revelation;[76] accordingly,

there is marked development from ***the gospel of the kingdom*** first preached to the Jews (before they rejected Jesus) to ***the gospel of Christ***:

	Gospel of the kingdom	**Gospel of Christ**
Kingdom	Kingdom is at hand	Kingdom is not at hand
Death/Resurrection	Not part of it	Essential to it (cf. Rom. 10:9)
Audience	Jews only (cf. Matt. 10:6)	Jews and Gentiles (cf. Rom. 1:16)

Emerging from the foregoing discussion are several features of God's present spiritual reign.[77]

First, it includes both believers and unbelievers, wheat and tares.

Second, it is not a visible kingdom, but an invisible reign of God over both good and evil beings, angelic and human.

Third, it is temporary—lasting only to the Second Coming.[78] At this point it reaches the ***Eschaton*** (end), which is the separation of good from evil and the eternal punishment of evil along with the eternal reward of good.[79]

In addition to the seven parables listed and interpreted together above,[80] there are at least five others in the Gospels regarding this matter:

(1) the parable of the king who wanted to settle his accounts (the unmerciful servant—Matt. 18:23–35), which teaches the grounds for forgiveness;
(2) the parable of the king who prepares a wedding banquet (22:2–14), which teaches that many will not enter the kingdom;
(3) the parable of the landowner who hired laborers (20:1ff.), which shows that rewards in the kingdom are under God's control;
(4) the parable of the ten virgins (25:1–13), which teaches that the faithful will be watching for His return;[81] and
(5) the parable of the seed (Mark 4:26), which demonstrates the kingdom's

mysterious growth by the operation of God (cf. 1 Cor. 3:6).

Explaining the Messiah's Rejection in the Epistles

Chapters 9–11 of Paul's letter to the Romans form a unit wherein he deals with the question "Has God cast away His people?" (11:1 nkjv); Romans 9 deals with Israel's past, Romans 10 with Israel's present, and Romans 11 with Israel's future, including a description of the process of rejection, retribution, and restoration.

Regarding use of the word ***Israel*** in this passage, Paul begins (9:1) with a clear statement about what ***Israel*** means, namely, his "countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises" (vv. 2–4 nkjv). Inarguably, this is national Israel; Paul longs for his people to receive salvation (10:1), later citing their prophet Isaiah and claiming to be one of them (11:1). ***Israel***, throughout this passage, continually and consistently delineates a group of people known as literal, physical, national Israel. There is no hint of any alleged spiritual Israel that has replaced national Israel in God's plan. The chapter unfolds as follows.

The Scope of Israel's Rejection

Did God reject his people? By no means! I [Paul] am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew.… [Just as in Old Testament times God always preserved a remnant,] so too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace. (11:1–6)

The Reason for Israel's Rejection

What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did. The

others were hardened, as it is written: “God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they could not hear, to this very day.” And David says: “May their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them. May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever” (vv.

7–10

).

In an earlier text Paul describes why they were blinded:

I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. (

10:2–4

)

The Result of Israel’s Rejection: Salvation to the Gentiles

Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, *because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles* to make Israel envious. But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring.... For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? ... If some of the branches have been broken off, and you [Gentile believers], though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not boast over those branches.... You will say then, “Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in” (

11:11–19

).

The Final Restoration of National Israel

If you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!

I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: *Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in*. And so all Israel will be saved,

[82]
as it is written: “The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.” … As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable. Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God’s mercy to you. For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all. (
11:24–32
)

What conclusions can be drawn? Israel as a nation (though not all individuals in it) rejected her Messiah and, thus, her promised messianic kingdom. However, God, in His mysterious and eternal wisdom, preplanned Israel’s fall for the Gentiles’ salvation; His grace to Israel is irrevocable. When God’s complete plan of salvation is accomplished, He will restore (re-ingraft) national Israel and fulfill His unconditional promises, including the messianic kingdom, which was delayed (but never annulled) by their rejection. When Messiah returns and is accepted by national Israel, then “all Israel will be saved” (v. 26); this will be at the end of the tribulation before the beginning of the millennium.[83]
A good deal of unnecessary ink has been spilt over the question of whether the messianic kingdom was postponed or whether the apparent change of timing was preplanned; ***both can be true***. It was not postponed from God’s standpoint—He knew and planned from all eternity when it would occur.[84] As for the death of the Messiah-King, Peter declared: “This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross” (Acts 2:23). Likewise, the church age that intervened was not a divine afterthought; it was a “mystery” (Rom. 11:25), known and planned by God from all eternity (Eph. 1:4), unknown to humans until the coming of the apostles and New Testament prophets (2:20; cf. 3:3–6). Is the church extraneous to God’s plan? It ***is*** parenthetical from the standpoint of Israel’s national history, since God’s time-clock for Israel stopped at Messiah’s rejection; hence, there is a break between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks of Daniel[85] in which the church fits. However, from the standpoint of God’s plan, there is ***not*** a break; as we have seen, God’s purpose was to provoke the Jews

and provide salvation for the Gentiles (Rom. 11:13–15). No wonder Paul concludes this section as he does: “Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!” (v. 33).

The Messianic Kingdom Was Not Yet Fulfilled in the Early Church

Another fact seems clear: This same literal, political messianic kingdom that the Jews rejected in the Gospels was not fulfilled at any time up to and through the end of Acts. The very last question Jesus answered before ascending was about this yet unfulfilled promise from the Old Testament and the Gospels.

Acts 1:6–11

Considering the Messiah Himself had just spent forty days speaking of things pertaining to “the kingdom of God” (v. 3), the disciples were not speaking out of ignorance when they asked Him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” (v. 6). Notice the implications of their question:

(1) The future “restoration” implies that such a kingdom once existed.
(2) The “restoration” implies that it did not now exist (cf. Luke 21:31).
(3) When the kingdom is restored, Israel will possess it in the sense expected in the Old Testament.
(4) “Israel” here is historic and national, not spiritual or symbolic; the text is surrounded by other references to “Israel.”[86]
(5) The “restoration” implies that the one point on which the disciples lacked information was the ***time*** of the coming kingdom (not its nature).
(6) If there were no literal national future for Israel, then Jesus missed His last chance to correct them and say something like “Do you still not understand?” (Matt. 16:9). By contrast, He gave not one word of rebuke and affirmed a future messianic kingdom of which only God knew the timing:

It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority [for the restoration of the kingdom to Israel]. But you will receive power [that is, in the interim you will be empowered to perform a different task —helping to build my church] when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:7–8)

Notice these important elements from the text.[87]

First, Jesus' answer neither contains nor implies rebuke of any alleged misconceptions about the coming kingdom.

Second, since their question deals only with the timing, His answer is only to this point ("It is not for you to know"). He had already once given a similar response (Mark 13:34–37).

Third, during the interregnum, they would be evangelizing the world.

Fourth, this post-resurrection period ended with His visible ascension into heaven and the promise of His visible return (Acts 1:9–11). Both of these bolstered Jesus' messianic claims and bring additional assurance about the restoration of His messianic kingdom.

Fifth, in the final promise of the Second Coming, "the angelic messengers seem almost to exhaust the resources of human language in declaring the reality and visibility of that grand event" (McClain, ***GK***, 396):

After he said this, *he was taken up before their very eyes*, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? *This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven*" (vv. 9–11).

The Ascension was bodily, visible, glorious. So will be His return.

Acts 3:19–26

Here Peter offers the messianic kingdom to Israel upon their repentance:

> Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.... Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days. And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers.

A consistent, straightforward reading of this passage, along with all that has been shown above, yields several crucial facts.
First, the messianic kingdom of Israel had not yet been fulfilled.
Second, God would restore the kingdom to Israel at a yet future time.
Third, this will not occur until after Jesus returns.[88]
Fourth, there is not the slightest hint that any spiritual kingdom had replaced these prophecies.[89]
Fifth, the Old Testament promises were not just for Israel but also for their literal descendants, whom Peter calls "heirs" of the promises.[90]
Sixth, and finally, these covenants made by God include an unconditional promise for Israel to inherit forever the Holy Land, from Egypt to the Euphrates (Gen. 15:18).[91]

Romans 11:26

"All Israel will be saved, as it is written: 'The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.' "As do so many others, this text reveals beyond question a literal national future for Israel, refuting so-called "realized" eschatologies alleging that Israel's kingdom-promises have already been fulfilled; plainly, they are still expectations of a future fulfillment.[92]

1 Corinthians 15:23–28

> Each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, *when he comes*, those who belong to

him. *Then the end will come*, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For *he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death*. For "he [the Father] has put everything under his [the Son's] feet." … "Everything" has been put under him … does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. *When he [the Son] has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him [the Father]* who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

Paul clarifies that the literal kingdom is yet future, beginning only after Christ returns, and that during His reign, effectively but not literally eternal,[93] there will still be death; death will ***finally*** be defeated[94] by resurrection.[95] Revelation 20:1–6 places the two resurrections[96] as bookends of Christ's reign: the first (of the saved) at the beginning, and the second (of the lost) at the end of the Millennium.[97] This contrasts Christ's temporal reign with God's eternal reign; the Millennium (Rev. 20) and the new heaven and new earth (Rev. 21–22).

	The Millennium	**The New Heaven and New Earth**
Time frame	At end of Christ's reign	No end
Death	Death occurs	No death occurs
Evil	Present	Not present
Location	On earth	In heaven and on earth
Final Judgement	Not yet occurred	Completed
Constituents	Saved and unsaved	Saved only
Satan	Not yet finally judged	Finally judged

The details of these differences will be spelled out later;[98] for now, note that the millennial and eternal states are not the same.

2 Timothy 4:1

In Paul's last epistle the hope of the messianic kingdom is still being soberly anticipated: "In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge." Not only is the kingdom still coming (not present), it will also visibly ***appear***. The Greek word for ***appearing*** is from ***epiphaneia***, which in the Jewish literature of the time "means a visible manifestation of a hidden divinity, within the form of a personal appearance, or by some deed of power by which its presence is made known" (Arndt and Gingrich, ***GELNT***, 304). In the New Testament this term is used only of Christ—of the Advent (2 Tim. 1:10), when He came with grace, and of the Return, when He will come in judgment (1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 4:1). The invisible King at last will be manifest in a visible kingdom.

Revelation 11:15

"The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: "***The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever***."

Given this is the last trumpet at the end of the tribulation,[99] its statement that Christ's kingdom will have come pinpoints the beginning of His return to earth and setting up of the long-awaited messianic kingdom. Regarding the judgment in this passage, ***judgment*** on literal earthly kingdoms has throughout Scripture been literal judgment, and the same word ***kingdom*** is used of Christ's kingdom; accordingly, it is unacceptable (and contrary to the historical-grammatical hermeneutic[100]) to take this as the establishing of some spiritual kingdom. The spiritual kingdom is what He established while He was on earth the ***first*** time; at ***this*** juncture (His return) there is a major and radical transformation from a purely invisible kingdom to a visible one, from the early mystery form of the

kingdom to the messianic form, from the spiritual to the political dimension of Christ's reign (cf. 1 Cor. 15:24–27).

Two unassailable truths follow from the preceding discussion.

For one thing, the Old Testament foretells a literal, political messianic rule over all the earth.

For another, no such reign that fulfilled these predictions was realized in Old Testament ***or*** New Testament times. As we've noted, the latter part of the Old Testament is still anticipating its fulfillment (cf. Amos 9:14–15; Mal. 4:1ff.), as is the entire New Testament. Since God's promises cannot go unfulfilled, there will yet be a literal fulfillment.

In short, with regard to the messianic kingdom of Israel,

[101]

(1) The Old Testament predicted it.
(2) Jesus confirmed it (Luke 21:24; Acts 1:6–7).
(3) Peter promised it (3:19–21).
(4) Paul reaffirmed it (Rom. 11:11–36).
(5) God never revoked it (v. 29; cf. v. 26).

New Testament Teaching on the Spiritual Reign of God

As we have seen, once the literal, political messianic kingdom was rejected (see Matt. 12ff.), an interim spiritual kingdom form was established. God's plan on earth shifted focus from establishing the Jewish kingdom to saving the Gentiles, through whom He desired to provoke the Jews into accepting their King and His kingdom for them (cf. Rom. 11).

God's Spiritual Kingdom Is Present Later in the Gospels

This spiritual or mystery form of the kingdom is distinguished from the messianic form in several important ways:

	Mystery Form of the Kingdom	**Messianic Form of the Kingdom**

Begins	Matthew 13	Revelation 19
Visibilty	Invisible	Visible
Form	Inner	Outer
Nature	Spiritual	Political
Subjects	Saved and unsaved are in it	Only saved enter
Time	Present age	Age to come
End	At the Second Coming	At the end of the Millennium

Matthew 13: The Kingdom Parables

There is a literal mystery involved in the transition from Christ's offer of the messianic kingdom (to Israel) and the spiritual form that followed. The kingdom parables seem to be a crucial turning point; as already noted,[102] before Matthew 13 the Jewish King had been officially present to the Jewish nation. After they rejected Him (Matt. 3–12), Jesus told parables in which a kingdom was established that would grow rapidly and contain both good and evil; in the end, the saved would be separated from the lost, each sent to their final destiny.[103]

John 18:36: "Not of This World"

Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But ***now my kingdom is from another place***." It is difficult to square this with earlier statements by John the Baptist and Jesus that the hoped-for messianic kingdom was "at hand" (i.e., "near"—Matt. 3:2; 4:17)[104] unless one recognizes that when Jesus' offer was rejected, an interregnum period was enacted (to accomplish God's eternal purpose to save

the Gentiles) between the Advent and the Second Coming, when all prophecies of the messianic kingdom will be fulfilled (25:31–45).[105]

Again, Christ's kingdom parables introduced the previously unknown plan (mystery) of God by which plans for the messianic kingdom (Israel's final restoration) would be put on hold in favor of the mystery form (cf. 21:43). Since the chosen nation would completely reject and then crucify her Messiah, the freight train of Israel would be ***temporarily*** sidetracked (Rom. 11:15) in order to allow the express train of the church to come through on the main tracks (v. 25). Only then, provoked by Gentile salvation (v. 11), will Israel finally (at the Second Coming) embrace her Messiah, when Christ returns to judge the nations and separate good from evil.[106]

Luke 17:20–21: "The Kingdom of God Is Within You"

Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "*The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation*, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because *the kingdom of God is within you*."

Jesus said this about God's spiritual kingdom (reign); that is, "the King is in your midst." Hence, the kingdom was present when the King cast out demons (e.g., Matt. 12:28), and it was also present (prefiguratively) when He said, "I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom" (16:28; cf. Mark 9:1; Luke 9:27). Peter testified of this event,

We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (2 Peter 1:16–17).

God's Spiritual Reign in the Church

While God's spiritual reign has continued into the church age, this reign is not identical to the church. God's spiritual kingdom began while Jesus was on earth,[107] and the church did not start until the Day of Pentecost.[108] Coexistence does not prove identity; the church is a mystery not revealed until New Testament times, a unique entity in which Jew and Gentile are coheirs with Christ (Eph. 3:3–5; Col. 1:26–27). So while the church is part of God's broader spiritual community, it is a narrower group made up of ***all believers since Pentecost who have been baptized by the Spirit into Christ's body***.[109] The church's relation to God's kingdom in the narrower and broader senses was charted above[110] and is diagrammed on page 495.

While Christ is not King of the church in the Davidic (or messianic) sense of the political ruler situated in Jerusalem—since the messianic kingdom has not yet begun[111]—nonetheless, He is the sovereign Head of the church and reigns over it spiritually. While we agree with McClain that several New Testament references to the kingdom can be taken in a future sense as ***either*** referring to heaven ***or*** the messianic reign,[112] his attempt to explain all of them in other than a present spiritual kingdom seems implausible and stretched. Consider the following support for speaking of God's spiritual reign as present in the church.

Romans 14:17

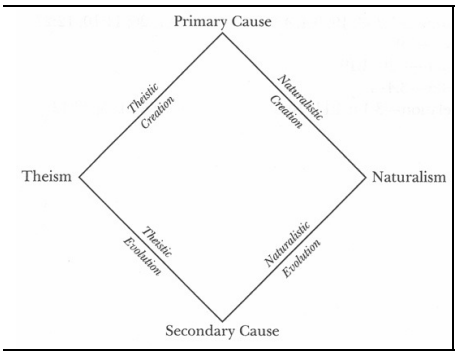
Paul wrote to the church at Rome: "The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." It seems evident that he was addressing their condition at the time, namely, of not offending a weaker brother by eating meat offered to idols.

1 Corinthians 4:20

Paul informed the Corinthians that “the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.” The context indicates that he is responding to their arrogant use of words (v. 19); his reply is not eschatological, but practical and to the point of their situation regarding God’s spiritual reign in the church.

Colossians 4:11

The “Jews among ***my fellow workers for the kingdom of God*** … have proved a comfort to me.” Admittedly, this could have a future sense because of the word ***for***, which might refer to rewards we will receive in the coming kingdom. It also may have a present sense, that of working for spiritual realities rather than material ones (cf. 2 Cor. 4:18).



1 Thessalonians 2:12

Paul reminds the Thessalonians of his ministry that is “encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, ***who calls you into his kingdom and glory***.” Since by virtue of being saved they were already in His kingdom (cf. John. 3:3, 5), it makes sense to take this as speaking of God’s present spiritual kingdom.

2 Thessalonians 1:5

“God’s judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the

kingdom of God, for which you are suffering." The Thessalonians were suffering for Christ in the present, for the church (cf. 2 Cor. 11:28); there is no need to interpret this as referring to some future state (cf. 2 Tim. 3:12).

1 Timothy 1:17

"Now to ***the King eternal***, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen." While Christ is never called King of the church in so many words, nevertheless He does reign over it as "head of all things to the church" (Eph. 1:22 nkjv). Since the interregnum between His comings is a spiritual kingdom (cf. Matt. 13), there is no reason to deny His spiritual kingship in the present.

1 Timothy 6:15

"God will bring about [Christ's return] in his own time—God, the blessed and only Ruler, the ***King of kings*** and Lord of lords." Again, the word ***King*** implies that He has a spiritual kingdom now.

The New Testament uses the word ***kingdom*** several times of the church. The apostles preached about the "kingdom of God";[113] Philip evangelized for the kingdom (Acts 8:12); Paul speaks of God having "rescued us from the dominion of darkness and [bringing] us into the kingdom of the Son he loves";[114] Christians are a kingdom of priests.[115] ***Members of the true church are part of this present kingdom***.

Hebrews 12:28

"Therefore, since ***we are receiving a kingdom*** that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe." Given the context—"You have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God … to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn" (vv. 22–23)—it seems natural to take it in the present

spiritual sense of the kingdom.
As noted, the word ***kingdom*** is not limited to God's spiritual reign in earthly believers; it is also used of heaven, or the place of bliss into which believers pass when they leave this life.[116] Jesus said to the thief who wanted to be part of His kingdom, "Today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43), which Paul says refers to the "third heaven" (the very presence of God, 2 Cor. 12:2).[117] Paul also mentions God's call of us "into his kingdom and glory" (1 Thess. 2:12) and notes that we are counted worthy to suffer for the kingdom (2 Thess. 1:5), as the apostle John was (Rev. 1:9): "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22).

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD

The history of the church contains abundant support for God's kingdom in its various aspects. The overall kingdom of God, viz., His sovereign reign over the universe, is treated elsewhere;[118] God's spiritual reign in the church was discussed earlier;[119] and we will later learn more about the messianic kingdom.[120]

CONCLUSION

The biblical concept of ***kingdom*** has at least five different senses.
First, there is ***God's universal kingdom***, His overall, invisible, and everlasting reign over the entire universe.
Second, there is ***Christ's messianic kingdom***, a visible, earthly, political kingdom promised to Israel in which Messiah reigns over the whole earth from a throne in Jerusalem.
Third, there is ***God's spiritual kingdom (in the broad sense)***, including both good and evil, announced by Jesus in Matthew 13 and sometimes called the

mystery form of the kingdom.
Fourth, there is ***God's spiritual kingdom (in the narrow sense)***, God's invisible reign only in the hearts of believers; this began when the first person was saved (John 3:3, 5) and will continue throughout eternity.
Fifth, there is ***God's spiritual reign in the church***; Peter used "the keys of the kingdom" (cf. Matt. 16:19) to open the door of the church to the Jews (Acts 2; cf. 11:15) and to the Gentiles (Acts 10).
With regard to the messianic kingdom, several comments are in order. From Genesis to Revelation there are promises of a literal, political kingdom in which the Ruler (King), who is Christ, will reign on earth. This kingdom (1) was promised in the Old Testament, (2) was offered by John the Baptist, Jesus, and His disciples to the Jews in the Gospels, (3) was rejected by the Jewish authorities, (4) was, in accord with God's eternal plan, put on hold while He brought Gentiles into a new body (the church), (5) will be offered again by Jesus at His return, and (6) will be accepted by the Jewish nation and fulfilled in the Millennium (Rev. 20:1–6). Any attempt to spiritualize away these yet unfulfilled prophecies is a violation of literal, historical-grammatical biblical interpretation;[121] if this same allegorical hermeneutic were applied to the rest of Scripture, it would undermine the fundamentals of the historic Christian faith.

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE COVENANTS OF GOD

Many of the issues in prophecy revolve around the covenants—with whom they were made, as well as how and when they will be fulfilled. There are two primary views on this topic, covenantalism and dispensationalism, and, as we have seen,[1] there are also modified forms of each.[2]

Traditional Dispensationalism

Traditional (classical) dispensationalism is found in the writings of John Nelson Darby (1800–1882), C.I. Scofield (1843–1921), and Lewis Sperry Chafer (1871–1952). It holds that the Old Testament covenants known as the Abrahamic, the Davidic, and the new were made strictly with the nation of Israel and its literal descendants and will be literally fulfilled in them. This involved the belief that there were two new covenants, one for Israel (yet to be fulfilled) and one for the church (presently being fulfilled). Further, Israel and the church form two separate peoples of God, one earthly and the other heavenly. Hence, they will have two destinies, one in heaven for the church and one on earth for Israel.

Revised Dispensationalism

Revised dispensationalism is represented by John Walvoord (1910–2002) and Charles Ryrie (b. 1925). Like its forerunner, it affirms that there is yet a literal national fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant to Israel. However, it holds that there is only one new covenant, which, while having a later literal fulfillment in national Israel, has a present application to the church. Most revised dispensationalists hold that while there are distinctive differences between Israel and the church and their respective destinies, all are part of one overall people of God who share in the spiritual redemption wrought by Christ.

Progressive Dispensationalism

Progressive dispensationalism, embraced by Robert Saucy (b. 1937), Craig Blaising (b. 1949), and Darrell Bock (b. 1952), is a further revision of dispensationalism in the direction of covenant theology.[3] While claiming there will be a literal fulfillment of the Abrahamic, Davidic, and new covenants in ethnic Israel, they insist that there is a present inaugural fulfillment in the church. Thus, they maintain that fulfillment of the Davidic covenant began at Christ's ascension to God's right hand and will later come to earth at the Second Coming. Like covenant theologians, they both stress the view that there is one people of God and embrace a hermeneutic that reads these Old Testament promises to Israel in the light of their supposed fulfillment in Christ and His church.

Classical Covenantalism

Classical covenantalism was formulated by Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669), was embraced by Charles Hodge (1797–1878) and most Reformed theologians, and was articulated by Oswald Allis (1880–1973). According to this position, these Old Testament covenants made with Israel are fulfilled in the New Testament church, God's "spiritual Israel," rather than a literal fulfillment in national Israel.

Modified Covenantalism

According to modified covenantalism, held by Anthony Hoekema (1913–1988) and Vern Poythress (b. 1944), the church is the New Testament Israel in which there is spiritual fulfillment of these Old Testament covenants, even though there also will be literal future fulfillment of them in ethnic Israel. Most modified covenantalists do not believe these will be fulfilled in a literal thousand-year reign of Christ (the Millennium), but in the new heaven and new earth.[4] Further, like classical covenantalists, they believe there is only one people of God and, hence, there will not be two separate destinies, one on earth for Israel and one in heaven for the church.

The Number and Nature of the Covenants

Rather than engage in a point-by-point interaction between these views, it will be more profitable to study covenants—there are at least seven in the Bible—and fulfillments. The Hebrew word for ***covenant, berit***, and the Greek term, ***diathéké***, mean "an agreement" or "an arrangement." Three covenants are before Israel began:

(1) The Edenic covenant (Gen. 1–2);
(2) The Adamic covenant (Gen. 3); and
(3) The Noahic covenant (Gen. 9).

The last four all deal with Israel:[5]

(4) The Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 12);
(5) The Mosaic covenant (Ex. 19);
(6) The Davidic covenant (2 Sam. 7); and
(7) The new covenant (Jer. 31).

THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

Genesis 12:1–3

Genesis 1–11 records the history of the nations; Genesis 12 begins the history of the chosen nation, starting with the Abrahamic covenant when the Lord said to Abram,

"Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. [1] I will make you into a great nation and [2] I will bless you; [3] I will make your name great, and [4] you will be a blessing. [5] I will bless those who bless you, [6] and whoever curses you I will curse; and [7] all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (vv. 1–3).

Later, [8] God promised Abraham innumerable descendants (12:7; 13:14–16; 15:4–7; 17:4–7), and that [9] the covenant would be established with them (17:7, 9, 21). These are the essential features of the Abrahamic covenant:

(1) It is unconditional ("I will bless you").
(2) It is national ("I will make you into a great nation").
(3) It is geographical (involving "the [Holy] land").

(4) It is perpetual ("to you and your offspring").
(5) It is international ("All peoples on earth will be blessed through you").

Genesis 13:14–17

The Lord said to Abram after Lot had parted from him,

Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. *All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever*. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you.

There are three important elements in the emphasized section: (1) God gave the land to Abraham (2) for his natural descendants (3) forever.

Genesis 15:7–18

He [God] also said to him, *"I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it."*

But Abram said, "O Sovereign Lord, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?"

So the Lord said to him, "Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon."

Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other.... As the sun was setting, *Abram fell into a deep sleep*, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him....

When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and *passed between the pieces*. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, *"To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates."*

Several important facts emerge. ***First***, the covenant is ***unconditional***—Abraham was not even conscious when it was made, and God alone passed through the split sacrifice. This was a one-way arrangement, like the original pledge He

made to Abraham (“***I will*** bless you”), as opposed to the conditional Mosaic covenant—“***If*** you obey my voice” (Ex. 19:5 tlb). The Lord’s passing through the parts alone followed the legal form of a grant covenant (such as a king would give to a subject, or a master to a servant), not the bilateral (two-way) form of a treaty.[6] Paul stresses this point (Rom. 4:1ff.), as does the writer of Hebrews (6:13–18).

Second, the dimensions of the land given to Abraham were spelled out, and they include all of modern Israel, the territory of the Palesinians, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and all the way to Northern Iraq. Even under Joshua’s conquests they did not occupy all this land, and at no time in Israel’s history did they ever occupy it all for any prolonged period of time, let alone “forever.” So to date, the Abrahamic covenant remains yet to be fulfilled.

Third, the great New Testament text on justification appears here: Abraham was declared righteous on the basis of his faith alone. Paul used this in Romans to show that all who believe are Abraham’s spiritual seed (cf. 4:3–5; 13–16). This fulfills in part the promise to bless all nations through Abraham, for he believed the “gospel” when it was preached to him (Gal. 3:8), as do all others who follow in the footsteps of his faith (3:26).[7]

Genesis 17:1–8

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, “I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. *I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers*.”

Abram fell face down, and God said to him, “As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; *your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations*. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and *kings will come from you*. I will establish my covenant as an *everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants* after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. *The whole land of Canaan*, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.”

First, God repeated that He had given the “whole land.”

Second, it is a gift not only to Abraham but also to his physical descendants, as

later confirmed to them.[8]
Third, this is the first reference to "kings" coming from Abraham. In fact, the entire Davidic kingdom would unfold from his descendants.[9]
Fourth, again, the covenant is "everlasting."
Fifth, "Abram" ("exalted father") underwent a name change to "Abraham" ("father of a multitude"), befitting the promise God made to him.
Sixth, and finally, it is unconditional—God called it "my covenant," something "I will" do.

Genesis 22:17–18

I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. *Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies*, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.

Many of the covenant elements are repeated here, including (1) God's promised blessing to Abraham, (2) God's blessing on his descendants, (3) God's multiplication of his offspring, (4) God giving them the Promised Land, and (5) God blessing all nations through Abraham.

Genesis 26:3–5

Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you [Isaac] and will bless you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham. I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because Abraham obeyed me and kept my requirements, my commands, my decrees and my laws.
[10]

Here the Abrahamic covenant is confirmed with his son Isaac. Many essential

elements are repeated—the land, the blessing, the descendants' blessing, the multitude of descendants, and the blessing of all nations.

Genesis 35:10–12

God said to him, "Your name is Jacob, but you will no longer be called Jacob; your name will be Israel." So he named him Israel. And God said to him, "I am God Almighty; be fruitful and increase in number. A nation and a community of nations will come from you, and kings will come from your body. The land I gave to Abraham and Isaac I also give to you, and I will give this land to your descendants after you."

The name of "Jacob" ("supplanter") being changed to "Israel" ("prince with God") signified a title that would become the national name perpetually.

Genesis 46:3–4

"I am God, the God of your father," he said. "Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you [Jacob] into a great nation there. I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again. And Joseph's own hand will close your eyes."

Again the promise is renewed with Isaac's son Jacob, who is reminded how great a nation will come from him and that God will bring them back from Egypt into their land.

Genesis 48:3–4

Jacob said to Joseph, "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and there he blessed me and said to me, 'I am going to make you fruitful and will increase your numbers. I will make you a community of peoples, and I will give this land as an everlasting possession to your descendants after you.' "

Jacob’s descendants will increase; they and their descendants will be given this land forever.

Deuteronomy 28:8–13

The Lord will send a blessing on your barns and on everything you put your hand to. The Lord your God will bless you in the land he is giving you. The Lord will establish you as his holy people, as he promised you on oath, if you keep the commands of the Lord your God and walk in his ways.... The Lord will grant you abundant prosperity—in the fruit of your womb, the young of your livestock and the crops of your ground—in the land he swore to your forefathers to give you. The Lord will open the heavens, the storehouse of his bounty, to send rain on your land in season and to bless all the work of your hands.... The Lord will make you the head, not the tail.

Even amid the conditional Mosaic blessings,[11] God reminds them, through Moses, of the unconditional promise made to the patriarchs, that He had given them the Holy Land. In accordance with the Mosaic covenant, ***their blessings in this land***, as described in this passage, ***would depend on their obedience to God***.

Joshua 1:2–6

Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites. I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. *Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates … to the Great Sea on the west*.... Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them.

Here Joshua is reminded that God was ***giving*** them all the land He had promised. However, they did not yet ***possess*** all of it and were not yet being ***blessed*** in it.

Possession and being blessed therein were conditioned on their obedience to the Mosaic covenant:[12] "Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you" (v. 7).

Joshua 21:43–45

The Lord gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their forefathers, and they took possession of it and settled there. The Lord gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their forefathers. Not one of their enemies withstood them; the Lord handed all their enemies over to them. *Not one of all the LORD's good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled*.

Some have mistakenly taken this as a fulfillment of the unconditional land-promises given to Abraham, but that cannot be the case for many reasons.

First, the last statement refers only to the promises through Moses made with "the house of Israel,"[13] not those made to Abraham.
Second, it appears to refer to the extent of the land as outlined in the Mosaic covenant (Num. 34), which was ***not the full extent God had promised to Abraham*** (cf. Gen. 15:18–21; Josh. 1:2–6).
Third, although Israel possessed the land as a whole, they did not literally possess the whole land, since right after this (in the very beginning of Judges) they were still trying to drive out the remaining evil inhabitants (1:27–34).
Fourth, what they did possess they were later dispossessed of;[14] the Abrahamic covenant promises that they would have it forever (Gen. 17:1–8).
Fifth, later in the Old Testament there are prophecies about Israel inheriting the land after Joshua's time (cf. Jer. 11:5; Amos 9:14–15), which plainly shows they were not yet fulfilled in Joshua's day.[15]
Sixth, and finally, even in the New Testament the kingdom had not yet been restored to Israel (Luke 19:11ff.; Acts 1:6–8); Paul spoke of it as yet future.[16]

1 Chronicles 16:15–18

He [God] remembers his covenant forever, the word he commanded, for a thousand generations, the covenant he made with Abraham, the oath he swore to Isaac. He confirmed it to Jacob as a decree, to Israel as an everlasting covenant: “To you I will give the land of Canaan as the portion you will inherit.”

Isaiah 49:6

It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.

Israel was not designed to be a mere receptacle of God’s blessing—Israel would channel it to the whole world (cf. Isa. 55:3–4).

Jeremiah 25:9–12

I will bring them [Babylon] against this land and its inhabitants and against all the surrounding nations. I will completely destroy them and make them an object of horror and scorn, and an everlasting ruin.... *This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years*. But when the seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians, for their guilt ... and will make it desolate forever.

Israel’s exile from her God-given land was only to be temporary; she would return after a seventy-year exile in Babylon. While they were later to be uprooted again (c. a.d. 70), Isaiah foretold:

In that day the Lord will reach out his hand *a second time* to reclaim the remnant that is left of his people from Assyria, from Lower Egypt, from Upper Egypt, from Cush, from Elam, from Babylonia, from Hamath and from the islands of the sea. (

Isa. 11:11

)

This began in 1948, when national Israel was reestablished and Jews returned from far and wide to the land.

Ezekiel 37:21–25

This is what the Sovereign Lord says: “I will take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land. I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. *There will be one king over all of them* and they will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms.... *My servant David* will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd. They will follow my laws and be careful to keep my decrees. They will live in the land I gave to my servant Jacob, the land where your fathers lived. *They and their children and their children’s children will live there forever*, and David my servant will be their prince forever.”

Given that this prophecy was given after the Babylonian captivity, and given that Israel had a king neither then nor since, literal fulfillment awaits the future. Also, David cannot be a part of it until after he is resurrected in the first resurrection, just before the Millennium (Rev. 20:4–6).[17]

Daniel 9:2

“In the first year of his [Darius’s] reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the Lord given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years.” Daniel was reading Jeremiah 25, which says Israel will return to the Promised Land and rebuild again.

Amos 9:14–15

"*I will bring back my exiled people Israel*; they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them. They will plant vineyards and drink their wine; they will make gardens and eat their fruit. *I will plant Israel in their own land*, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them," says the Lord your God.

This is a prediction that God will fulfill His land-promises to Abraham's descendants. If it had already been fulfilled before this, as some suggest,[18] Amos would have given no such prophecy.

Acts 1:6–7

[The disciples asked Jesus,] "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority."

Even after Jesus' time on earth, the ***kingdom*** of Israel, which included its unconditional land-promises (***forever***), had not yet been fulfilled. Jesus here implied that it was coming but did not say when.

Acts 3:19–21

Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that *times of refreshing* may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. *He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets*.

We examined this text earlier—Peter is offering the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises to the nation ("Men of Israel") who had handed Him over to

be killed (3:12–13). He even includes some of the Abrahamic covenant as part of the fulfillment: “You are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, ‘Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed’ ” (3:25).

Because national Israel, through a Sanhedrin vote, officially rejected their Messiah, the nation was called on to repent. While remnants of the people ***did*** repent (cf. Rom. 9:6–8; 11:1), the nation as a whole has not yet repented. This awaits the Second Coming,[19] of which God said,

I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son. (

Zech. 12:10

; cf.

Rev. 1:7

)

As a result of their encounter with the returned Messiah, a nation will be born in a day, that is, “all Israel [as a nation] will be saved” (Rom. 11:26).

Acts 15:14–17

Simon [Peter] has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written: “*After this I will return and rebuild David’s fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it*, that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things” (cf.

Amos 9

).

God ***will*** rebuild and restore the kingdom of Israel to what He promised. Nevertheless, this was not accomplished at the First Coming, for Jesus told a parable to correct mistaken notions that “the kingdom of God would appear immediately” (Luke 19:11 nkjv), and just before the Ascension He informed His

disciples that the kingdom would not then be restored to Israel (Acts 1:6–8). There cannot be kingdom restoration without the King's presence.

Romans 11:1–32

> *Did God reject his people? By no means*! … God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. … Again I ask: *Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all*! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. *But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring! … If their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead*? … If they do not persist in unbelief, *they will be grafted in*, for God is able to graft them in again. After all, if you [Gentile believers] were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree! I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved. … God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.

Romans 11 crucially reveals that even after the church has been established, there is still a future for national Israel—they will one day be re-ingrafted, restored, and "saved" (v. 26). This refers to those of the chosen nation who are left, namely, the remnant who accept Christ as Messiah, after some two-thirds are destroyed in the Tribulation judgments:[20]

> Naturally there is no salvation for Israel merely because they are bodily descendants of Abraham. Much rather does the whole prophecy of blessing of the Old Testament refer to the transformed and renewed Israel. (Sauer, *EE*, 159)

That there is no explicit mention of their land being restored is no problem; it is implied in the nation being restored, since they cannot be nationally restored unless they are geographically restored. Further, verses 26–27 refer to Isaiah 59:20–21, which presents full national restoration, including their homeland.

Hebrews 11:8–10, 12–16

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. *By faith he made his home in the promised land* like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. …

And so from this one man [Abraham], and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore. All these people were still living by faith when they died. *They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance*. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, *they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one*. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

It is noteworthy that (1) Abraham and his descendants had not yet received the complete fulfillment of God's land-promise; (2) Abraham's descendants are still awaiting this promise's fulfillment; and (3) God will yet fulfill this promise in the future.

What can this mean but that it is yet to be fulfilled, not in the church, but in a literal earthly kingdom of God described in the last chapters of Revelation?

Revelation 7:4

"Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: ***144,000 from all the tribes of Israel***."

During the Tribulation period, 144,000 Jews from the twelve tribes are "sealed" (cf. 14:3), 12,000 from each (7:5–8). Since the literal hermeneutic requires that ***Israel*** and ***tribe*** be taken literally[21]—and since they are presented as such throughout the Bible—it follows that God will preserve His remnant through the Tribulation so they can go into the millennial kingdom[22] just as He

promised.[23] This remnant, plus the great multitude (14:3, 6) of others who come to Christ during the Tribulation,[24] will be the "sheep" Christ welcomes into His messianic kingdom (Matt. 25:33–34).

Summary: The Abrahamic Covenant

The first of Israel's covenants (Abrahamic) is an unconditional agreement God made with Abraham and his descendants that has never been fulfilled at any time in history, either prior to or after the Advent. Because Israel rejected their Messiah-King who is to rule in Jerusalem (Matt. 19:28) over the whole land God gave Abraham, and since this reign is to be forever, the event is yet future; it will not be fulfilled until Christ returns (24:30; 25:31–34). At this time Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, and all other Old Testament saints will be raised[25] and literally will reign over the whole earth in physical, resurrected bodies.[26]

THE MOSAIC COVENANT

Unlike the unconditional Abrahamic covenant, the Mosaic covenant was conditional. Likewise, whereas the Abrahamic covenant is everlasting (Gen. 17:19), the Mosaic covenant was temporal and would be replaced.[27] The following chart contrasts them:

	Abrahamic Covenant	**Mosaic Covenant**
Nature	Unconditional	Conditional
Agreement	Unilateral	Bilateral
Parties	God alone	God and Israel

Stated condition	None	Obedience to God
Duration	Everlasting	Temporal
Beginning	Genesis 12	Exodus 19
End	No end	At the cross

Again, the Abrahamic covenant is (among other things) an unconditional gift of the land from the Mediterranean Sea (west) to Northern Jordan and Northern Iraq (east), from Egypt (south) to Lebanon and Syria (north). The Mosaic covenant involved (among other things) the conditions for being blessed in that land.

The Condition of the Blessing

From its very inception the Mosaic covenant was conditional; it was not in a grant covenant, but a treaty form of the same legal structure as the suzerain-vassal treaties of the day. It included:

(1) identity of the King (Ex. 20:2; Deut.1ff.);
(2) historical relationship between King and people (Ex. 20:2; Deut. 1:6–4:49);
(3) stipulations—laws of the King (Ex. 20–31; Deut. 5–26);
(4) blessings and curses (Lev. 26; Deut. 27–30);
(5) witnesses (Deut. 4:26; 30:19; 31:28);
(6) ceremonial meal (Ex. 24:9–11);
(7) filing of the treaty (Ex. 25:16; 40:21; Deut. 31:25–26). (See Blaising and Bock, ***PD***, 143.)

You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now *if you obey me fully and keep my covenant*, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you

will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. (
Ex. 19:4–6
)

The Mosaic covenant was bilateral: God required Israel to obey His word as a condition for being "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (v. 6), and the people said, ***"We will do everything the Lord*** has said" (v. 8).

The Lord our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. It was not with our fathers that the Lord made this covenant, but with us, with all of us who are alive here today. The Lord spoke to you face to face out of the fire on the mountain. (
Deut. 5:2–3
)

The Nature of the Blessing

The nature of the blessing was earthly and temporal, involving the land God had given, an inheritance in it, children to share it, good health, and many other elements. God promised to

(1) bless Israel (Lev. 26:4–12; Deut. 7:13–15; 28:3–12);
(2) multiply Israel (Lev. 26:9; Deut. 6:3; 8:1; 28:11);
(3) give Israel the land (Lev. 26:5; Deut. 6:3; 8:1; 9:4; 28:11);
(4) make Israel a great nation (Deut. 7:14; 28:1, 3);
(5) be Israel's God, and they His people (Lev. 26:11–12; Deut. 7:6–10; 28:9–10)
(6) confirm His covenant with Israel (Lev. 26:9). (See Blaising and Bock, ***PD***, 143.)

Many of these promises were already in the Abrahamic covenant, and, thus, were incorporated here.[28] However, again, the Mosaic covenant dealt not with the blessings of being ***given*** the land, but with the conditions of ***living*** in the land. While the land grant to Abraham was unconditional, the blessings that

came from living in the land were conditional. There was a flip side to every blessing in the Mosaic covenant; namely, everyone who did not live up to God's words would experience a curse.

If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you *if you obey the LORD your God*. (Deut. 28:1–2)

Moses then enumerated the ways they will be blessed, including their offspring, crops, livestock, calves, defeating their enemies, etc.:

The Lord your God will bless you in the land he is giving you.... The Lord will establish you as his holy people, as he promised you on oath, *if you keep the commands of the LORD your God and walk in his ways*.... The Lord will grant you abundant prosperity—in the fruit of your womb, the young of your livestock and the crops of your ground—in the land he swore to your forefathers to give you. The Lord will open the heavens, the storehouse of his bounty, to send rain on your land in season and to bless all the work of your hands.... *Do not turn aside from any of the commands I give you today, to the right or to the left, following other gods and serving them*. (vv. 8–14)

The blessings were largely physical, material, and earthly, and all were conditional, coming only as a result of obedience to God's laws.

The Nature of the Cursing

The curses, recorded in remarkably vivid language, show that the result of disobedience was as bad as the result of obedience was good:

If you do not obey the LORD your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come upon you and overtake you: You will be cursed in the city and cursed in the country.... The fruit of your womb will be cursed, and the crops of your land, and the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks.

You will be cursed when you come in and cursed when you go out. The Lord will send on you curses, confusion and rebuke in everything you put your hand to, until you are destroyed and come to sudden ruin because of the evil you have done in forsaking him. The Lord will plague you with diseases until he has destroyed you from the land you are entering to possess.

The Lord will strike you with wasting disease, with fever and inflammation, with scorching heat and drought, with blight and mildew, which will plague you until you perish. The sky over your head will be bronze, the ground beneath you iron. The Lord will turn the rain of your country into dust and powder; it will come down from the skies until you are destroyed.... *All these curses will come upon you. They will pursue you and overtake you until you are destroyed, because you did not obey the Lord your God and observe the commands and decrees he gave you*. (vv. 15–45)

The Duration of the Covenant

Other scriptural indications that the Mosaic covenant was not permanent are that it involved sacrifices and types pointing forward to fulfillment in Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 5:7); once they were fulfilled there was no longer a need for a type—the antitype had arrived. Also, as the writer of Hebrews noted, the very fact that a "new" covenant was prophesied indicates that the "old" would pass away.

Jeremiah 31:31–33

"The time is coming," declares the Lord, "When *I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel* and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the [Mosaic] covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because *they broke my covenant*, though I was a husband to them....

"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time.... *I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts*. I will be their God, and they will be my people."

Hebrews 8:7, 13

If there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another.... *By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete*; and what

is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.

Romans 6:14

"Sin shall not be your master, because you [who are under the new covenant] are not under law, but under grace."

Romans 7:1–4

Do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to men who know the law—that *the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives?* … So, my brothers, *you also died to the law* through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God.

Galatians 3:17–25

The law [the time-bound Mosaic covenant], introduced 430 years later [than the timeless Abrahamic covenant], does not set aside the [Abrahamic] covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through promise.... So the [Mosaic] law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. *Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law*.

Galatians 4:1–7

As long as the heir is a child, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. He is subject to guardians and trustees *until the time set by his father*. So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world. But when the time had fully come, *God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons*. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So *you are no longer a slave*, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.

Galatians 4:21–31

Tell me, *you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says*? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman [Hagar] and the other by the free woman [Sarah].... *One covenant [the Mosaic] is from Mount Sinai* and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. Now *Hagar [the slave] stands for Mount Sinai* in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children.... But what does the Scripture say? "*Get rid of the slave woman and her son*, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son." Therefore, brothers, *we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman*.

2 Corinthians 3:7–11

If the ministry that brought death, which was *engraved in letters on stone*, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? ... And *if what was fading away [the Mosaic covenant] came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts [the new covenant]*!

Romans 10:3–4

Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. *Christ is the end of the law* so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

The law was done away with not by destruction but by fulfillment: Jesus said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matt. 5:17).

Colossians 2:14, 17

Having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; *he [Jesus] took it away*, nailing it to the cross.... [The law was] a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.

Old Testament history is the history of Israel breaking the Mosaic covenant. It is for this reason that they were punished, and again why they went into captivity: "They mocked God's messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the Lord was aroused against his people and there was no remedy" (2 Chron. 36:16). Indeed, the Old Testament ends with the threat of a curse (Mal. 4:6).

Hebrews 7:12

"When there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be ***a change of the law***."

In summary, the Mosaic covenant (the law) passed away, being fulfilled by Christ. While many of the Ten Commandments are restated in the New Testament, nonetheless, they are affirmed in the context of grace rather than theocratic use.[29] For example, the Mosaic penalty for breaking the seventh commandment, against adultery, was capital punishment (Lev. 20:10); the new covenant calls for excommunication from the church if the offender is unrepentant (1 Cor. 5:1–5). Likewise, the Mosaic promise attached to the fifth commandment, to honor one's parents, was "that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you" (Ex. 20:12).[30] However, when the new covenant states the same moral principle, the promise is not land inheritance/blessing but a broader and more generally applicable pledge to New Testament believers, "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth" (Eph. 6:3). ***While the basic moral principles, reflective of God's moral nature,[31] embedded in the theocratic construct of Old Testament Israel, are the same immutable principles expressed in the context of grace for the New Testament church, nevertheless, church-age believers are not under Mosaic Law, which has been fulfilled and passed away***.

The Relationship Between the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants

Even though the Mosaic covenant was conditional and its blessings dependent on Israel's legal obedience, it adds much to our understanding of national Israel. For one thing, the promises of how they would be blessed in the land are wrapped around the Abrahamic covenant, which promised them that land. For another, as suggested earlier in Genesis (17:6; 49:10), it was during the period of the Mosaic covenant that the nation's monarchy was set up and the promise of the Davidic covenant eventually given.
The relationship between the unconditional Abrahamic and the conditional Mosaic covenants can be summarized thus:

(1) The Abrahamic covenant takes precedence over the Mosaic covenant;[32]
(2) The Mosaic covenant did not void the Abrahamic covenant (cf. Gal. 3:17);
(3) The Abrahamic covenant is unconditional, while the Mosaic covenant was conditional (v. 12);
(4) The Mosaic covenant was instituted because of human sinfulness (v. 19), whereas the Abrahamic covenant was given because of God's graciousness;
(5) The Mosaic covenant was temporary (v. 19); the Abrahamic covenant is forever.

THE DAVIDIC COVENANT

As the Abrahamic covenant centers around the land, the Davidic covenant centers around the throne. The former provides the land and the nation; the latter provides a king to rule over the kingdom. ***Both*** involve literal, national, unconditional, and perpetual blessings.

2 Samuel 7:11–16

Though David desired to build a house for the Lord, God instead declared that

He would build David's house for him, a dynasty from which the Messiah would come and reign on David's throne.[33]

The Lord declares to you that *the LORD himself will establish a house for you*: When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom.... *Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever*. (cf. 1 Chron. 17)

Like the Abrahamic covenant, the Davidic covenant, which expanded God's blessings to Israel, was irrevocable—"everlasting," based on "the sure mercies of David" (Isa. 55:3 nkjv). While much of this prophecy refers to David's son Solomon (cf. v. 14), the use of ***forever*** clearly reveals that further Davidic descendants were also in mind. Other passages confirm that this text is a prediction that Messiah would come through David's line and reign on David's throne.[34] Indeed, at His triumphal entry, Jesus was heralded by the Jerusalem crowd with shouts of "Hosanna to the Son of David" (Matt. 21:15), "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!" (Mark 11:10). They expected the beginning of the promised messianic kingdom.

Isaiah 55:1–3

Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live. *I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David*.

Psalm 89:20–37

To be sure, Israel would sin and need repentance, but God promised:

I have found David my servant; with my sacred oil I have anointed him. My hand will

sustain him; surely my arm will strengthen him.... My faithful love will be with him, and through my name his horn will be exalted.... I will also appoint him my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth. *I will maintain my love to him forever, and my covenant with him will never fail. I will establish his line forever, his throne as long as the heavens endure*.

If his sons forsake my law and do not follow my statutes, if they violate my decrees and fail to keep my commands, I will punish their sin with the rod, their iniquity with flogging; *but I will not take my love from him, nor will I ever betray my faithfulness. I will not violate my covenant or alter what my lips have uttered*. Once for all, I have sworn by my holiness—and I will not lie to David—that his line will continue forever and his throne endure before me like the sun; it will be established forever like the moon, the faithful witness in the sky.

Despite countless acts of disloyalty on Israel's part,[35] God has been (and will be) absolutely faithful. The Davidic covenant promises to Israel a political, religious, moral, visible earthly kingdom, and God personally guaranteed that it would endure forever and that all nations would be blessed through it (as with the Abrahamic covenant).[36]

The New Covenant

In addition to the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenants, the Old Testament sets forth a future new covenant. What makes it "new" can be set forth in the following contrasts.

	The Old Covenant	**The New Covenant**
Duration	Temporal	Everlasting
Replaced	Yes	Never
Written	In stone	On hearts
Initiated	By the blood of animals	By the blood of Christ

Number of sacrifices	Many sacrifices	One sacrifice forever
Mediator	Moses	Jesus
Forgiveness	Anticipatory	Realized by the Cross
Holy Spirit	No permanent indwelling	Permanent indwelling
Approach to God	Through Aaron the high priest	Through Christ our High Priest
Celebrated	By sacrifices (looking forward to the Cross)	By Communion (looking backward to the Cross)

This covenant, foretold by Jeremiah, is also mentioned in several other places.

Jeremiah 31:31–34

"The time is coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a *new covenant* with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will *not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers* when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them....

"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time.... *I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts*. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.... I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

Isaiah 59:21

"As for me, this is *my covenant* with them," says the Lord. "My Spirit, who is on you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will not depart from your mouth, or from the mouths of your children, or from the mouths of their descendants from this time on and forever."

Ezekiel 36:25–27

I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.
[37]

Ezekiel 37:10–23

So I prophesied as he [the Spirit] commanded me, and breath entered them [the dry bones on the valley floor]; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army. … "Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land.… I will take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land. I will make them one nation in the land.… There will be one king over all of them and they will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms.… I will save them from all their sinful backsliding, and I will cleanse them. They will be my people, and I will be their God."

Clearly, there are elements of three covenants here:

(1) their return to their God-given land (Abrahamic);
(2) one king over them (Davidic); and
(3) His Spirit within them (new).

This will be ***after*** Israel is resurrected; verses 9 and 12, taken literally,[38] refer to their bodily resurrection in the last days.[39] Daniel, Ezekiel's contemporary, predicted this also: "Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt" (Dan. 12:2;

cf. Rev. 20:1–6).

Matthew 26:26–28 (cf. Luke 22:19–20)

As they were eating, Jesus took the bread, blessed it and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” Then he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. For this is my blood of the *new covenant*, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (
nkjv
).
[40]

It would appear that Jesus is initiating the new covenant at this point, and Hebrews applies it to believers in Him. Thus, even though the new covenant is said to be ***made*** “with the house of Israel” (Jer. 31:31), that it is ***applied*** to the New Testament church is appropriate for several reasons.
First, Gentile blessing was promised from the Abrahamic covenant on (Gen. 12:3).
Second, the church age is contemporaneous with the spiritual kingdom established by Jesus while on earth, after the messianic political form of the kingdom had been rejected by national Israel.[41]
Third, Christ, the Jewish Messiah, died for all, Jews and Gentiles. The results of His death—the basis of the new covenant—[42]are applied to Gentiles and Jews in the New Testament church.

Romans 8:2

Without naming it, this text seems to be a reference to the new covenant: “Through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.”[43]

Romans 11:26–27

"All Israel will be saved, as it is written: 'The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.' And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins."

This crucial text shows a future new covenant in a restored Israel. That is, whatever the significance of applying some of these covenant benefits to believers today, there will be a fulfillment of this in national Israel—exactly as the Old Testament promised.

1 Corinthians 11:25

"After supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the ***new covenant*** in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.' "

2 Corinthians 3:3, 6

You [Corinthians believers] show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, *written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts*.... He has made us competent as *ministers of a new covenant*—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Using 2 Corinthians 3, Erich Sauer succinctly summarizes the differences between the old and new covenants:

[This chapter] also throws into relief a sevenfold glory of the new covenant: [1] stone-flesh (vv. 3, 7); [2] letter-spirit (v. 6); [3] death-life (vv. 6–7); [4] lesser-greater (vv. 8–10); [5] condemnation-righteousness (v. 9); [6] passing-remaining (v.

11

); [7] veiling-unveiling (vv.

12–18

). (*TC*, 91)

Hebrews 8:7, 13

If there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another.… *By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete*; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear. (cf.

Matt. 26:26–28

)

Hebrews 9:15

Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant. (cf.

12:24

)

Hebrews 10:16–18

"This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.… Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more." And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin.

Hebrews 10:28–29

Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the [*new*] *covenant* that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?

Hebrews 13:20

"The God of peace … through the blood of the eternal ***[new] covenant*** brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus."

Observations on the New Covenant

Some observations emerge from our study of the new covenant.

First, the manner in which the Old Testament passages are (1) cited by Jesus[44] and (2) applied to the church rules out the ***classical*** dispensational view, viz., that there are two covenants. There is simply no textual indication that the New Testament writers did not see their application of this to the church as a fulfillment of the new covenant prophecies.

Second, that there will be an ultimate fulfillment of the new covenant after Israel has been resurrected and returned to the Holy Land (Ezek. 37) clearly indicates that the promise is not entirely fulfilled in the church. The implication of a state of final perfection (where sin is eliminated and God makes individuals perfect) also supports a final fulfillment (Jer. 31:33–34).

Third, that a covenant was ***made*** with Israel (v. 31) does not mean spiritual benefits cannot be ***applied*** to Gentiles (Heb. 8:7–9); insofar as the new covenant depends on the death of Christ for forgiveness of sins,[45] it applies to Jewish and Gentile believers alike.

Fourth, in the same way, the Abrahamic covenant's promise that all nations[46] would be blessed through its provisions (Gen. 12:3) does not in any way annul the other provisions (e.g., the land-promise) to Abraham and his physical descendants. Jesus inaugurated a spiritual (mystery) form of the kingdom in Matthew 13; there is still a political messianic form to come.[47]

THE COMBINED TESTIMONY OF ISRAEL'S

COVENANTS

The overall testimony of the covenants, understood through the historical-grammatical hermeneutic,[48] leads to rejection of both the traditional dispensational and classical covenantal interpretations of Scripture. ***There are not two new covenants***. The New Testament does apply Old Testament promises to church-age believers (contrary to traditional dispensationalism), and both Testaments foretell a future literal fulfillment in restored national Israel (contrary to traditional covenantalism). We must still discover whether these prophecies will be fulfilled in a literal millennial reign of Christ (as revised dispensationalists claim) or, rather, in the new heaven and new earth (as revised covenantalists maintain).[49]

Combining what is taught about Israel under all its covenants yields the emergence of seven features, outlined by Lewis Sperry Chafer.[50]

(1) A Land Forever

The Duration of the Promise

In the Abrahamic covenant, Israel was promised the Holy Land forever: "Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring ***forever***" (Gen. 13:14–15; cf. 17:7, 13; Psa. 105).

The Extent of the Promise

The borders of the Promised Land were specified: They extended from the edge of Egypt on the south, to the Mediterranean Sea (the Great Sea) in the west, all the way to the Euphrates on the east, and Lebanon in the north. The peoples that then occupied this land were enumerated (15:18–21; Josh. 1:3–4), and the Lord

said, "***The whole land of Canaan***, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God" (Gen. 17:8).

The Permanence of the Promise

Even though Israel would be periodically exiled for disobedience, God would bring them back nonetheless, for never would their banishment be permanent: "The Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the remnant that is left of his people" (Isa. 11:11; cf. Jer. 25). God's promise to Abraham is unconditional and, hence, not dependent on anyone's faithfulness but His (2 Tim. 2:13). Speaking of Israel in this context, Paul declared, "God's gifts and his call are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:29).

(2) A Nation Forever

The People Multiplied

Not only did God promise Abraham a land, He also assured countless descendants (Gen. 15:5) that He would make "into a great nation" (12:1–2). From Abraham came Isaac, and from Isaac came Jacob; Jacob had twelve sons who were the fathers of Israel's twelve tribes. While their people were in Egyptian bondage, God multiplied them greatly (Ex. 1:7), and by the time Moses led them out they numbered two or three million (cf. Num. 1:26).[51]

The Nation Was Chosen

It was under Moses that God said to Israel, "If you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then ***out of all nations*** you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests ***and a holy nation***" (Ex. 19:5–6; cf. Deut. 14:2). Israel is the only chosen nation (Ps. 147:19–20), the exclusivity of which Paul spells out: "They have been entrusted

with the very words of God" (Rom. 3:2); furthermore, "theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises" (9:4).

The Nation Is Unique

Israel brought the Savior to the world (Gal. 4:4). They alone produced the Scriptures.[52] They alone had prophets confirmed by God through miracles. They alone had Moses, the mediating lawgiver with whom God spoke face-to-face. They alone had the covenants. They alone had God, in His glory, dwell personally in their tabernacle and temple. They alone were a theocratic nation under the only God.

The Nation Will Endure

God has determined that His chosen nation, Israel, will endure in its land forever; this will be fulfilled after the resurrection:

> Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.... As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me ... so will your name and descendants endure. (Isa. 65:17 ; 66:22 ; cf. Rev. 21–22)

The return of exiled Jews to their land after nearly two millennia—and their having been nationally restored—is another proof that God fulfills His promises literally.

(3) A King Forever

God promised that Israel would be a nation forever, living in its land forever; He also decreed that they would have a king forever. Even before the Davidic covenant there were intimations that Israel would have a ruler or king.

THE EVIDENCE FOR AN EVERLASTING KING

Genesis 17:6

"I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you." Israel eventually would have a line of kings from whom the King of kings would come.

Genesis 49:10

"The ***scepter*** will not depart from Judah, nor the ***ruler's staff*** from between his feet, until ***he comes to whom it belongs*** and the obedience of the nations is his." Again, a descendant of Judah would rule Israel.

Exodus 19:6

God said, "You will be for me a ***kingdom of priests*** and a holy nation." This records the establishment of a theocracy: Israel accepted direct rule by God. They were His kingdom on earth; He was their King.

Deuteronomy 17:14–15

When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, "Let us set a king over us like all the nations around us," be sure to appoint over you the king the Lord your God chooses.

The kingdom's political dimension existed even under Moses, but it would become more apparent in the later monarchy.[53] While the ruling was to be based in God's law, it was a political rule nonetheless.

Isaiah 9:6

"To us a child is born, to us a son is given, and ***the government will be on his shoulders***. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father [Father of eternity], Prince of Peace." Both deity and political reign are mentioned: This Son would reign as the God-man.

THE CESSATION OF ISRAEL'S KINGS

The apparent problem with these predictions is that Israel went into exile in 605 b.c. and has not had a king since, as Hosea predicted.

Hosea 3:4

"The Israelites will live many days without king or prince." Historical records confirm that it has indeed been millennia since Israel had a king. Nevertheless, God promised to restore the kingdom.

Psalm 89:28–37

I will maintain my love to him [David] forever, and my covenant with him will never fail. I will establish his line forever, his throne as long as the heavens endure.... I will not take my love from him, nor will I ever betray my faithfulness.... [David's] line will continue forever.

The text does not say David's throne will never be left unoccupied—the promise is that it will be ***established forever***. Descendants to David's throne were kept alive until the return of Christ, the Son of David (cf. Matt. 1; Luke 3); when He

begins to reign on David's throne, it ***will*** be established forever (Matt. 24:30; cf. 19:28).[54]

(4) Restoration of Israel Forever

Even the latter part of the Old Testament contains repeated prophecies that Israel would return to its land and that God would restore its king.

Amos 9:11

"In that day I will restore David's fallen tent. I will repair its broken places, restore its ruins, and build it as it used to be."

Micah 4:7–8

I will make the lame a remnant, those driven away a strong nation. The Lord will rule over them in Mount Zion [Jerusalem] from that day and forever. As for you, O watchtower of the flock, O stronghold of the Daughter of Zion, the former dominion will be restored to you; kingship will come to the Daughter of Jerusalem.

Daniel 2:44

After speaking of four great successive earthly kingdoms and ten kings still to come after them, Daniel declares that "in the time of those kings, ***the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that … will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever***."

Daniel 9:24–27

Regarding the "seventy years" of desolation (9:2), Daniel was told that after sixty-two "sevens" (434 years, v. 25) the "Anointed One will be cut off" (v. 26),

but only after he had “put an end to sin” and sealed up “vision and prophecy” about His coming (v. 24). The time interval would be “from the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes” (v. 25); roughly, this span works out to 445/444 b.c.–a.d. 33.[55]

(5) Presentation of the Messianic King

The herald of Christ proclaimed the promised Ruler: “In those days John the Baptist came … saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near’ ” (Matt. 3:1–2). Jesus announced the same message (4:17) and also commissioned His apostles to deliver it to “the lost sheep of Israel” (10:5–6; cf. Luke 10:1–12). They proclaimed the good news of the “kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 3:2) or “kingdom of God” (12:28). There is no kingdom without a king; the King, Jesus of Nazareth, would later be crucified as the King of the Jews.

(6) Rejection of the Messianic King

Israel rejected their King, sealing it by calling Jesus’ work of healing the work of the devil.[56] Just before His execution, Jesus declared: “The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit” (21:43); “They [the Jews] will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles ***until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled***” (Luke 21:24).

Immediately thereafter, Jesus announced the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 13:11ff.) in parables that unfold the mystery form to dominate the interim between His rejection and His return, when He will set up the long-awaited messianic form. The central feature of this time period is the church (Matt. 16:18; cf. Eph. 3:3–5); God would temporarily set aside His dealings with national Israel and attempt to provoke them to envy by centering on the salvation of the Gentiles. Israel will be restored as a nation when “the full number of the Gentiles has come in” (Rom. 11:25).

(7) Restoration of the Messianic Kingdom[57]

With the King's rejection, the plans to restore the kingdom to Israel were postponed; though it is coming, no one knows when (Acts 1:6–7). Israel was offered their restoration if they would repent, but they refused (3:11ff.), and as a nation they continue in unbelief to this very day (cf. 2 Cor. 3:14; Rom. 11:25). However, God has not rejected His people, and they have not transgressed beyond His forgiveness. God is working through their rejection to save the peoples of the world, reconciling us to Himself:

> Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. (vv. 30–31)

COMPARING/CONTRASTING ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH

Now that we have examined the covenants, we can address the relationship between Israel and the church, another issue that divides covenantalists and dispensationalists. As we saw earlier,[58] the church is the mystery bride of Christ wherein there is neither Jew nor Gentile—believers all are joined together as coheirs of God's spiritual blessings.[59] Further, we have seen that the New Testament distinguishes Israel from the church (1 Cor. 10:32) and that after the church age God will restore Israel as a nation (Rom. 11).

Similarities Between Israel and the Church

Israel and the church have a great deal in common; the following are several

areas of similarity.

Both Are Part of the People of God

Members of both Israel and the church are part of God's people, that is, the saved through all the ages,[60] also including saints from both testaments. One day we will all gather around the same throne and sing praises to the same God (Rev. 4–5).

Both Are Part of God's Spiritual Kingdom

In addition to being under God's sovereign rule over all creation,[61] Israel (see Luke 13:28) and the church are part of the same overall spiritual kingdom,[62] to which Jesus referred when He said, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (John 3:3).

Both Are Designed to Glorify God

For both national Israel and the spiritual body of Christ, the ultimate purpose is to give glory to God. Indeed, this is the purpose for which everything was created, and we will worship the Lord in heaven (cf. Rev. 4:10–11).

Both Participate in the Spiritual Blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant

As we saw earlier, the Abrahamic covenant contains blessings for Gentiles as well as Jews (Gen. 12:3). Everyone is justified by faith alone, as was Abraham (15:6), a patriarchal model of faith for all who believe (Rom. 4:16).

Both Are Participants in the Spiritual Blessings of the New Covenant

Once again, even though the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31–33) was ***made*** with

Israel, it is also ***applied*** to the church. As with the Abrahamic covenant, there are spiritual benefits for all persons contained in Christ's sacrifice (cf. 1 John 2:2), which is sufficient for the entire human race.[63] As we have repeatedly observed, the Mosaic (Law-based) covenant was temporal (Heb. 8:7, 13).

Both Will Endure Forever

Finally, both Israel and the church will exist forever, for, as shown above, the promises of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants are everlasting. We, Christ's eternal bride, were chosen in Him before the world began (Eph. 1:4) in accordance with His "eternal purpose" (3:11). Paul told Timothy, "I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with ***eternal glory***" (2 Tim. 2:10). The Holy City, the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2–3), is eternal.

Differences Between Israel and the Church

Despite all that Israel and the church have in common spiritually, they are not identical. Paul clearly distinguished them (1 Cor. 10:32) and spoke of the chosen nation's restoration after the church age is completed (Rom. 11:25–26).
The following chart summarizes some of the significant differences in the origins, natures, and purposes of Israel and the church. Since we have extensively discussed the church,[64] the contrast will be based on that study and what we have learned about Israel in this chapter.

	The Nation of Israel	**The Church**
Headship	Moses	Christ
Origin	Abraham	Pentecost
Nature	Earthly (a political body)	Heavenly (a spiritual body)

Governing Principle	Law of Moses	Grace of Christ
Holy Land	Divine inheritance	No inheritance
Davidic covenant	Promised to Israel	Not promised to church
Constituents	Jews only	Jews and Gentiles
Membership	By physical birth	By spiritual birth
Function	Channel of blessing to the world	To provoke Israel to repent

Different Heads

Moses was the head of Israel: “The law was given through Moses” (John 1:17). Christ is the Head of the church: “Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John. 1:17; cf. Eph. 5:23). Israel was baptized into Moses (1 Cor. 10:2); believers are baptized into Christ (12:13).

Different Origins

The roots of Israel predate Moses, for Abraham was given the promise of being the father through whom Israel would come (Gen. 12:2–3). The church began on the Day of Pentecost; Jesus previously had said, “In a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:5). Baptism into Christ’s body is membership in the universal church,[65] “whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free … we were all given the one Spirit to drink” (1 Cor. 12:13).

Different Natures

Israel is the name of an earthly political entity that was officially organized under Moses (Ex. 19:5–6). The universal church is the invisible spiritual body of Christ (Eph. 1:3; Heb. 12:22–23).

Different Governing Principles

While there is grace under law (e.g., redeeming Israel from Egypt—Ex. 12ff.) and law under grace (cf. Gal. 6:2), there is nonetheless a difference between the governing principles of Israel and the church. Israel was under the ***Law*** as given to Moses and set in the context of a national, political theocracy, with numerous violations calling for capital punishment, including adultery (Lev. 20:10), homosexuality (v. 13), incest (v. 11), the cursing of parents (Deut 5:16), rebellious children (Ex. 20:15–17), idolatry (22:20), and kidnapping (21:16). While the New Testament contains the same basic moral principles that reflect God's unchanging character (Mal. 3:6; James 1:17), these essentials are codified in the context of ***grace***.[66]

Different Inheritances

Emphatically declared in the Abrahamic covenant is the promise of the Holy Land to Abraham's physical descendants.[67] The church received no such promise; its inheritance is not tied to any real estate but is spiritual and heavenly (Eph. 1:3, 11, 14, 18; Col. 1:12), even though believers will reign with Christ on the earth after the final resurrection (Matt. 19:28; Rev. 20:4–6). The New Testament nowhere switches over the Abrahamic promise from Israel to the church—the covenantal doctrine of replacement theology (or realized eschatology) is without biblical foundation.

Different Promises

Neither is the church promised that it will be part of the Davidic covenant, which guarantees that a descendant of David would forever reign on his throne in Jerusalem.[6]8

Progressive dispensationalists argue that fulfillment of the Davidic covenant began with Christ's ascension to heaven, but the New Testament does not say this—the texts they use for support are taken out of context.[69] Some verses say nothing about David whatsoever.[70] Others say nothing about Christ's reign.[71]

Still others refer to the Second Coming, not the Ascension.[72] A few verses speak of Christ reigning at God's right hand in heaven, not on David's throne in Jerusalem.[73]

One verse is a prediction that Christ will reign on David's throne but does not specify when this begins (Luke 1:32). Another verse connects David's throne with Christ's reign (Acts 2:30), but it is about the Resurrection (v. 31) and the Ascension (vv. 34–35), which were a ***prelude*** "to sit on his [David's] throne" (v. 30 nkjv), and the text does not specify when He would do this. The same is true of Psalm 110:1, which refers to making Christ's enemies His footstool;[74] that will occur at the end of the Millennium (cf. Rev. 20:1–6).[75] No text shows that Jesus assumed David's political throne[76] at His ascension.

In the present time, between His ascension and His return, Christ is on His *Father's* throne (

Rev. 3:21

;

Heb. 8:1

). "Sit at my right hand *until* I make your enemies a footstool for your feet" (

Ps. 110:1

). Through His "waiting" time (

Heb. 10:13

) His kingship is *super*-national, purely spiritual, invisible, concerned with the course of salvation. *This is the kingdom of grace*. [However,] in the Millennial kingdom Christ is on *David's* throne (

Luke 1:32

;

Acts 2:30

). The throne of this His earthly ancestor is then *His* throne (

Rev. 3:21

;

Matt. 19:28

;

25:31

). (Sauer, *TC*, 51–52)

Different Constituencies

The nation of Israel was composed of Jews only. Gentiles could convert to Judaism and become proselytes, but even then they were a sort of second-class citizen, since they were not Jews by birth—they were still beyond the "middle wall of separation" (Eph. 2:14 nkjv) that was torn down by Christ in the church, where both Jew and Gentile are one in Him (Eph. 2:12). While the constituents of Israel are Jews, both Jews and Gentiles are part of Christ's body (Gal. 3:28).

Different Conditions for Membership

Likewise, there are different conditions for membership in national Israel and the body of Christ. One becomes a Jew by natural, physical birth (cf. Phil. 3:5);[77] a member of the church is such only by a supernatural spiritual birth (cf. John 3:3).

Different Functions

One of national Israel's primary functions was to be a channel of blessing to the world (Gen. 12:3). Two of the primary ways they were to accomplish this were through the body and through the book; the Living Word and the Written Word. Hebrews declares:

When Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but *a body* you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, 'Here I am—it is written about me in *the scroll [the Book]*—I have come to do your will, O God' " (

10:5–7

).

Strangely enough, Paul showed that one of the church's functions was to provoke Israel into repentance and acceptance of their Messiah (Rom. 11:25): "I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them" (vv. 13–14).

Reasons for Distinguishing Israel and the Church

The following is a summary of the many reasons for maintaining a distinction

between the promises to national Israel and the promises to Christ's spiritual body.

Consistent Use of the Historical-Grammatical Hermeneutic Demands That Literal Unconditional Promises to Israel Are Yet to Be Fulfilled[78]

The unconditional land-promise God made to Abraham and his descendants (e.g., Gen. 13:1–17) has never been fulfilled; it must have a future fulfillment for national Israel.

Further, it was a unilateral covenant made by God with Abraham (not Abraham with God); Abraham was unconscious when it was made (15:12, 18).

What is more, it was a gift of the ***whole*** land, not just west of the Jordan (e.g., vv. 18–21).

Finally, it was an eternal inheritance: "The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God" (17:8, cf. v. 19; 26:3).

In short, God forever gave the land to Abraham and his descendants through Isaac, Jacob, and his sons, who became the twelve tribes. This includes modern-day Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and all the way to Northern Iraq. Even under Joshua and Solomon this was not fulfilled, let alone fulfilled forever. The unconditional land-promise to Israel must have a future literal fulfillment.

John, Messiah's Herald, Offered a Literal Kingdom to National Israel

The Baptist's simple message was "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matt. 3:2); to the Jewish mind, this was the kingdom promised in the Old Testament (e.g., Dan. 2, 7).

> He announced a coming kingdom, which simply means "a coming rule." This rule was to be heaven's rule: "the kingdom of heaven." [Would God then begin to rule in the heavenly realm?] Obviously not, for God has always ruled over the heavenly spheres since Creation. John must mean that God's heavenly rule was about to be extended directly to earthly spheres. [That is,] God's rule over earth had drawn near and was about to be instituted through the person of the Messiah for whom John was preparing the way. (Walvoord and Zuck, *BKC*, 1.24)

Though the Jews rejected Him and thereby His earthly visible reign over them, Jesus began to reign spiritually (cf. Matt. 13) in the kingdom's interim, containing both saved and unsaved, who will be separated after the Second Coming.[79] The outward messianic reign was set aside until His return, when the so-called "Lord's Prayer" will be literally and ultimately fulfilled; meanwhile we have the church age (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 3:3–5), the mystery form described in the kingdom parables (op. cit.). The messianic promises to Israel (delayed until Jesus comes back) are not to be confused with spiritual blessings for the church; they are distinct entities, and literal promises are not to be spiritualized away.[80]

Jesus Foretold a Literal Reign Over Israel at His Second Coming

"I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28; cf. 24:30). The Second Coming is a literal physical return in a literal physical body.[81] Jesus left physically and visibly, and He will return in the same manner, as Zechariah and John foresaw: "On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west" (Zech. 14:4); "Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be!" (Rev. 1:7).

The Apostles Will Sit on Twelve Thrones to Judge Israel

The twelve apostles, through whom Jesus built His church, were literal physical persons, who at the final resurrection will regain their literal physical bodies (John 5:28–29), which will be just like Jesus' resurrection body (Phil. 3:21), made of "flesh and bones" (Luke 24:39; cf. v. 44; John 20:27). It makes no sense to call this a spiritual reign of Christ—both He and His apostles will be in physical resurrection bodies. The reign after Christ's return can be no less literal

and physical than the body in which He comes to reign; ***a denial of Christ's literal reign is, in effect, a denial of His literal resurrection body***.[82] Regarding the twelve apostles on twelve thrones judging the twelve ***tribes*** of Israel (Matt. 19:28), again, the word ***tribe*** is never used of Israel or any other group in a purely spiritual sense. These are always the twelve literal tribes, who were the literal descendants of the literal twelve sons of Jacob (whom God renamed "Israel"—Gen. 32:28).

The Promised Messianic Kingdom Was Not Yet Fulfilled at the Ascension

The disciples asked Jesus if He was then going to "restore the kingdom to Israel" (Acts 1:6); as mentioned earlier, if there were to be no future literal kingdom, this was His last opportunity to correct them, as with their errors on other occasions. Instead, He implied that this kingdom had not yet been fulfilled but ***would be***, in the Father's good time (vv. 7–8).

After the Church Began, Peter Offered the Kingdom to Israel

In Acts 3:19–21 Peter offered restoration (the literal messianic kingdom) to national Israel, specifically addressing the "Men of Israel" (v. 12) who had killed Jesus (v. 15) and their "rulers" (v. 17 nkvj). This was the promised Old Testament kingdom that would be inaugurated when Messiah came, but Jesus would not return until they repented and accepted Him as their Messiah. This was not merely a hypothetical offer. Had they repented, Christ would have returned in accordance to what was prophesied. Since God knew they were not going to repent,[83] it is not contradictory to affirm with Scripture that the "times of the Gentiles" (Ezek. 30:3 nkjv) would occur in the intervening time: "Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in" (Rom. 11:25). Since Israel did not repent, this will occur at the Second Coming.[84]

National Israel Will Yet Be Restored to Its Place of Blessing Under God

The promises about Israel's future restoration to their land and national status were not fulfilled in the first century (as preterists claim)[85] or today through the church in a spiritual sense (as amillennialists insist).[86] We have already seen how, in Romans 11, Paul speaks clearly of national Israel's literal future.[87] Verses 9–11 are about Israel's past blessings (9), present rejection (10), and future restoration (11); Paul makes it evident he is speaking of literal physical Israel, not some "spiritual" Israel (like the New Testament church); they are the "nation" to whom Moses wrote, the "Israel" to whom Isaiah prophesied, "his [God's] people" of whom Paul is one (9:3; 10:1, 19, 21; 11:1).

They are "the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises" (9:4). God has not, will not, and cannot cast them away (11:1–2, 29). God's unconditional promises will be fulfilled; the nation as a whole will be converted and restored when their Messiah returns (vv. 24–26).

Revelation Speaks of National Israel's Role Before Christ Returns

John's Apocalypse points to Israel's future role during the tribulation period before the Second Coming: "Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel. From the tribe of Judah, 12,000 were sealed … [12,000 from each of the tribes]" (see 7:4–8). This refers to literal national Israel,[88] and it is these who are alive and active during the Tribulation,[89] bringing into the kingdom "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands" (v. 9).

Then Jesus' words about the twelve tribes and the twelve apostles (Matt. 19:28) will be literally fulfilled, and He will separate those who have believed from those who have not believed (25:31–34).

Having said all of this, it is important to repeat that, despite these differences between Israel and the church, there are many commonalities. In addition, as with the pre-Israelite believers (before Abraham and Moses), believers of the present age will have more in common than they have differences. After all,

there is one Savior, one plan of redemption, and one family of all the redeemed people who will worship God in heaven. Spiritually, God's people share a redemptive inheritance, even though there are functional differences between Israel and the church.

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE COVENANTS WITH ISRAEL

The theological foundation for belief in a literal fulfillment of Israel's unconditional covenants is based in (1) several attributes of God and (2) a consistent application of the historical-grammatical hermeneutic to Old Testament prophecy. Specific divine attributes stand out in this regard: sovereignty, eternality, omniscience, immutability, omnipotence, and omnisapience. With His sovereign power God has no difficulty bringing about His plan and purpose for Israel, which He willed from all eternity. In order for God to be sure that what He willed would come to pass when He made the covenants, He must have infallible foreknowledge. His immutable will, by means of His omnipotent power, will accomplish His eternal decrees and unconditional covenants, and His omnisapience planned Israel's election, dispersion, and ultimate restoration.[90]

God's Glory As the Basis for His Covenants With Israel

Ultimately, everything is for God's glory (1 Cor. 10:31; cf. Ps. 76:10), and, as with New Testament believers, God's plan for Israel was to bring glory to Himself:

> God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that *no one may boast before him.* (1 Cor. 1:27–29)

God is glorified through His faithfulness to Israel:

The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands. (

Deut. 7:7–9

)

The Literal Hermeneutic as the Basis for God's Covenants With Israel

While God is the basis for Israel's unconditional election, the basis for our knowing about it is the historical-grammatical hermeneutic. The only way to deny Israel's literal national future is to deny literal interpretations of all covenants with Israel; as we have seen, denial of the literal hermeneutic is both self-defeating ***and*** undermining of the Christian faith.[91]

ANSWERING OBJECTIONS

Many objections have been leveled against distinguishing between Israel and the church;[92] we'll focus on the texts around which the primary arguments are drawn. Misunderstanding of such passages (and misapplication of the historical-grammatical hermeneutic[93]) is what leads to claims that promises made to Israel are fulfilled "spiritually" in the church, with no literal future fulfillment for Israel.

Matthew 2:15

While the New Testament sometimes gives an application of an Old Testament passage, it never spiritualizes away the literal interpretation. For example, Hosea 11:1—"Out of Egypt have I called my son"—referred to the children of Israel

emerging from bondage in Egypt. Matthew ***applied*** this verse to the Christ-child coming out of Egypt; Jesus too is God's "son."
This fits the dictum of the literal hermeneutic: one common interpretation; many applications. The same is true of 1 Peter 2:9 (regarding a kingdom of priests and a holy nation), which in its Old Testament context (Ex. 19:6) refers to Israel, and Peter does not spiritualize it away when he uses it of church-age believers, of whom it is also literally true. Peter doesn't even quote the passage as such or claim it is fulfilled in the church; he merely borrows language appropriately used of God's people (Israel) and applies it to God's people (the church).

Hebrews 8:7–13

Likewise, the new covenant (contrasted with the "first covenant" in Heb. 8), which was ***made*** with the nation of Israel (and will be literally fulfilled with them), is also ***applied*** to the church; the benefits of Christ's death were always intended by God for both (cf. Gen. 3:15; 12:3). Again, this is not a New Testament spiritualization of a literal promise. The application to current believers, also saved through the predicted Messiah, means neither that the promise is fulfilled in the church nor that the church thereby is Israel's replacement. Abraham was promised that Gentiles would be included (12:3); Gentile inclusion does not mean Jewish exclusion.

1 Corinthians 10:4

We have seen[94] the allegation of allegorization regarding Paul's statement about the children of Israel in the wilderness: "They drank of that ***spiritual*** Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ" (nkjv). This is ***not*** allegory—the Rock that followed them was a literal rock, just as the manna they ate was literal food from heaven. The Greek word ***spiritual*** (***pneumatikos***) refers not to the rock's nature but the rock's source. Just as a "spiritual" person (cf. 2:14–15) is a literal physical person whose life is dominated by the Spirit, even so the literal rock in the wilderness was Spirit-dominated—it "followed them" around for forty years with an endless source of water. The rock was a Christophany, a literal manifestation of Christ and His supernatural power, like the Angel of the Lord appearing in physical human form (cf. Gen. 18:2, 8, 22).

Romans 4:13–16

It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.... Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.

From this passage it is argued that Abraham has spiritual seed, and that the promise to him has a fulfillment in all of us, Jew or Gentile, that have faith in Christ—we are all Abraham's spiritual seed.

While this is correct, it doesn't necessitate that the unconditional land-promises God made to Abraham's literal seed (Israel) are not literally true and will not be literally fulfilled. Abraham has two "seeds," physical and spiritual; the spiritual seed is a parallel (not a replacement) seed. There is a future for Abraham's physical descendants;[95] as has been shown above,[96] the yet-unfulfilled land- and kingdom-promises to Israel ***will*** be fulfilled.[97]

Galatians 3:16

"The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say 'and to seeds,' meaning many people, but 'and to your seed,' meaning one person, who is Christ." Some covenant theologians suggest that since Christ is the seed who fulfilled Abraham's promise, there is no need to look for a further future fulfillment in Abraham's literal seed (descendants).[98] In Acts 3:25–26, Peter says to the Jews, "You are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.' When God raised up his servant [Jesus], he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked

ways." Here too Jesus is set forth as the Seed that fulfills Abraham's promise. In response, note several points.

First, even other covenantalists[99] do not accept this conclusion. Amillennial scholars like Hoekema and Poythress maintain that there will be a literal fulfillment of this promise to Abraham's physical descendants.

Second, no double fulfillment of this promise is necessary, at any rate. The word ***seed*** (Gk: ***sperma***), in both the Septuagint and the New Testament, is singular.[100] Hence, Paul's referring it to Christ (Gal. 3:16) leaves room also for the obvious Old Testament references to the "seed" as being Abraham's physical offspring, said to be as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sand on the seashore (cf. Gen. 15:5; 22:17–18).

Third, that Christ in some way fulfills the seed-promise in no way means He fulfills the land-promise. The New Testament never says, "Christ is the Land."

Fourth, and finally, even after the time of Christ, Scripture mentions fulfillment of Israel's promises.[101] Considering Christ as the Seed of Abraham does not deny a literal fulfillment of the Abrahamic land promises to national Israel.[102]

Galatians 6:15–16

"In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but a new creature. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, ***and*** upon the Israel of God" (kjv). The asv, the nasb, ***Young's Literal Translation***, and the nkjv all follow suit regarding "***and*** [up]on the Israel of God." The niv deviates, however, rendering, "Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, ***even*** to the Israel of God."

Linguistically, the Greek word ***kai*** can mean "and," "even," or "also," the intended meaning normally being determined by the context. Sometimes, though, other considerations come into play, which will be made evident by the following summary of the three basic ways to interpret this text.[103]

The first interpretation, which renders ***kai*** as "even," takes "the Israel of God" to refer to the church. This is a standard amillennialist view,[104] supporting the idea that the church is "spiritual Israel," the spiritual heir to Old Testament

promises, as supposedly implied in all believers[105] being called the "seed of Abraham" (3:29). This view has been held by (among others) John Calvin (1509–1564), Martin Luther (1483–1546), R. C.H. Lenski (1864–1936), Herman Ridderbos (b. 1900), and John Stott (b. 1925); the earliest representative among the fathers was Justin Martyr (c. 100–c. 165; see ***DJ***, 11:1–5).

The second interpretation regards "the Israel of God" as a reference to the remnant of believing Jews in the church. In support of this is Paul's claim that he is a believing Israelite (Rom. 11:1), "a remnant according to God's gracious choice" (v. 5 nasb). Also, "Israel of God" is understood in contrast to "Israel after the flesh" (1 Cor. 10:18 nkjv). Adherents include Charles Ellicott (1819–1905), Adolf von Schlatter (1852–1938), Walter Gutbrod (1901–1998), and many premillennialists.[106]

The third interpretation sees this text as a reference to the future redeemed ethnic Israel, emphasizing "all Israel" (11:26) as roughly equivalent to "the Israel of God." Proponents include Ernest De Witt Burton (1856–1925), F. F. Bruce (1910–1991), W. D. Davies (b. 1911), and Franz Mussner (b. 1916).

Our focus is not on deciding between the last two views—both hold that "the Israel of God" is a reference to ethnic Israel—but to show that the first (favored by amillennialists) is not demonstrable.

First, translating ***kai*** as "and" is standard.[107]

Second, this translation is the common grammatical tradition; without compelling arguments to the contrary, it is generally unwise to deviate.

Third, the common usage makes good sense in Galatians 6:16.

Fourth, Ellicott points out that it is doubtful whether Paul ever used ***kai*** in "so marked an explicative sense" (as "even").

Fifth, S. Lewis Johnson (1915–2004) notes:

> From the standpoint of biblical usage this view stands condemned. There is no instance in biblical literature of the term *Israel* being used in the sense of the church, or the people of God as composed of both believing ethnic Jews and Gentiles. ("PTIG," 189)

Occasionally, Romans 9:6 is offered as an exception, but Paul is speaking there of a division ***within*** ethnic Israel, not of believing Gentiles: "They are not all

Israel who are descended from Israel" (nasb). There is no support here for the amillennial view that the New Testament church is spiritual Israel, and, in short, no real support for literal Old Testament promises to Israel being fulfilled spiritually in the church.

Response to Modified Covenantal Arguments

2 Corinthians 1:20

"No matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ. And so through him the 'Amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God." This is alleged to prove that all Old Testament promises are spiritually fulfilled in Christ, and from this Poythress infers that since Christians are in Christ, the church is a spiritual fulfillment of these prophecies to Israel (***UD***, 126). Many also go on to add that, therefore, the land and throne promises to Abraham and David will not have a literal fulfillment in a future national Israel.

These conclusions do not follow for several reasons.

First, again, that Christ fulfilled salvific prophecies[108] does not mean He has thereby spiritually fulfilled all Old Testament prophecies about Israel returning to the land and about Christ reigning on David's political throne.

Second, again, even some covenant theologians (like Poythress and Hoekema) admit there will be a literal fulfillment of these promises to ethnic Israel. Accordingly, Paul's claim that there is fulfillment in Christ cannot be taken to exclude Israel; for that matter, the promises unfulfilled during the First Coming will be fulfilled in Christ and His literal reign at the Second Coming.

Third, as we have observed repeatedly,[109] historical-grammatical interpretation of prophecy reveals that some unconditional land- and throne-promises have never yet been fulfilled; God stakes His own immutable character[110] that these promises ***will*** be fulfilled (cf. Ps. 89:24–37; Heb. 6:13–18).

Hebrews 12:22–24

You have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Poythress attempts to use this to say that if Christ fulfills all the Old Testament sacrificial types, then, by analogy, this "is simultaneously a fulfillment of prophecies about a perfect, restored Jerusalem (Isa. 60:14; Mic. 4:1–2)."

First, Hebrews is speaking of a "heavenly" city, (heaven itself), not an earthly city in which Christ will reign when He returns (Isa. 2:3; Matt. 19:28).
Second, this city is a spiritual place where "spirits" dwell, not an earthly place where bodies dwell.
Third, again, even some covenant theologians admit there will still be a future literal fulfillment of this (e.g., Poythress, ***UD***, 120).
Fourth, and finally, since the Holy City will come down to earth (Rev. 21–22), since this is the place from which Christ will reign for a thousand years (20:1–6),[111] and since there will be a literal resurrection before this reign and Christ will return in a literal physical body,[112] there is no reason why this presently "heavenly" city cannot be the same city that will descend for Christ's earthly reign.

1 Corinthians 3:21–23

"No more boasting about men! All things are yours, whether … ***the world*** or life or death or the present or ***the future***—all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God." Since Paul informs the Corinthian Christians that even "the world" is theirs, Poythress argues that there is no reason Gentiles cannot share in Israel's literal future land-promise fulfillment, After all, we share in other promises given to Abraham (Gal. 3:28) and in the new covenant (Heb. 8:7–13);

why, then, cannot the church partially fulfill the land-promises?
In response, ***first***, this text is a general affirmation that believers possess the world; it in no way excludes God's promise for Israel to inherit a specific portion of this world in the future.
Second, believers today do not possess the Holy Land in the way in which it was promised to Israel, namely, as a ***national inheritance***. The church is not a nation but a non-ethnic entity (Gal. 3:28).
Third, the church does not directly possess the world or any piece of property in it. Whatever we possess is indirect; we are possessed by Christ, who possesses the world.
Fourth, and finally, once again, some covenantalists admit that ethnic Israel will one day directly possess the land given to Abraham, so there is no reason national Israel as a nation cannot occupy this very land as promised.

Galatians 3:28

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." From this, covenant theologians infer that there is only one people of God who have no religious difference in God's future plan, all sharing equally in all the Old Testament promises made to Israel (including the Davidic prophecies).
In reply, ***first***, no New Testament believers—Jews or Gentiles, members of Christ's body—have any claim on the promises made to believing Jews as part of ethnic Israel.
Second, Paul is not speaking here of national Israel and her promises from God; he only addresses what present believers have in Christ's body.
Third, the New Testament church is not a funnel through which Gentiles can receive Jewish blessings—it is a non-ethnic entity composed of those who are a "new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17) or "new man" (Eph. 2:15). The ancient prophecies made to Israel, if interpreted literally, make an ethnic distinction.
Fourth, to affirm functional equality of the church with Israel is to reject historical-grammatical interpretation of the texts that give a ***functionally*** superior place to Israel in the future messianic kingdom.[113] All God's people share equally in His salvation ***personally and spiritually***; nonetheless, Israel has a special future place ***collectively and nationally***.

Fifth, Paul clarified that the church is a third New Testament group alongside Gentiles and Jews: "the church of God" (1 Cor. 10:32). "In the place of the former twofold division of mankind there thus arises a threefold division, and to Israel and the peoples of the world there is added the church as a 'third race' " (Sauer, ***TC***, 58).

Sixth, and finally, Israel will be a separate entity after the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled (the church age, Rom. 11:25), which would not be true if the church had replaced Israel and fulfilled her prophecies.

In summation, none of these verses demonstrates the covenantal view; all are amenable to a revised dispensational understanding. Indeed, taken in immediate context (to say nothing of Holy Writ's overall context), they make much more sense as understood by dispensationalists.

CONCLUSION

What can we conclude from the above discussion? National Israel was promised a literal physical kingdom involving the Holy Land and the Davidic throne on which the Messiah will reign. This messianic kingdom was through ethnic Israel and, thereby, their promised fulfillment of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants. Since the covenants are irrevocable (Rom. 11:29), God, in His mysterious and eternal wisdom, preplanned Israel's fall (in accordance with their own foreseen rebellion) to provide for Gentile salvation, which was from the beginning envisioned as part of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 12:3; Rom. 4:16) and the new covenant (Heb. 8:7–8).[114]

Blindness will remain with national Israel (Rom. 11:25) until God finishes His plan of calling out from Jews and Gentiles a heavenly bride (the church) for Himself. When this work is accomplished, God will restore (re-ingraft) ethnic Israel and fulfill the new covenant made with her (Jer. 31:31). Thus, the unconditional promises of the Abrahamic, Davidic, and new covenants with Israel will be fulfilled. When Messiah returns and is accepted by Israel, "all Israel will be saved" (Rom. 11:26); that is, all who are believers (cf. Rev. 14:3–4) and are left at the end of the Tribulation[115] and the beginning of the Millennium.[116]

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE SECOND COMING AND THE MILLENNIUM

There are three primary eschatological views with regard to the Second Coming and the Millennium, and their differences are largely a matter of how prophecy is interpreted:[1] Those who use an allegorical method generally uphold an amillennial or postmillennial view, while those who apply a literal hermeneutic embrace a premillennial view.

The basic issue is whether or not Christ will return before a literal thousand-year reign on earth (cf. Rev. 20). ***Premillennialists*** say yes, contending that Christ will return bodily and reign over the whole world. ***Amillennialists*** and ***postmillennialists*** say no; the former hold that there will be ***no*** literal thousand-year reign—that related predictions are to be understood spiritually as being fulfilled in the church of this present age—while the latter stress that the church, by Christianizing the world, will usher in the millennial era, ***after which*** Christ will literally return to earth.

THE PREMILLENNIAL VIEW

The essence of premillennialism is that Christ will physically return to earth and set up a worldwide thousand-year reign. There are two main forms: historic premillennialism (e.g., George Eldon Ladd [1911–1982]) and dispensational premillennialism (e.g., John Walvoord [1910–2002]). The latter stresses that the Millennium will be a time of fulfillment of unconditional promises to Israel;[2] the former essentially rests its case for the Millennium on a literal interpretation of Revelation 20:1–6.

In addition to being maintained by many early church Fathers (e.g., Justin Martyr [c. 100–c. 165], Clement of Alexandria [150–c. 215], Tertullian [c. 155–c. 225]), and others (see historical section below), premillennialism has been embraced by a diverse group of medieval, modern, and contemporary scholars, including some Roman Catholics (the early Augustine [354–430]), some Puritans (Cotton Mather [1663–1728]), Plymouth Brethren (John Nelson Darby [1800–1882]), Anglicans (Griffith Thomas [1861–1924]), Presbyterians (Lewis Sperry Chafer [1871–1952]), Reformed (James Montgomery Boice [1938–2000]), Baptists (Millard Erickson [b. 1932]), and a wide variety of charismatics. The numerous arguments offered in support of premillennialism include:

(1) It best explains the unconditional land-promise to Abraham and his descendants (Gen. 12, 14–15).
(2) It provides the best understanding of the unconditional Davidic covenant (that his descendent would reign forever (2 Sam. 7:12ff.).
(3) It is needed to fulfill numerous Old Testament predictions about a messianic age (cf. Isa. 9, 60, 65).
(4) It explains Jesus' promise that He and His apostles would reign on thrones in Jerusalem (Matt. 19:28).
(5) It is supported by Jesus' response to the disciples' question about restoring the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:5–7).
(6) It upholds Paul's affirmation about Christ reigning until death is defeated (1 Cor. 15:20–28).
(7) It is consistent with the Romans 11 promise that Israel will be restored.
(8) It maintains a literal interpretation of Christ and the resurrected saints reigning "a thousand years" (Rev. 20:1–6).

THE AMILLENNIAL VIEW

The term ***amillennial*** means literally “no Millennium.” However, proponents are quick to point out that they do not deny the statements (in Rev. 20) about a thousand-year reign but, rather, deny that there will be a literal, physical, earthly millennial reign of Christ following the Second Coming.[3] They often prefer to label their view “realized millennialism,” “realized eschatology,” or “inaugurated eschatology” (Hoekema in Clouse, ***MMFV***, 177), for, unlike dispensational premillennialists, amillennialists hold that the unfulfilled Old Testament predictions made to Israel are fulfilled spiritually in the New Testament church.[4]

The later Augustine was amillennial, as were Martin Luther (1483–1546) and John Calvin (1509–1564). Most Puritans held to amillennialism, as do most Roman Catholics; more recent proponents include Oswald Allis (1880–1973), Louis Berkhof (1873–1957), and Anthony Hoekema (1913–1988).

The basic arguments for amillennialism include the following:

(1) The Abrahamic and Davidic covenants were ***conditional*** and, thus, need no future fulfillment.[5]
(2) Prophecy demands a symbolic approach and, hence, need not be taken literally.[6]
(3) Israel and the church are not two distinct entities, but one people of God bound by one covenant of grace.[7]
(4) The Old Testament is fulfilled in the New Testament and so must be understood in light of this fulfillment.[8]
(5) The “first resurrection” of Revelation 20 should be understood as a “spiritual resurrection,” namely, souls being delivered from earth to heaven where they reign with Christ spiritually.[9]
(6) Numerous New Testament passages show that Old Testament prophecies (e.g., the new covenant—cf. Jer. 31:31; Heb. 8:8–13) are fulfilled in the

church.[10]

THE POSTMILLENNIAL VIEW

Postmillennialism and amillennialism have much in common: Both believe that Christ will not physically return before a literal thousand-year reign; both allegorize or spiritualize much of Old Testament prophecy; and both reject dispensational interpretations of it.

However, postmillennialism maintains that Christ will return after "the thousand years" (= long period of time); the ***church*** (not the Second Coming) will inaugurate the Millennium. The preaching and teaching of the Christian message throughout the world will increasingly Christianize it; the Millennium will be a thousand years of peace and prosperity ***preceding*** Christ's physical return.

Although some postmillennialists claim Augustine, it's difficult to find much support for the view before modern Reformed theology. A. A. Hodge (1823–1886), B. B. Warfield (1851–1921), A. H. Strong (Baptist, 1836–1921), and Loraine Boettner (1932–2000) were postmillennialists; on the contemporary scene, postmillennialism's main impetus is the reconstructionist movement spawned by R. J. Rushdooney (1916–2001).[11]

The following are some of the main postmillennial arguments:

(1) The Bible promises universal gospel proclamation (Matt. 28:18–20).
(2) Christ's throne, from which He reigns, is in heaven (Ps. 47:2; 9:5).
(3) People from all nations and ethnicities will be saved (Rev. 7:9–10).[12]
(4) Jesus' parable of the mustard seed foretells continual advance of Christianity in the world (Matt. 13:31–32).
(5) There is ample evidence that world conditions, through Christian teaching, are improving morally, socially, and spiritually.[13]
(6) In the Bible, ***thousand*** is often used symbolically (cf. 1 Chron. 16:15; Ps. 50:10).

Comparison of the Three Views

	Pre-millennialism[14]	Amillennialism	Postmillennialism
Literal Millennium	Yes	No	No
Resurrection before Millennium	One[15]	None	None
"Thousand years" of Revelation 20	Future	Present	Present
Resurrection(s)[16]	Two	One	One
Consistent literal understanding of prophecy	Yes	No[17]	No
UnconditionalOld Testamentcovenants	Yes	No[18]	No
Distinctionsbetween Israel and the Church	Many	None	None
Messianic kingdom	Future	Present	Present
Rapture[19]/SecondComing	Separate events	Same event	Same event

Binding of Satan[20]	In the future (during the Millennium)	In the present	In the present
Moral progress	Not inevitable	Not inevitable	Inevitable
Final judgment[21]	Two events	One event	One event

In these categories, for the most part, amillennialism and postmillennialism agree, which is why it's sometimes difficult to determine whether a writer is one or the other. Loraine Boettner admitted that "there is comparatively little difference between postmillennialism and amillennialism, at least when either of these is compared with historic premillennialism or dispensationalism" (in Clouse, ***MMFV***, 199). One chief distinguisher is the postmillennial belief that moral and spiritual progress is inevitable between Christ's first and second comings; this seems to contradict the many passages revealing an apostasy before He returns[22] and to effectively ignore teaching about Antichrist and the Tribulation.[23]

From this brief comparison it's obvious that the crucial eschatological difference between premillennialism and the others is hermeneutical:

(1) Consistent literal interpretation of Revelation 20 yields two resurrections,[24] one before and one after a literal thousand-year reign (the Millennium) of Christ.
(2) Consistent literal interpretation of Old and New Testament teaching on Israel's future reveals that they are distinct from the church and have a literal national future.
(3) Consistent literal interpretation of Old and New Testament prophecy

yields dispensational premillennialism.[25]

Since the defense of the historical-grammatical hermeneutic has already been given,[26] here we will illustrate and apply it to the issues and events at hand.

THE SECOND COMING

It is possible to overemphasize variations between the major evangelical views on the Millennium and forget two facts: (1) They are all within the boundaries of evangelicalism; (2) they all believe in the Second Coming:

> It should be remembered … that while post-, a- and premillennialists differ in regard to the manner and time of Christ's return, that is, in regard to the events that precede or follow his return, they agree that he will return personally, visibly and in great glory. (Boettner in Clouse, *MMFV*, 119)

Christ's Return Will Be Literal and Physical

The Second Coming is grounded in the Resurrection. Christ was resurrected in the same physical body of flesh and bones in which He died (Luke 24:36–39); He still had the crucifixion scars (cf. v. 40; John 20:20), was touched (Matt. 28:9), and consumed physical food (Luke 24:42–43). Christ also ascended, literally and physically, in that same physical body (Acts 1:11); He will come again in the same way (Zech. 14:4).[27]

Christ's Return Will Be Visible and Tangible

"Look, he is coming with the clouds, and ***every eye will see him***, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him" (Rev.

1:7). “The sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory” (Matt. 24:30). “On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two” (Zech. 14:4).

Christ’s Return Will Be Supernatural and Glorious

Jesus predicted the Second Coming[28] when interpreting the parable of the soils:

> The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. *The harvest is the end of the age*, and the harvesters are angels.
>
> As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. *The Son of Man will send out his angels*, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.[29]

John describes the Second Coming in dramatic words:

> I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself.
>
> He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. (
>
> Rev. 19:11–15
>
>)

These precious truths about Christ's return, which constitute one of the faith's great fundamentals and are held by all orthodox Christians, ***are*** a test of orthodoxy. That the intramural debate about the Millennium is not a test of orthodoxy does not mean it lacks importance; one could say that the literal hermeneutic (which yields premillennialism) is a hermeneutical fundamental, though not a doctrinal fundamental.[30] This may be why premillennialists are less likely to slip into liberalism, while those who allegorize prophecy are more likely to spiritualize (and, thereby, perhaps deny) doctrinal nonnegotiables.

PREMILLENNIALISM

Premillennialism is rooted in a literal interpretation of prophecy.[31] A consistent literal interpretation of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants,[32] a host of other Old Testament predictions, the early announcement of the kingdom of heaven by John and Jesus, and later statements by Jesus and Paul about Israel's future inexorably yield dispensational premillennialism. While historic and dispensational premillennialists both apply the literal hermeneutic to Revelation 20, unfortunately the former does not apply the same consistency when interpreting biblical predictions about Israel's destiny and the messianic (millennial) kingdom.[33]

Amillennialist Oswald Allis agreed that other views discard literal interpretation (in favor of allegorism) when it comes to biblical prophecies about the future of Israel and the exposition of Revelation (especially Rev. 20): "The Old Testament prophecies if literally interpreted cannot be regarded as having been fulfilled or as being capable of fulfillment in this present age" (cited by Hoyt in Clouse, ***MMFV***, 67). Somehow, amillennialist Anthony Hoekema took certain predictions about Israel to be fulfilled spiritually in the church, yet concedes a literal future fulfillment of the Abrahamic land-promises in the new heaven and new earth. Also, he conceded[34] that symbolic language can refer to a literal future event (such as hell—ibid., 184), but the heart of traditional amillennialism argues that millennial passages cannot be interpreted literally when they contain

symbolic language.

The Biblical Basis for Premillennialism

We have already set forth groundwork for dispensational premillennialism in a biblical examination of the messianic kingdom and in a study of the unconditional covenants made with Israel.[35] Building on this, here we will note the primary issues and show how dispensational premillennialism is the natural working-out of these promises.

The Eternal Land-Promise to Israel Is Yet to Be Fulfilled

The unconditional Abrahamic covenant has not yet been fulfilled,[36] so it will be, in a future messianic kingdom, for "the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:29 nkjv).

The Eternal Davidic Throne-Promise Is Yet to Be Fulfilled

The unconditional pledge of a future, political, earthly messianic reign is found in 2 Samuel 7:11–16. Though David wished to build a house for the Lord, God declared that He would build the house of David for him, a dynasty from which Messiah would reign on David's throne (cf. Ps. 89:20–37).

The Old Testament Ends With Israel Expecting the Messianic Kingdom

During the years prior to the end of the Old Testament (c. 400 b.c.), the prophets were still looking forward to the yet unfulfilled messianic kingdom. Isaiah prophesied of Messiah that "the government will be on his shoulders.… Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness" (Isa. 9:6–7; cf. 16:5). Malachi recorded God saying, "See, I

will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come" (Mal. 3:1).

John the Baptist Offered Israel the Messianic Kingdom

The very one of whom Malachi wrote heralded the Messiah-King (Matt. 3:1–2). Jesus (4:17), the Twelve (10:5–7), and other followers delivered the same message (Luke 10:1–12).

Jesus Offered Israel the Messianic Kingdom

The kingdom John and Jesus announced was the same as the political messianic kingdom promised in the Old Testament (see McClain, ***GK***, chapter 21).
First, the absence of any formal definition in its announcement assumes that the Jewish hearers would know what it meant; the kingdom they expected was a visible messianic reign over the earth from Jerusalem.
Second, Jesus said His teaching had continuity with the Old Testament (Matt. 5:17–18), and the terms ***son of man*** and ***kingdom of heaven*** are rooted in Daniel's messianic prophecies (see Dan. 7:13–14, 22). Jesus constantly appealed to the Old Testament to support His claims to the messianic kingdom,[37] and the gospel record always connects the kingdom proclaimed by Jesus with that of Old Testament prophecy.[38]
Third, there is literal identity with messianic events foretold by the prophets and the life of Christ, such as being born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14) in the city of Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2) from the tribe of Judah (Matt. 1:3), performing miracles (Isa. 35:5), making a triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Zech. 9:9), dying (Isa. 53; Dan. 9:26), and rising from the dead (Ps. 16:10).
Fourth, and finally, all the basic elements[39] of the Old Testament prophetic kingdom are found in Christ's message and miracles: ***spiritual*** (Matt. 3:2), ***moral*** (5–7), ***social*** (Mark 12:40–44; Luke 10:29–37), ***ecclesiastical*** (Matt. 5:17–18; 8:34), ***political*** (Luke 1:31–33; Matt. 19:28), and ***physical***, e.g., the Virgin Birth,

the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection.[40]

The Chosen Nation Rejected the Messianic Kingdom

"He [Jesus] was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him" (John 1:10–11). After His rejection by the Jews, Jesus declared, "The kingdom of God will be taken away from you[41] and given to a people who will produce its fruit" (Matt. 21:43).
Jesus announced that His kingdom was at hand (3:2), but instead of repenting and accepting their Messiah-King, they rejected Him (21:42; cf. Ps. 118:26). "Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent" (11:20). An apex of unbelief was reached when the Jewish leaders attributed His miraculous power to Satan, to which Jesus replied, "Every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven" (12:31). The mysteries of the kingdom of heaven (13:11), explained through parables, revealed the kingdom form that will dominate the interregnum until the Second Coming, when Jesus will return and initiate the long-awaited messianic form.

Christ Instituted a Present Spiritual Kingdom Until He Returns

Jesus explained the situation to His disciples: "The knowledge of the secrets [mysteries] of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them" (ibid.). Jesus cited Isaiah 6:9–10, a text used five times in the New Testament, always in connection with Israel's rejection of her King;[42] Israel's unbelief resulted in divine judgment in the form of spiritual blindness, deafness, and hardness.[43]

Jesus Promised to Restore the Messianic Kingdom to Israel

"At the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28; cf. 25:31–34; Acts 1:6–7).[44] No such event has ever happened, from Jesus' time to the present; the only option besides future fulfillment is rejection of the literal hermeneutic in favor of allegorism, which is self-defeating and inconsistent, and (if applied more broadly) undermining of evangelicalism in general.[45]

Paul Affirmed the Irrevocability of God's Promised Kingdom to Israel

Clearly the word ***Israel*** here means literal, national Israel, which Paul called my "countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises" (Rom. 9:3–4; cf. 11:1). Israel is not beyond recovery but is being used of God to bring eternal life to the Gentiles, who are in turn purposed to compel Israel to jealousy and salvation.[46] When God's complete plan of salvation is accomplished,[47] He will restore national Israel and fulfill His unconditional promises to them, including the messianic kingdom, which was delayed but never annulled by their rejection. When Messiah returns and is accepted by Israel, "all Israel will be saved" (Rom. 11:26), at the end of the Tribulation,[48] before the beginning of the Millennium.

Peter Promised Israel the Messianic Kingdom

Peter told Israel that if they repented, they would be forgiven and the promised long-awaited messianic kingdom would come (Acts 3:19–21, 24–25). They refused, and though this kingdom has not yet been fulfilled, God ***will*** restore it after Jesus returns. There is not the slightest hint that any spiritual kingdom has replaced the land- and/or throne-prophecies, which are not just for Israel but also for their literal descendants, whom Peter calls "heirs."

Paul Specified That Christ's Future Reign Would End

Paul wrote, regarding the Second Coming and the final resurrection:

> All will be made alive.... Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.... [God] has put everything under his [Christ's] feet. Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all. (
> 1 Cor. 15:22–28
>)

This fits with John's affirmations that place the two resurrections as bookends of Christ's reign: the first resurrection (of the saved) at the beginning and the second resurrection (of the lost) at the end of the thousand years. This occasions a contrast between Christ's temporal reign and God's eternal reign, between the Millennium (Rev. 20) and the new heaven and new earth (Rev. 21–22).[49]

John Specified That Christ's Reign Would Be for a Thousand Years

> I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.
>
> I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge.... They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who have a part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years. (
> 20:1–6
>)

A historical-grammatical reading of this passage[50] informs us that there will be a literal Millennium, during which Satan is bound, beginning with the raising of the saved and ending with the raising of the lost.[51] The last enemy (death) will not be destroyed until the end of Christ's reign (1 Cor. 15: 23–26), and, because the word ***resurrection*** is used exclusively of literal, bodily resurrection from the grave,[52] it makes no hermeneutical sense to spiritualize away one resurrection (as amillennialists do) while embracing the other as literal.

THE MILLENNIUM

The Length of the Millennium

The length of this period has been hotly debated, despite the meaning of the word ***millennium*** and the abundant reasons for interpreting it as a literal thousand years. (See Rev. 20:1–6.)

This Time Period Is Repeatedly Called "a Thousand Years"

Facts mentioned only once in the Bible are true; the future messianic kingdom is said to be a thousand years long ***six times*** in Revelation 20:1–7.
First, some have taken the word ***thousand*** to be symbolic of a long period of time (e.g., 1 Chron. 16:15) or of a great number of things (e.g., Job 33:23), as indeed it sometimes is. However, of its hundred-plus occurrences in the biblical text, only a handful are nonliteral, and even these are mostly hyperbole (not allegorical).
Second, other numbers in Revelation are used literally; for example, 1,260 days (12:6) is a literal three and one-half years (Dan. 12:7, 11).[53]
Third, even symbols refer to something literal, as indicated by John's literal

interpretation of symbolic usage (e.g., 1:20).[54]
Fourth, as just noted, Paul indicated that Christ's earthly reign would be a long period of time with an end.[55]
Fifth, and finally, literal numbers can have symbolic significance—Israel was tested for forty years in the wilderness (cf. Matt. 4), and while there is a symbolic meaning to this time of wandering, it is also true that they literally wandered for about forty years. Relatedly, ***thousand*** can symbolize a long period and still be literally true.

Isaiah's "Little Apocalypse" Fits John's Description in Revelation 19–21

Isaiah 24 is a prediction of the Day of the Lord that resembles John's expanded version in Revelation 6–19. Isaiah 25:6–9 envisions an everlasting kingdom that corresponds to Revelation 21–22 (the new heaven and new earth). Between these two bookends is Isaiah 24:21–23:[56]

> In that day the Lord will punish the powers in the heavens above and the kings on the earth below. They will be herded together like prisoners bound in a dungeon; they will be shut up in prison and be punished after many days. The moon will be abashed, the sun ashamed; for the Lord Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before its elders, gloriously.

When Christ returns, He will punish the devil and his emissaries, imprisoning Satan (Rev. 19:17–21; 20:1–6) and then reigning on Mount Zion (Jerusalem). "After many days" (the Millennium) there will be a punishment of the wicked before the Great White Throne (20:11–15), followed by the new heaven and new earth (20:21–22; cf. Isa. 25:6–9). These verses in Isaiah are Old Testament foretellings of an intermediate kingdom before the final judgment and God's eternal reign.

Use of the Term Forever

The term ***forever*** is often used in relation to the messianic kingdom: God promised, “Once for all, I have sworn by my holiness—and I will not lie to David—that his line will continue forever and his throne endure before me” (Ps. 89:35–36). As mentioned earlier, ***forever*** (Heb:
olam
) does not always mean “without end” (e.g., Ezek. 36:3–4), but since Christ’s kingdom will be delivered up to the Father, who will continue to reign on into the new heaven and new earth, there is no reason why ***forever*** cannot mean “without end” in this case. A thousand-year period could be a ***literal*** fulfillment of such promises.

The Existence of Evil and Death in the Millennium Implies an End

That Messiah’s kingdom reign will contain sin and death is a sure indication it will not last forever; during the thousand years Christ will have to rule with a rod of iron (Rev. 12:5), some sinners will be judged and die (Isa. 65:20), and He will crush a large rebellion at the end (Rev. 20:7–10). By contrast, the new heaven and new earth will be entirely devoid of sin and death: “He [God] will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (21:4).

The Nature of the Millennium

Again, the millennial and eternal states can be contrasted as follows:

	Millennium	**New Heaven and New Earth**
Terminus	At end of Christ’s reign	No end
Evil	Present	Not present
Death	Death occurs	No death occurs
Location	On earth	In heaven and on earth

Final judgement	Not yet occurred	Completed
Constituents	Saved and unsaved	Saved only
Satan	Not yet finally judged	Finally judged

The nature of Christ's millennial reign can be described briefly in the following points.

The Millennium Will Begin With the Second Coming

There is no kingdom of God without God the King; there is no literal kingdom without a literal King's presence. It is Messiah's return that will inaugurate the messianic kingdom:

> Immediately after the distress of those days
> [57]
> "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken." At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. (
> Matt. 24:29–30
>)

Christ Will Judge the Nations and Separate the Sheep (Saved) From the Goats (Lost)

> I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it.... Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city. Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle. On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives. (
> Zech. 14:2–4
>)

> When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. [Then,] the King will

say to those on his right, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.” … Then he will say to those on his left, “Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (
Matt. 25:31–41
).

So only saved people will enter the Millennium, namely, the remnant of the 144,000 Jews who are saved, plus the multitude they win to Christ (see Rev. 7:4–9).[58]

Some Children Born During the Millennium Will Not Believe

Saved parents can have unsaved children; of those born during the Millennium, some will accept Christ as their Savior, and others will not. Of those who do not, some will go along with His reign outwardly, while others will overtly rebel against it. The latter will be judged and die prematurely (Isa. 65:20) under the rod of iron (Rev. 12:5) with which Christ will crush all opposition. At the end of the Millennium, the false believers who only followed outwardly will rebel, at the instigation of the devil’s release from his prison, only to be destroyed by Christ:

When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth…. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God’s people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. (
20:7–9
)

Resurrected Humans Will Take Part in the Heavenly New Jerusalem

The first resurrection[59] takes place before the Millennium:

Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection.[60]
The second death has no power over them,

[61]
but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.... [These will be part of] the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. (
20:6
;
21:2
)

There will be a great wedding as the church, Christ's bride, is joined to her Husband and Head.[62]

Christ Will Reign on a Throne in Jerusalem

Jesus promised His disciples that when He sits on His throne, they would also be seated on thrones and would judge the twelve tribes (Matt. 19:28; cf. Isa. 2:3). As we have seen, this will fulfill the unconditional, everlasting Davidic covenant (2 Sam. 7:12ff.; cf. Ps. 89:33–36).

Christ's Followers Will Be Positionally Rewarded in His Reign

Christ's disciples will reign with Him, each being rewarded according to his works (2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Cor. 3:11–15); in a parable of a king entrusting servants with resources, those who were faithful and industrious were congratulated and promoted (Luke 19:16–19). Jesus said, "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done" (Rev. 22:12).

One Faith Will Be Established Over All the Earth

The millennial kingdom will not only be a divine but also a religious monarchy. The King will be the Priest (Ps. 110), the one object of worship for all nations: "'From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me,' says the Lord" (Isa. 66:23).

Every nation must comply:

> The survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the Lord Almighty, and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. If any of the peoples of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord Almighty, they will have no rain.... The Lord will bring on them the plague he inflicts on the nations that do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. (
>
> Zech. 14:16–18
>
>)

A central sanctuary, established for all worship (Ezek. 37:27–28), will be filled with God's ***shekinah*** (43:1–7). God's original intention for Israel will be established as she becomes a spiritual beacon to the nations (Isa. 61:6), making universally known the knowledge of the true God (59:19; Ezek. 37:28).

Peace Will Be Restored to the Earth

There will be no real peace until the Prince of Peace comes back: "While people are saying, 'Peace and safety,' destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape" (1 Thess. 5:3). But when Christ returns,

> He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. (
>
> Micah 4:3
>
> ; cf.
>
> Isa. 2:4
>
>)

What the current peace movement tries to do impotently, God will accomplish by His omnipotent hand. There will be no more war (Zech. 9:10).

Prosperity Will Be Restored to Earth

Not only peace but also prosperity will be restored. The earth will be fruitful and prosperous. None will want, and everyone will be supported physically and financially:

"In that day each of you will invite his neighbor to sit under his vine and fig tree," declares the Lord Almighty.... They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit.... [It will again be] a land flowing with milk and honey. [63]

Creation Will Be Delivered From Bondage

Adam's sin brought toil, suffering, and bondage to God's creation, but Paul reminds us that in the Millennium the effects of the Fall will be reversed:

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. [For] the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. (

Rom. 8:18–23

)

At the Millennium's commencement, the Paradise lost will become the Paradise regained. The dead who believed will be raised and reverse the curse on the body; nature will be restored and reverse the curse on creation.

There Will Be No Carnivorous Animals

The curse on the animal kingdom likewise will be reversed. No longer will nature be red in tooth and claw; no animals will be carnivorous; rather, they will be herbivorous, as in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:9; 3:2). " 'The wolf and the

lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, but dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain,' says the Lord" (Isa. 65:25).

Longevity Will Be Restored

Before the time of the Flood, people commonly lived 900 or more years, and apparently this kind of longevity will be restored during the Millennium:

> As the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people; my chosen ones will long enjoy the works of their hands.... Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; he who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere youth; he who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed. (vv. 22, 20)

Death Will Result From Rebellion and Punishment

Even though life is lengthened in the Millennium, death will still occur; those who survive the Tribulation[64] will still be mortal. Apparently, though, there will be no death of natural causes—decay, disease, or degeneration. It will be by judgment for rebellion against God (Rev. 12:5; Isa. 65:20) and perhaps by accident.

The Millennium is not heaven—it will not be absolutely perfect, but it will be as perfect as it can be on earth with unsaved people still in the mix (Matt. 13:29–30). ***The Millennium is not the first chapter of heaven but the last chapter of earth—not the completed victory but the last chapter in the ultimate victory***: "He must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet" (1 Cor. 15:25; cf. 13:10–12). Nonetheless, the Millennium will be a vast improvement over the world before the Second Coming: There will be no more poverty, sickness, famine, plagues, or war, and, instead, there will be peace, prosperity, and tranquility. "They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (Isa. 11:9).

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE MILLENNIUM

Like all other doctrines, premillennialism as embraced by dispensationalists is rooted in the nature of God. Several attributes[65] stand out in this regard: God's eternality, immutability, omniscience, omnisapience, omnipotence, and sovereignty.[66] The all-wise eternal God, who knows all things by His omniscient knowledge, makes unconditional promises based on His immutable character, plans all things by His unchangeable will, and achieves them with His omnipotent power. God foretold and will accomplish the future messianic millennial kingdom in which Christ the Messiah, chosen by the Father to this end, will reign.

There are other arguments for premillennialism that do not flow directly from a specific attribute of God but are based in God's activity, particularly His revelation of Himself.[67]

Unless Premillennialism Is True, God Loses the War of History

God started human history by creating people in a literal Paradise with trees, plants, animals, and rivers (Gen. 2). It had a specific geographical location, by the Tigris and Euphrates rivers (Iraq). There was no evil or suffering; Adam and Eve lived in a perfect environment.[68]

This Paradise was lost by sin: Adam and Eve defied God and brought sin, suffering, and death on themselves (3:14–9) and on the whole human race (Rom. 5:12). They were expelled from the Garden, which was sealed off and guarded by an angel (Gen. 3:24). The tempter won that battle—he brought death and its fear upon humankind (Heb. 2:14).

Consequently, if the Paradise lost is ***not*** a Paradise regained, then God will have

lost the war; if physical death is not reversed by physical resurrection, then Satan obtains ultimate victory; if literal perfection is not restored, then God will have lost what He created. However, because God is immutable and omnipotent,[69] He will reverse the curse and gain victory over the Satan-damaged creation. This He will do by a literal resurrection[70] and by a literal earthly reign of Christ.[71] He will reign until death is actually[72] defeated (1 Cor. 15:24–27; Rev. 20:4–6), at the end of the Millennium and the beginning of the new heaven and earth (21:4).

Unless Premillennialism Is True, History Has No Consummation

It is widely acknowledged that a linear view of history (that history is moving forward toward a goal) is the result of the Judeo-Christian revelation.[73] History is said to be His-story, for God has planned and is moving history toward its end (the Eschaton). Without a literal historical millennium, there is no real end to history; in traditional amillennialism, history never comes to a climax, merely ceases to be, and then the eternal state dawns. Premillennialism maintains that the Millennium is not the first chapter of eternity but the last chapter of time, the time when sin, suffering, and death will be finally overcome by Christ's reign (1 Cor. 15:24–25).

Only Premillennialism Employs a Consistent Hermeneutic

To deny premillennialism is to deny consistently literal interpretation:

(1) Nonpremillennialism takes parts of the Bible nonliterally.
(2) Nonpremillennialism takes prophecy regarding the Advent literally, but takes some of what relates to the Second Coming allegorically.

(3) Nonpremillennialism takes part of the Gospels literally, viz., Christ's death and resurrection (Matt. 26–28), but not all His statements, viz., about His return (19:28; 24–25).
(4) Nonpremillennialism will even apply both literalism and allegory to the same sentence.[74]
(5) Nonpremillennialism takes the second resurrection literally and the first spiritually (cf. Rev. 20:5–6; John 5:25–29).[75]

Further, applying the nonliteral (i.e., allegorical) hermeneutic of amillennialists and postmillennialists to other sections of Scripture undermines Christian essentials. If applied to Genesis 1–3, it would deny the historicity of Adam and Eve, the Fall, and the doctrine of creation. (If the end isn't literal, then why should the beginning be literal?) If applied to the texts on the Cross, it would deny the Atonement. If applied to the resurrection narratives, it would deny Christ's victory over death. This is why premillennialism is a ***hermeneutical*** fundamental of the faith. There are three kinds of fundamentals:

- *Doctrinal fundamentals* (e.g., the Trinity, the deity of Christ, sacrificial atonement, and the Resurrection) are tests of evangelical ***authenticity***.[76]
- *Epistemological fundamentals* (e.g., inspiration and inerrancy) are tests of evangelical ***veracity***.[77]
- *Hermeneutical fundamentals* (e.g., literal historical-grammatical interpretation and its subsequent premillennialism) are tests of evangelical ***consistency***.[78]

Premillennialism Adds Urgency to Evangelism

Premillennialism, especially in those who uphold the imminence[79] of Christ's return, creates urgency not generated by the other views. If Christ is coming before the Millennium at a time we know not, we must live with a constant sense of expectation (Luke 19:13; John 9:4). Believing that time is limited, that Christ may come at any moment, and that the eternal status of human souls is in the balance heightens the realization that any hour might be our last to reach someone for Jesus. It's no coincidence that an amazing percentage of the modern missionary movements (e.g., through William Carey [1761–1834], Adoniram Judson [1788–1850], and David Livingstone [1813–1873]) and evangelistic efforts (e.g., through John Wesley [1703–1791], D. L. Moody [1837–1899], Billy Sunday [1862–1935], and Billy Graham [b. 1918]) have been headed by premillennialists.

Premillennial Imminence Adds an Incentive for Holiness

There ***are*** other incentives for godliness, but, once again, certainly the premillennial expectation of Christ's imminent return is significant (cf. 1 John 3:2–3):

> The day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. *Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives*. (
>
> 2 Peter 3:10–11
>
>)

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR PREMILLENNIALISM

Premillennialism's foundation is strong in the early church—it was the standard

for the Fathers up to and through the early Augustine;[80] Augustine, who powerfully influenced the thousand years that followed him, later incorrectly discarded the view.

Early Fathers

Clement of Rome (c. first century a.d.)

God said to him [Abraham], “Get thee out from thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, to a land which I shall show thee.… And again, on his departing from Lot, God said to him, “Lift up thine eyes, and look from the place where thou now art, northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward; for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed forever. (*FECC*, 10)

Soon and suddenly shall His will be accomplished, as the Scripture also bears witness, saying, “Speedily will He come, and will not tarry”; and “The Lord shall suddenly come to His temple, even the Holy One for whom we look” (ibid., 23).

He forewarns us: “Behold, the Lord [cometh], and His reward is before His face, to render to every man according to his work.” He exhorts us, therefore, with our whole heart to attend to this, that we be not lazy or slothful in any good work. Let us therefore earnestly strive to be found in the number of those that wait for Him in order that we may share in His promised gifts. (ibid., 34–35)

Ignatius of Antioch (d. c. 110)

Be watchful, possessing a sleepless spirit.… Be ever coming more zealous than what thou art. Weigh carefully the times. Look on Him who is above all time, eternal and invisible, yet who became visible for our sakes. (*EP*, 1, 3)

The Epistle of Pseudo-Barnabas (c. 70–130)

The Day is at hand on which all things shall perish with the evil [one]. The Lord is near and His reward.… It therefore behooves us, who inquire much concerning events at

hand, to search diligently into those things which are able to save us. (21)

Didache (c. 120–150)

Let grace come, and let this world pass away. Hosanna to God (Son) of David! If any one is holy, let him come; if any one is not so, let him repent. Maranatha. Amen. (10.6)

Justin Martyr (c. 100–c. 165)

I and others, who are right-minded Christians on all points, are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead, and a thousand years in Jerusalem, which will then be built, adorned, and enlarged, [as] the prophets Ezekiel and Isaiah and others declare. (*DJ*, 80)

Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)

It behooves the righteous first to receive the promise of the inheritance which God promised to the fathers, and to reign in it, when they rise again to behold God in this creation which is renovated, and that the judgment should take place afterwards.... It is fitting, therefore, that the creation itself, being restored to its primeval condition, should without restraint be under the dominion of the righteous.

Thus, then, the promise of God, which He gave to Abraham, remains steadfast.... Now God made promise of the earth to Abraham and his seed; yet neither Abraham nor his seed, that is, those who are justified by faith, do now receive any inheritance in it; but they shall receive it at the resurrection of the just. For God is true and faithful; and on this account He said, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (*AH*, 5.32).

[Jesus said,] “But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of the fruit of this vine, until that day when I will drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.” Thus, then, He will Himself renew the inheritance of the earth, and will reorganize the mystery of the glory of [His] sons; as David says, “He who hath renewed the face of the earth.” He promised to drink of the fruit of the vine with His disciples, thus indicating both these points: the inheritance of the earth in which the new fruit of the vine is drunk, and the resurrection of His disciples in the flesh. For the new flesh which rises again is

the same which also received the new cup. And He cannot by any means be understood as drinking of the fruit of the vine when settled down with his [disciples] above in a super-celestial place; nor, again, are they who drink it devoid of flesh, for to drink of that which flows from the vine pertains to flesh, and not spirit.

The predicted blessing, therefore, belongs unquestionably to the times of the kingdom, when the righteous shall bear rule upon their rising from the dead; when also the creation, having been renovated and set free, shall fructify with an abundance of all kinds of food, from the dew of heaven, and from the fertility of the earth ... and that all animals feeding [only] on the productions of the earth, should [in those days] become peaceful and harmonious among each other, and be in perfect subjection to man. (ibid., 5.33)

Lactantius (c. 240–c. 320)

"The dead will rise again, not after a thousand years from their death, but that, when again restored to life, they may reign with God a thousand years" (***DI***, 7.22).

He, when He shall have destroyed unrighteousness, and executed His great judgment, and shall have recalled to life the righteous, who have lived from the beginning, will be engaged among men a thousand years, and will rule them with a most just command.... Then they who shall be alive in their bodies shall not die, but during those thousand years shall produce an infinite multitude, and their offspring shall be holy, and beloved by God; but they who shall be raised from the dead shall preside over the living as judges....

About the same time also the prince of the devils, who is the contriver of all evils, shall be bound with chains, and shall be imprisoned during the thousand years of the heavenly rule in which righteousness shall reign in the world, so that he may contrive no evil against the people of God.... Throughout this time beasts shall not be nourished by blood, nor birds by prey; but all things shall be peaceful and tranquil. (ibid., 7.24)

When the thousand years shall be completed, the world shall be renewed by God, and the heavens shall be folded together, and the earth shall be changed, and God shall transform men into the similitude of angels, and they shall be white as snow; and they shall always be employed in the sight of the Almighty, and shall make offerings to their Lord, and serve Him for ever. At the same time shall take place that second and public resurrection of all, in which the unrighteous shall be raised to everlasting punishments. (ibid., 7.26)

The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs (c. first century)

The saints shall rest in Eden, and the righteous shall rejoice in the New Jerusalem, which shall be unto the glory of God for ever and ever. And no longer shall Jerusalem endure desolation, nor Israel be led captive; for the Lord shall be in the midst of her, dwelling among men, even the Holy One of Israel reigning over them in humility and in poverty; and he who believeth on Him shall reign in truth in the heavens. (7.5)

Commodianus (fl. between third and fifth centuries)

In the flame of fire the Lord will judge the wicked. But the fire shall not touch the just, but shall by all means lick them up. In one place they delay, but a part has wept at the judgment. Such will be the heat that the stones themselves shall melt. The winds assemble into lightnings, the heavenly wrath rages; and wherever the wicked man fleeth, he is seized upon by this fire.... Flames on the nations, and the Medes and Parthians burn for a thousand years ... then after a thousand years they are delivered over to Gehenna; and he whose work they were, with them are burnt up. (*ICAGH*, 43)

We shall arise again to Him, who have been devoted to Him. And they shall be incorruptible, even already living without death. And neither will there be any grief nor any groaning in that city. They shall come also who overcame cruel martyrdom under Antichrist, and they themselves live for the whole time, and receive blessings because they have suffered evil things; and they themselves marrying, beget for a thousand years.... The earth renewed without end pours forth abundantly. (ibid., 44)

Ephraem of Syria (c. 306–373)

Grant Jeffrey (b. 1948) discovered an untranslated manuscript by a Syrian Christian poet who was not only premillennial but also pretribulational.[81] This is a phenomenal find, particularly in light of posttribulationist pronouncements that "we can find no trace of pretribulationism in the early church" (Ladd, ***BH***, 31). The argument from perceived silence is often dangerous.

> Why therefore do we not reject every care of earthly actions and prepare ourselves for the meeting of the Lord Christ? ... All saints and the Elect of the Lord are gathered together before the Tribulation which is about to come and are taken to the Lord, in order that they may not see at any time the confusion which overwhelms the world because of our sins. (cited in Ice, *WTS*, 110–11)

Medieval Fathers

During the early Middle Ages and continuing on through the Reformation, the amillennial view gained dominance under the influence of the "Medieval Monolith," Augustine of Hippo (354–430). Unfortunately, as regards prophecy, Augustine would come to reject the literal hermeneutic[82] for a more allegorical approach. Thus, coupled with the Roman Catholic wedding of the spiritual and earthly kingdoms,[83] and with the later Reformers' preoccupation with other critical issues, allegorical amillennialism gained preeminence up to modern times. Through exegetical progress and reapplication of the literal hermeneutic, premillennialism has experienced revival.

Augustine

The early Augustine was premillennial, but he changed his view when he overreacted to a chiliastic cult[84] and adopted an allegorical approach, a crucial error that amillennialists and postmillennialists have perpetuated since his time.

> Those who, on the strength of this passage [Rev. 20:1–6], have suspected that the first resurrection is future and bodily, have been moved, among other things, specially by the number of a thousand years, as if it were a fit thing that the saints should thus enjoy a kind of Sabbath-rest during that period.... And this opinion would not be objectionable, if it were believed that the joys of the saints in that Sabbath shall be spiritual and consequent on the presence of God; for I myself, too, once held this opinion. (*CG*, 259)

Why did Augustine forsake premillennialism?

> They assert that those who then rise again shall enjoy the leisure of immoderate carnal banquets, furnished with an amount of meat and drink such as not only to shock the feelings of the temperate, but even to surpass the measure of credulity itself; such assertions can be believed only by the carnal. (ibid.)

With what did Augustine replace literal interpretation? With allegorical: “This resurrection [in John 5] regards not the body, but the soul. For souls, too, have a death of their own wickedness and sins.…[85]

Regarding Revelation 20:1–6, Augustine likewise offers his allegorical interpretation:

> There are two resurrections—the one the first and spiritual resurrection, which has place in this life, and preserves man from coming into the second death; the other the second, which does not occur now, but in the end of the world, and which is of the body, not of the soul, and which by the last judgment shall dismiss some into the second death, others into that life which has no death. (*CG*, 20.6)

> Many passages I omit, because, though they seem to refer to the last judgment, yet on a closer examination they are found to be ambiguous, or to allude rather to some other event—whether to that coming of the Savior which continually occurs in His Church, that is, in His members, in which comes little by little, and piece by piece, since the whole Church is His body, or to the destruction of the earthly Jerusalem. For when He speaks even of this, He often uses language which is applicable to the end of the world and that last and great day of judgment, so that these two events cannot be distinguished unless all the corresponding passages bearing on the subject in the three evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, are compared with one another—for some things are put more obscurely by one evangelist and more plainly by another—so that it becomes apparent what things are meant to be referred to one event. (ibid., 20.5)

Thus, the medieval departure from the permillenialism of the New Testament and the early Fathers was based in the adoption of an allegorical hermeneutic.

Reformation Fathers

The major Reformers, like Luther and Calvin, were amillennial. As they were largely preoccupied with soteriological matters,[86] they left latent their Augustinian eschatology to await a future consistent application of the literal hermeneutic (as they themselves had done to salvific matters, which made the Reformation possible).

Post-Reformation Teachers

Among the many who rediscovered the premillennialism of the New Testament and the early Fathers were those in the Lutheran, Reformed, and Puritan traditions.

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758)

The saints have hitherto for the most part been kept under, and wicked men have governed. But now they will be uppermost; the kingdom shall be given into the hands of the saints of the "most high God" (
Dan. 7:27
). And "they shall reign on earth" (
Rev. 5:10
). They shall live and "reign with Christ a thousand years" (
20:4
). (*HWR*, 3.8.3)

Then antichrist will be confined to hell, and will have no more place here on earth; much after the same manner as the devil is said at the beginning of Christ's thousand years' reign on earth, to be cast into the bottomless pit, as you may see in the beginning of [
Rev. 20
]. (*EWCR*, intro.)

John Gill (1697–1771)

The rest of the dead … meaning not the dead saints, for they will be all raised together, but the wicked dead; and not them as morally or spiritually, but as corporeally dead: these *lived not again until the thousand years were finished*; so that there will be such an exact term of years between the resurrection of the saints and the resurrection of the wicked; nor will there be any [of these] wicked living upon earth, or in bodies, during that time; for the wicked dead will not be raised with the saints at Christ's coming, and the wicked living will be destroyed in the conflagration of the world, and neither of them shall live again until the end of these years. (*EWB*, on
Rev. 20:5
)

Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892)

What galleys, laden to the water's edge, come to us from the millennium! What visions we have of the days of heaven upon earth! Through our glorious Lord we have commerce with angels; communion with the bright spirits washed in blood, who sing before the throne; nay, better still, we have fellowship with the Infinite One. (*ME*, Nov. 24)

There is also a host of nineteenth- and twentieth-century premillennialists, including John Nelson Darby, C.I. Scofield (1843–1921), George Peters (1825–1909), Erich Sauer, Lewis Sperry Chafer, John Walvoord, Charles Ryrie (b. 1925), and many others. Since their teachings are widely disseminated, it is unnecessary to fill these pages with their citations supporting premillennialism.

ANSWERING OBJECTIONS TO PREMILLENNIALISM

Many arguments have been leveled against premillennialism (especially of the dispensational variety); those we have already addressed, directly or peripherally,[87] we'll only examine in summary form.

Objection One: That the Millennium Is Mentioned Only Once in Scripture

Opponents often argue that a thousand-year reign comes up only once in the Bible (Rev. 20). All other references to a future reign speak of it being "eternal" (cf. 2 Sam. 7:16; Ps. 89:36), and, thus, this single reference should not be taken literally.

Response to Objection One

First of all, the charge is untrue—the “thousand years” of the millennial reign is mentioned six times (Rev. 20:2–7). Being “born again” is only mentioned twice (John 3:3, 7), yet no evangelical has difficulty upholding that.
Furthermore, one biblical occurrence is sufficient: “The truth and reliability of a Divine word does not depend upon the number of statements which God permits to be made concerning it. If God makes a statement only once we have simply to believe it” (Sauer, ***EE***, 147).
Also, there are other scriptural indications that Christ will reign for a long period of time;[88] Revelation 20 repeatedly tells us how long that time will be.

Objection Two: That the Promises to Israel Are Conditional

The amillennial response to one of premillennialism’s strong arguments is that the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants, which clearly have not yet been literally fulfilled as predicted, are actually conditional. Oswald Allis offers the following:

> [*First*,] a condition may be involved in a command or promise without its being specifically stated. This is illustrated by the career of Jonah. Jonah was commanded to preach judgment, unconditioned, unqualified....
>
> [*Second*,] it is true that, in the express terms of the covenant with Abraham, obedience is not stated as a condition. But that obedience was presupposed is clearly indicated by two facts. The one is that obedience is the precondition of blessing under all circumstances (
>
> Ps. 68:6
>
>).... The second fact is that in the case of Abraham the duty of obedience is particularly stressed (in
>
> Gen. 18:17ff
>
> .;
>
> 22:18
>
> ;
>
> 26:5
>
>)....
>
> [*Third*,] that obedience was vitally connected with the Abrahamic covenant is shown with special clearness by the fact that there was connected with it a sign, the rite of circumcision.... Cutting off from the covenant people was the penalty for failure to observe it....

[*Fourth*,] that those who insist the Abrahamic covenant was wholly unconditional, do not really so regard it, is shown by the great importance which Dispensationalists attach to Israel's being "in the land" as the precondition of blessing under this covenant.…

[*Fifth*,] that Dispensationalists do not regard the Abrahamic covenant as wholly unconditional is indicated also by the fact that we never hear them speak of the restoration of Esau to the land of Canaan and to full blessing under the Abrahamic covenant.… Why is Esau excluded from the blessing of his covenant? He was a son of Isaac as much as Jacob was. How could his disobedience deprive his descendants of the blessing of the covenant, if the covenant did not require obedience? …

[*Sixth*,] it is important to distinguish between the certainty of the ultimate fulfillment of the promise to the seed of Abraham and the blessedness and security of the nation or of the individuals at any given time under the covenant.… The certainty of the fulfillment of the covenant is not due to the fact that it is unconditional, nor is its fulfillment dependent upon the imperfect obedience of sinful men. [Rather,] the certainty of the fulfillment of the covenant and the security of the believer under it, ultimately depend wholly on the obedience of Christ. (*PC*, 32, 34, 36)

Response to Objection Two

In response, (1) all of these arguments are flawed, and (2) there is abundant evidence to the contrary.

Refuting the Argument From Jonah's Commission

It's true that there was an implied condition in Jonah's proclamation of Nineveh's doom; however, applying this to the unconditional covenant with Abraham is a category mistake for many reasons:

(1) No covenant was made with Jonah—he was merely commissioned to give a divine message to Nineveh.
(2) The very nature of the proclamation about the Assyrians' moral condition and the forty-day period implies that God was giving them time to repent. There are no such implied conditions in the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants.[89]

(3) Jonah understood the announcement of God's judgment on Nineveh as conditional—that's why he didn't want to go (Jonah 4:2).
(4) Jesus presented it as conditional (Matt. 12:41). Claiming Jonah as a reason these other covenants should be taken as conditional is a false analogy.

Further, and most important, we have seen clear, explicit evidence that the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants are unconditional:[90]

(1) The Abrahamic covenant was one-sided (unilateral).
(2) The Bible declares emphatically that the Abrahamic covenant is unconditional (e.g., Heb. 6:13–14, 17–18).
(3) The same is true of the Davidic covenant, about which God pointedly stated that disobedience would not annul His unconditional promise (Ps. 89:30–37).

Refuting the Argument From Abraham's Obedience

First, as Allis admits, "It is true that, in the express terms of the covenant with Abraham, obedience is not stated as a condition." With a covenant, it is the "express terms" that matter.
Second, to argue that obedience is a condition under all circumstances begs the question and is contrary to fact, as shown by the explicit unconditional statements about these covenants.[91]

Third, that Abraham's obedience is mentioned in other texts[92] is irrelevant; this confuses the ***result*** of Abraham accepting God's unconditional promise with a ***condition*** for receiving it. While obedience is a condition for Abraham's seed to ***experience*** the blessings of the covenant, it was not a condition for God ***giving*** them.[93]
Fourth, it is contrary to the biblical teaching of grace (unmerited favor) to say that anything, including our obedience, is a condition for God granting us His grace. We do not work ***for*** grace; we work ***from*** grace.[94] How ironic that

biblical scholars from the Reformed tradition would miss this truth.

Refuting the Argument From Circumcision

This too is a strange position for a Reformed scholar. Circumcision was not a condition for receiving the benefit of the unconditional Abrahamic covenant; as Paul argued, circumcision is not a condition for receiving God's grace but a sign of it (Rom. 4:9–11). Regarding justification by faith, the unconditional covenant was given to Abraham in Genesis 15, and he was not circumcised until Genesis 17.

> The law, introduced 430 years later,
> [95]
> does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but *God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise*. (
> Gal. 3:17–18
>)

The Abrahamic land- and seed-promises are unconditional, and so is the Davidic throne promise (cf. Ps. 89:20–37); the later Mosaic covenant was conditional (cf. Ex. 19:5).

Refuting the Argument From the Need for Israel to Be in the Land

The stress on the importance of Israel being in the Promised Land is not because that is a condition for God ***giving*** them the land; rather, it was a condition for their receiving the ***blessings*** that accrued to this promise. The ***gift*** of the Land is unconditional; Israel's ***blessings*** for dwelling in the Land were conditional.
A similar distinction is found in our salvation. There are no conditions for God ***giving*** us salvation; it is completely by grace. However, there is one condition for our ***receiving*** this gift and enjoying its blessing: faith.[96]

Refuting the Argument From Esau

Some covenant theologians claim that Esau's exclusion from the blessing is a proof that the Abrahamic covenant is not unconditional (see Allis, ***PC***).

In response, ***no one*** entered into the blessing of the covenant by virtue of being a physical descendant of Abraham (cf. Rom. 9:6–7); ***only*** those who appropriated the blessing by faith were able to enjoy it (cf. 4:13–16). Esau is portrayed as an unbeliever in Hebrews 12:16–17, so he forfeited his enjoyment of the covenant blessings by his unbelief.

Like Ishmael (see Gen. 17), Esau was blessed by God, but as an outsider to the covenant. Remember, the everlasting promise of the Holy Land to Abraham's physical descendants is unconditional, but this is distinguished from receiving the blessings of being in the Land. Being a physical descendent of Abraham did not guarantee every individual Israelite a place in the kingdom;[97] ethnic heritage is a necessary condition for this blessing but not a sufficient one.[98] The blessing is to be claimed by faith, as Paul unmistakably teaches (Rom. 9:6; 4:13, 16).

Refuting the Argument From the Distinction Between Blessedness and Fulfillment of the Promise

This is the most perplexing of the six arguments, for it appears to be presenting the same point just made and thus undermines the footing of the amillennialist. We can agree completely with Allis that "the certainty of the fulfillment of the covenant is not due to the fact that it is unconditional, nor is its fulfillment dependent upon the imperfect obedience of sinful men." This is precisely premillennialism's point, namely, that Israel's disobedience did not annul God's unconditional, eternal land- and throne-promises.

Of course, there is a sense in which God cannot fulfill His ultimate purposes to have a redeemed Israel in the land of a crucified and resurrected Messiah-King unless both the Redeemer and the redeemed exercise their freedom[99] to accept God's will for them. This, though, is another version of the predestination/free-will question already discussed in detail.[100] In brief, the answer is that God

both foreordained and foreknew exactly who would believe (1 Peter 1:2; Rom. 8:29).

Whatever God foreknows must come to pass, otherwise He would have been wrong in what He foreknew. An omniscient mind cannot be wrong about anything, so the event is determined from the standpoint of God's foreknowledge and foreordination (which are coordinate eternal acts), and yet it is free from the vantage point of the freedom of choice God gave us. After all, God ordained the Cross from all eternity (Acts 2:22–23; Rev. 13:8), and yet Jesus freely chose it (John 10:17–18).

To summarize, the amillennialist arguments in no way undermine the straightforward biblical teaching about God's unconditional land- and kingdom-promises to Israel (cf. Rom. 11:29). Since these have not yet been fulfilled, we can rest assured, based on God's unchangeable nature,[101] that there will be a future, literal, earthly, thousand-year messianic reign (Rev. 20:1–6).

Objection Three: That the Land-Promises Were Fulfilled in Joshua's Day

According to some amillennialists, the Abrahamic land-promises were fulfilled after Joshua conquered the Land:

> So the Lord gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their forefathers, and they took possession of it and settled there. The Lord gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their forefathers.... Not one of all the Lord's good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled. (Josh. 21:43–45)

Response to Objection Three

This cannot have been the final fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant.[102] *First*, there were still prophecies about Israel inheriting the land after Joshua's time (e.g., cf. Amos 9:14–15).

Second, they did not possess all the land that was promised to Abraham, namely, east of Jordan all the way to the Euphrates (Gen. 15:18).
Third, they did not possess it forever, as promised to Abraham, but were later dispossessed of it by the Babylonian captivity.
Fourth, statements in Judges, immediately after Joshua died, indicate that they did not even possess all the land west of Jordan at this time. They were still trying to drive out the evil inhabitants who remained (Judges 1:27–34).
Fifth, Joshua 21 refers to the promises through Moses made with "the house of Israel," not to those made to Abraham.
Sixth, Joshua 21 appears to refer to the extent of the land as outlined in the Mosaic covenant (Num. 34), which was not the full extent God promised to Abraham (Gen. 15:18–21).
Seventh, even in the New Testament the kingdom had not yet been restored to Israel (Luke 19:11ff.; Acts 1:6–8).
Eighth, and finally, Paul affirmed that the restoration of national Israel would not be until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in (Rom. 11:25; cf. Luke 21:24).

Objection Four: That the Abrahamic Land-Promises Were Fulfilled in the Later Monarchy

Allis argues, "The very words which appear in the covenant (Gen. 13:16; 15:5; 22:7) are used of the nation of Israel in the time of Solomon: 'sand' (1 Kings 4:20), 'stars' (1 Chron. 27:23) and 'dust' (2 Chron 1:9) are the standards of comparison. This would indicate that the [Abrahamic] promise was regarded as fulfilled in this respect in the golden age of the Monarchy" (***PC***, 58).

Response to Objection Four

While 1 Kings 4:20 says that Solomon at one time reigned over the land designated in the Abrahamic covenant, this cannot be taken as the fulfillment. *First*, he reigned over it for a very short time, not forever, as promised to Abraham.

Second, again, even after Solomon's time, future land promises were made.
Third, the seed-promise made to Abraham (viz., Christ—see Gal. 3:16) was not fulfilled in the monarchy.
Fourth, the references to Israel being as numerous as the stars and the dust do not fulfill the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants for the same reasons as those just listed.
Fifth, this text does not claim that it is a complete and final fulfillment of either the Abrahamic or the Davidic covenant.

Objection Five: That the Land-Promises Will Be Fulfilled in the New Earth

Some amillennialists, such as Anthony Hoekema and Vern Poythress (b. 1944), have posited that the land-promises to Israel will not be fulfilled in the Millennium but in the new earth (Rev. 21:22). They do this by holding to the literal and unconditional nature of these promises while at the same time rejecting consistent literal interpretation of the millennial passage in Revelation 20.

Response to Objection Five

First of all, the premillennialist rejoices that at least some amillennialists have taken the promises as literal, as yet unfulfilled, and as finding their fulfillment in the new earth (as premillennialists have upheld all along).
However, their skipping over the Millennium as the beginning point in this fulfillment is inconsistent; the same hermeneutic that yields a literal future fulfillment of these promises also yields a literal thousand-year messianic reign and a clear difference from the eternal state (see above under "The Nature of the Millennium").[103]
Also, like the First and Second Comings, which the Old Testament sometimes connects (cf. Isa. 61:1–2), even so the Millennium and the new heaven and new earth are spoken of together (Isa. 66:22–24; cf. 65:17ff.).

In conclusion, many premillennialists believe the land-promises to Israel will go on literally forever (without end) in the new earth (e.g., see Walvoord, ***M***); this is not inherently contradictory to the premillennial view.

Objection Six: That the Promises to Israel Are Fulfilled Spiritually in the Church

A more serious charge, one that strikes to the core of the differences between covenant theologians and dispensationalists, is that there will be no literal fulfillment of these promises to Israel, since they are being fulfilled spiritually in the church, "spiritual Israel." This position is based on a number of texts that require separate replies.[104]

Responses to Objection Six

Matthew 2:15

Matthew uses Hosea 11:1, a text that refers to Israel coming out of Egypt, to Jesus returning from Egypt as a child. This does not bolster the claim that the church spiritually fulfills all Israel's literal land- and kingdom-promises. As we've seen again and again, while the New Testament sometimes gives an ***application*** of the Old Testament passage, it never spiritualizes away the literal truth (***interpretation***).

Hebrews 8:7–13

The same is true of the new covenant, which was ***made*** with national Israel (and will be literally fulfilled with them). While it is also ***applied*** to the church (Heb. 8:7–13), since the benefits of Christ's death are for both (Gen. 3:15; 12:3), the

literal promise will be literally fulfilled.[105]

1 Corinthians 10:4

Israel, in the wilderness, "drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ" (nkjv). As already established,[106] the Rock that followed them was a literal rock with an endless source of water—a Christophany, a literal manifestation of Christ and His supernatural power (cf. Gen. 18:2, 8, 22).

Romans 4:16

This verse teaches that "the promise comes by faith … to all Abraham's offspring … also to those who are of the faith of Abraham." On this basis, amillennialists argue that Abraham's spiritual seed, those who have faith in Christ, will inherit what was originally promised to Abraham's physical seed. In reply, this is true, but Abraham having two sets of offspring does not mean one replaces the other; once again, the spiritual seed is a parallel seed, not a replacement seed. As already demonstrated,[107] Abraham's physical descendants will see the fulfillment of God's land- and kingdom-promises at the Second Coming.[108]

Galatians 6:16

Paul's reference here to the "Israel of God" is often taken by allegorists to mean "spiritual Israel," so they consider this to be proof that Paul is using "Israel" in a spiritual sense of the church. This interpretation is by no means necessary; in fact, given the context (which leads to the discovery of meaning),[109] it should be taken as referring to Israelites (Jews) who are true believers (which also fits with Paul's usage in other places). Consider the following evidence for not

taking this as a so-called spiritual Israel.[110]

First, Paul says nothing of a spiritual Israel. "Israel of God" denotes literal Israelites who have accepted the message of God's grace.[111] This fits with his language in a similar situation where he refers to literal Israelites who are false teachers in contrast to: "We are ***the circumcision [Jews] who worship God*** in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." "Israel of God" and those of the "circumcision, who worship God" (Phil. 3:3 nkjv) are the same group, viz., Jews saved by grace.

Second, this interpretation fits contextually; Paul is contending with those who taught legalistic messages of works. These he called false teachers who were Israelites (Jews) not of God; that is, their teaching was contrary to the true gospel (cf. Gal. 6:12–13).

Third, Paul's language here fits with his consistent use of ***Israel*** as a reference to literal Jews, the physical descendants of Abraham and David (e.g., cf. Rom. 9:3–4; 10:1). Not once does the New Testament use ***Israel*** in a spiritual sense.[112]

A. B. Davidson (1831–1902) summarized:

> Certainly the extreme anti-literal interpretation which considers the names Zion, Jerusalem, Israel, and the like to be mere names for the Christian Church, without reference to the people of Israel, does no justice either to the spirit of the Old Testament and its principle, or to the principles on which the apostle [Paul] reasons. (*OTP*, 490, quoted in Ramm, *PBI*, 254n)

Ephesians 1:9–10

> [God] made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

God's "mystery" coming to fulfillment "in Christ," according to covenant theology, demonstrates that the church fulfills the promises to Israel, showing that there is only one people of God under Christ's headship.

In response, ***first***, Harold Hoehner (b. 1935) says, "This dispensation is the millennial kingdom when 'the times' in God's purposes will be completed (fulfilled), and all things both spiritual and material will be under Christ and His rule" (cf. 1 Cor. 15:27; Col. 1:20). So rather than oppose the dispensational view, the text supports it.

Second, while dispensationalists admit there is ultimately one family of God to which all believers of all ages belong, this passage is apparently not speaking about it. The "general assembly" in heaven (Heb. 12:23 nkjv) may refer to it, as may "his whole family in heaven and on earth" (Eph. 3:15). In any event, that all believers from all ages share a common God, a common Savior, a common faith, and a common family in no way diminishes the fact that God has different functions and different roles for different members of His overall family, such as those distinguishing Israel and the church.

Third, while the Old Testament made promises fulfilled in Christ, it never says all of this would be completed at the First Coming, or that the literal, unconditional land- and throne-promises (to Abraham and David, respectively) would be fulfilled in the church as a "spiritual Israel" replacing national Israel.

1 Peter 2:9

Peter uses language from Exodus 19:6, which describes national Israel as a chosen people belonging to God, as applicable to the church. We have seen that this does not affirm the church as a spiritual Israel and/or that Israel's literal promises are fulfilled spiritually. (1) Peter doesn't quote this passage but borrows some language from it. (2) He applies these words to the church; he doesn't claim that this is the fulfillment of the original text. (3) Even if it could be shown that the church is somehow a fulfillment of ***some*** Old Testament promises, it wouldn't mean that ***all*** of Israel's literal land- and kingdom-promises are transferred spiritually to the church.

Objection Seven: That Jesus Said His Kingdom Was Not of This World

"My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."

"You are a king, then!" said Pilate.

Jesus answered, “You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me” (

John 18:36–37

).

Amillennialists take this as a clear and emphatic denial that Jesus had any intentions to set up a political kingdom: “Surely Jesus’ replies to Pilate indicate that he is not the King of an earthly kingdom but that he is King in the realm of truth—in other words, the King of a kingdom which is primarily spiritual, not earthly” (Hoekema in Clouse, ***MMFV***, 106).

Response to Objection Seven

This is correct up to a point: Christ’s words ***were*** a clear and emphatic denial that He had any intentions of setting up such a kingdom—***then***. Jesus ***is*** only the King of a “spiritual” kingdom—***now***. The problem is the assumption, contrary to the evidence, that Jesus will not set up the unconditionally promised earthly political Davidic kingdom in the future. This is:

(1) contrary to numerous unconditional Old Testament prophecies;[113]
(2) contrary to the New Testament offers by John and Jesus of this kingdom;[114]
(3) contrary to Jesus’ statement in Acts 1:6–8;[115]
(4) Contrary to Peter’s offer in Acts 3;
(5) contrary to Pauline declarations in Romans 11;[116] and
(6) contrary to a literal interpretation of Revelation 20:1–6.[117]

Objection Eight: That There Will Be Only One Resurrection

A key difference between premillennial and nonpremillennial views is in interpreting the first resurrection of Revelation 20:4–6. If it is a literal resurrection, separated by a thousand years from the second literal resurrection, then premillennialism is correct. If it is a spiritual resurrection—namely, spiritual regeneration (i.e., salvation), then nonpremillennialism is correct and there is only one literal resurrection, which would take place after the (real or supposed) thousand years.

Nonpremillennialists often use John 5:25–27 as evidence that the first resurrection of Revelation 20 is spiritual and that only the second resurrection will be literal. Here Jesus speaks of a spiritual regeneration resulting from believing in Him; He then describes a physical resurrection, namely, those who "come forth" from "graves" (John 5:28–29 nkjv). It is argued that, by analogy, this is the same as the two resurrections of Revelation 20, the first resurrection being spiritual regeneration and the second being the literal resurrection at the end of the age.

Response to Objection Eight

Historic premillennialist George Eldon Ladd responds pointedly to such reasoning:

> This passage does not provide a real analogy to the passage in the Apocalypse.... There is an all-important difference. In John the context itself provides the clues for the spiritual interpretation in the one instance and the literal in the other.
>
> Concerning the first group [in John 5], *the hour has already come*. This makes it clear that it refers to those who are spiritually dead and who enter into life upon hearing the voice of the Son of God. [By contrast,] the second group ... are *in the tombs*. They are not spiritually dead but physically dead. (in Clouse, *MMFV*, 36)
>
> In Revelation 20 *there is no such contextual clue for a similar variation of interpretation*. The language of the passage is quite clear and unambiguous. There is neither necessity nor contextual

possibility to interpret *ezesan* [“come to life,” vv.
4–5
] spiritually in order to introduce meaning to the passage. At the beginning of the thousand years some of the dead [the saved] come to life; at the conclusion, the rest of the dead [the lost] come to life.… The passage makes perfectly good sense when interpreted literally. [That is,] natural inductive exegesis suggests that both words are to be taken in the same way, referring to literal resurrection. (ibid., 37)

This is reinforced by the fact that the same word [*ezesan*] is used two other times … in Revelation in reference to a physical resurrection (
2:8
;
13:14
). As the noted commentator Henry Alford said: “If, in a passage where *two resurrections* are mentioned … the first resurrection may be understood to mean spiritual rising with Christ, while the second means literal rising from the grave … then there is an end of all significance to language,
[118]
and Scripture is wiped out as a definite testimony to anything” (ibid., 36–37).

John, who also wrote Revelation (cf.
1:1
), when speaking of the literal resurrection from the “graves” (
John 5:28
), records Jesus’ teaching that there will be two resurrections within a future “hour”:
[119]

A time is coming when all who are *in their graves* will hear his voice and *come out*—those who have done good will rise to live [first resurrection], and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned [second resurrection]. (vv.
28–29
)

This follows the almost universal pattern of referring to end-time resurrection.[120] “Resurrection” (Gk: ***anastasis***) is never biblically used of a spiritual resurrection; it always means a literal physical resurrection from the dead.[121] There ***is*** a spiritual coming to life called “regeneration” (Titus 3:5–7; cf. Eph. 2:1), but this is never scripturally called a resurrection. It ***isn’t*** a resurrection, that is, “a coming alive again”;[122] those dead in sin were born that way—they were never alive spiritually.[123]

Objection Nine: That Prophecies Are Symbolic, Since They Use Symbolic Language

Many prophetic passages use symbolic language, so covenantalists argue that they shouldn't be understood as referring to literal events. For example, because Revelation 20 refers to a "key," a dragon, and a "chain," it is reasoned that the "thousand years" must be spiritual and not literal.

Response to Objection Nine

For one thing, this is a misunderstanding of symbols, which refer to literal things.[124] Just as a stop sign refers to a literal road crossing, the "dragon" (v. 2) refers to a literal Satan.

For another, biblical symbols are usually interpreted so that the literal meaning they symbolize can be understood. John interpreted symbols—for instance, the "seven stars" were the seven messengers to the seven churches (symbolized as "seven golden lampstands," 1:20)—and Jesus interpreted parabolic symbolism for the disciples (e.g., cf. Matt. 13:39).

Objection Ten: That the Old Testament Should Be Viewed in Light of the New

Amillennialism and postmillennialism avoid literal fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies to Israel in a millennial kingdom.[125] They use the Old Testament sacrificial system as an example, claiming that since Christ fulfilled it (1 Cor. 5:7; Heb. 7–10), we should read the Old Testament through the lens of the Cross. Likewise, since they argue that the literal land- and kingdom-promises are fulfilled in Christ, interpreting them as having a literal future fulfillment is

actually using the Old Testament to interpret the New.
Allis criticized dispensationalists by claiming that it "is a faulty and unscriptural literalism which, in the important field of prophecy, ignores the typical and preparatory character of the Old Testament dispensation."

> The assertion that "Israel always means Israel" and that the kingdom prophecies enter the New Testament "absolutely unchanged" leads at once and inevitably to the conclusion that the "kingdom of heaven" which John the Baptist announced as "at hand" was an earthly, political, national kingdom of the Jews. (*PC*, 256)

Response to Objection Ten

First, that ***is*** precisely what "the assertion" means, as a normal, literal, commonsense hermeneutic demands.
Second, the assertion that Israel does not mean Israel, and that literal kingdom-prophecies can be made to mean a spiritual kingdom, leads at once and inevitably to amillennialism. (It also leads to "confusionism.")
Third, the amillennial hermeneutic is both retroactive and unbiblical.
For one thing, it perpetuates a category mistake: Not all Old Testament predictions were types. The sacrificial system ***did*** point forward to Christ and ***was*** a type; that is, it was a symbol that anticipated the antitype who would fulfill it (cf. John 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7). By contrast, a covenant is ***not*** a type that points forward to its own fulfillment, and an unconditional covenant (such as the Abrahamic or the Davidic), unlike a conditional covenant (such as the Mosaic), will never cease to be in effect as foretold.
In addition, the Old Testament should ***not*** be interpreted in light of the New, because later writings, inspired or not, do not change the meaning of earlier writings.[126] Meaning is objective and absolute;[127] a text means what the author meant by it, nothing more and nothing less. Later authors can add more information on the same topic, but they cannot change the meaning of earlier texts.
Furthermore, regarding inspired writings, God can and does know more about the topic (and see more implications) than the human coauthor,[128] but they both affirm exactly the same thing in the same text.

Consequently, the retroactive hermeneutic is seriously misdirected as to Old Testament promises and prophecies about Israel—it is not exegetical but eisegetical. New Testament revelation does not change the meaning of these texts; it may give more implications than the original author had in mind, and it may give more information on the topic being discussed, but it cannot change the meaning so that what was meant for Israel is now fulfilled in the church. This is ***not*** to say that writers can't search their own writings to find implications of which they were unaware when they penned them; scriptural authors could and did (cf. 1 Peter 1:10–12).[129] It ***is*** to say that what they said, God said, and what they meant, God meant: The one inspired text has one inspired meaning affirmed by both the divine and human authors. Therefore, the Old Testament is to be interpreted in light of ***itself***; whatever it meant in that context by those authors who wrote to those people is what it still means.

Objection Eleven: That the New Covenant Is Fulfilled in the Church

"The time is coming," declares the Lord, "when *I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah*. It will not be like the [Mosaic] covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because *they broke my covenant*, though I was a husband to them" (
Jer. 31:31–32
).

Hebrews seems to say this covenant is said to be fulfilled in the church: "If there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another.… By calling this covenant 'new,' he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear." (8:7, 13)

Response to Objection Eleven

It's not that the new covenant was ***made*** with Israel and fulfilled in the church; it

was made with Israel and also ***applied*** to the church.[130] Again, that there are Gentiles who inherit God's promised spiritual blessings through Abraham in no way cancels God's unconditional material promises to his physical descendants.

Objection Twelve: That Taking Ezekiel 40–48 Literally Contradicts Hebrews 8–10

Ezekiel apparently says that in the messianic period the before-Christ Jewish sacrificial system will be reinstituted. Many premillennialists take this literally; indeed, to do otherwise would seem to be inconsistent with their own hermeneutic.[131] For the New Testament in general, and Hebrews in particular, is emphatic that Christ forever did away with the need for animal sacrifice; returning to this system would be a denial of the sufficiency of His once-for-all, final sacrifice, which fulfilled it:

> We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest stands daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till his enemies are made his footstool. For by one offering he has perfected forever those who are sanctified.... Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin.... For if we sin willfully after we receive the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins. (Heb. 10:10–14 , 18 , 26 nkjv)

Response to Objection Twelve

Premillennialists have responded in two basic ways to this objection: Some take

it typologically, and others view it literally.[132]

The Typological Interpretation

Those who argue for typological interpretation claim that these sacrifices are to be understood as symbols or foreshadowers of what was fulfilled in Christ's all-sufficient sacrifice (10:1–18). They give the following reasons.

First, since Christ literally fulfilled these ***types***, they insist that typological interpretation, in this case, does not forsake literal historical-grammatical interpretation. Further, it does not open the door for further spiritualization regarding Israel and the church,[133] since those were ***not*** types fulfilled by Christ.

Second, it makes sense for Ezekiel to speak of the future temple in terms that the Israelites of his day would understand (which included animal sacrifices).[134]

Third, Hebrews teaches that Christ fulfilled and abolished the Old Testament sacrificial system and priesthood (8:8–10); taking Ezekiel literally would contradict the New Testament.

Fourth, Revelation describes the future heavenly city with no temple or sacrifices, only Christ the Lamb (21:22ff.).

Fifth, Ezekiel portrays the Gentiles as excluded from Israel's temple, which is contrary to New Testament teaching that Jew and Gentile are one in Christ (cf. Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:12–22).

In ***The Theocratic Kingdom***, George Peters defended the typological view of these sacrifices in Ezekiel:

> It is a figure of speech called … "hypocatastasis" by which one thing is employed as a substitute or equivalent for another. This figure is employed by the prophet to portray a future existing priesthood, using for this purpose the priesthood then known, just as future enemies of God are presented under the names Moab, Babylon, etc., of enemies then existing. (Peters, *TK* 3.89)

The Literal Interpretation

Premillennialists who take the Ezekiel animal-sacrifice references literally offer

the following support.

First, not doing so violates the standard historical-grammatical hermeneutic[135] and engages in the same inconsistency they ascribe to nonpremillennialists.
Second, the typological view ***does*** open the door for further spiritualization of prophecy as amillennialists carry out in claiming that the New Testament church fulfills all promises made to Old Testament Israel.[136]
Third, the typological view illegitimately reads New Testament meaning back into the Old Testament text rather than understanding the Old Testament text as written.[137]

Fourth, the sacrifices foretold by Ezekiel[138] may point ***back*** to the Cross, just as the Old Testament types pointed ***forward*** to it.
Fifth, Ezekiel presents a highly detailed description, with numerous measurements and historical scenes that do not fit with an allegorical interpretation: "As regards the prophecies of a future temple service in time of Messiah, in numerous places they go into such detail that for every impartial reader a purely spiritual meaning is completely excluded" (Sauer, ***EE***, 179).
Sixth, Ezekiel is not alone in making this prediction. Many other Old Testament passages speak of "offering sacrifices" ***in the Millennium***.[139]
Seventh, even Jewish Christians in the New Testament church practiced temple worship (Acts 2:46; 3:1; 5:42), including animal sacrifices (21:26).
Eighth, if this passage is spiritualized, then on similar grounds most of the Old Testament prophecies could be spiritualized away, including the obviously literal ones about Christ's first coming. Because we know from their fulfillment that these were literal, the same applies to His second coming.
Ninth, again, Scripture distinguishes between Israel and the church (1 Cor. 10:32; Rom. 9:3–4). Promises unique to Abraham and his literal descendants (e.g., Gen. 12:1–3) are not fulfilled in the church but will be fulfilled in the future (cf. Rom. 11; Rev. 20).
Tenth, the picture in Revelation 21 is not that of the Millennium (cf. Rev. 20), but of the eternal state that follows. Ezekiel's prediction (40–48) will be fulfilled in the Millennium; later, in the new heaven and new earth, there will be no temple or sacrifices.

Eleventh, the Ezekiel sacrifices mentioned have no ***atoning*** significance;[140] they are ***memorial*** in nature. Like the Lord's Supper, they look back in remembrance at the accomplished work of Christ on the Cross.[141]

Twelfth, celebration of the Eucharist will end at the Second Coming (1 Cor. 11:26). After this, Israel will be restored (Rom. 11:25–27), along with her sabbaths and sacrifices, which will be with her during the Millennium.[142]

Thirteenth, the rest of Ezekiel's prophecy will be fulfilled in a literal thousand-year reign of Christ (Rev. 20:1–7), as He sits on a literal throne with His twelve apostles ruling alongside Him (Matt. 19:28). Accordingly, there is no reason not to take the prophecy about the sacrifices as literal also.

Fourteenth, as noted earlier, the Old Testament did not foresee ***how*** Jew and Gentile would be joined together,[143] but it did envision ***that*** the Gentiles would be blessed (cf. Isa. 11:10–16). Ezekiel's presentation does not exclude this later revelation.

Fifteenth, and finally, Hebrews (8–10) speaks of abolishing animal sacrifices in an ***atoning*** sense, not as regards ***memorial*** observance. Otherwise, the use of bread and wine to symbolize Christ's body and blood would not be legitimate either—which it is, since it is commanded of church-age believers.[144]

Either the prophet himself was mistaken in his expectations of a coming temple service, and his prophecy in the sense in which he himself meant it will never be fulfilled; *or* God in the time of Messiah will fulfill literally these prophecies of the temple according to their intended literal meaning. (Sauer, *EE*, 181)

Notwithstanding, either the typical or the literal interpretation would answer the objection that Ezekiel's predicted animal sacrifices are inconsistent with New Testament teaching, for they could be understood literally in a memorial (if not spiritual) sense.

Certainly the Hebrews' epistle says, "Where forgiveness of sins is there is no more offering for sin" (

10:18

). But this in no way proves that there can be no more symbolic actions in Divine

service after the redeeming work of Christ. (ibid., 183)

Both baptism and the Lord's Supper go beyond the merely symbolic and are associated with the reception of divine blessing (1 Cor. 19:16–21).[145]

Further, taking ***these*** prophecies spiritually as fulfilled in Christ does ***not*** violate a literal hermeneutic and open the door to other spiritualization; such a view preserves the literal interpretation in that ***Christ literally and physically fulfilled these sacrifices***.[146] Hence, understanding Old Testament sacrifices as being filtered through the Cross and literally fulfilled in Christ's literal sacrifice is not a violation of the literal hermeneutic, regardless of how preferable the literal interpretation may be.

Objection Thirteen: That Acts 15:14–18 Is Contrary to Premillennialism

[James said,] "Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written: 'After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things' that have been known for ages."

Allis argued that this text poses a serious problem for premillennial dispensationalists, since it identifies the foretold time of Gentile blessing[147] with the church age: "If James' quotation refers to the Christian Church, the claim of Dispensationalists that prophecy skips over the Church age cannot be maintained: it is directly refuted by this passage" (***PC***, 147). If it does not refer to the church, then "it is hard to believe that James would have beclouded the issue by quoting a passage from the Old Testament which had no bearing upon the question under consideration" (ibid., 148).

In summary, either rebuilding David's tent refers to the church age or it does not.

If it does, then, contrary to traditional dispensationalism, the church is predicted in the Old Testament. If it does not, then rebuilding David's tent is seemingly irrelevant to the point James is making, namely, that Gentiles can be saved as Gentiles (without circumcision).

Response to Objection Thirteen

Dispensationalists have responded in several ways, depending on their perspective.

Progressive Dispensational Reply: Spiritual Fulfillment Now/Literal Fulfillment Later

The dilemma posed by amillennialism does not apply to progressive dispensationalism, which accepts that Christ is spiritually on the throne of David ***now***[148] but will return later to fulfill the political aspects of the promise later.[149] While this is a possible explanation of Acts 15:16–18, progressive dispensationalism, as a system, has significant problems defending itself, both hermeneutically and biblically.[150]

Traditional Dispensational Reply: An Argument From Analogy

Some traditional dispensationalists take James's statement as a reference to Israel's future (millennial) blessing and note that it is simply an argument by analogy. For instance, if God can bless the Gentiles in the future kingdom (the Millennium), He can certainly do the same now. Some have pointed to "the words of the prophets are in agreement with this" (Acts 15:15) in support. Others agree with ***The Bible Knowledge Commentary*** (Walvoord and Zuck), which makes several good points for a traditional dispensational understanding of this text:

[First,] James did not say

Amos 9:11–12

was *fulfilled* in the church; he simply asserted that what was happening in the church was in full agreement with the Old Testament prophets. [Second,] James' main point is clear: Gentile salvation apart from the Law does not contradict the Old Testament prophets. [Third,] the words *after this* are neither in the Masoretic text (Hebrew) nor in the Septuagint [Greek OT]; both have "in that day" (2.394).

Therefore, the amillennial objection fails—there is no ***after this*** in the original text of Amos to indicate that he is foretelling the church age.

Modified Dispensational Reply: The Old Testament Predicted Gentile Blessing for This Age but Not the Mystery of the Church

Even if Acts 15:14–18 is a direct reference to the church age (rather than an argument by analogy), there is no real dilemma here for modified dispensationalism, since it does not deny that the church's age (of which Paul spoke) was not previously known,[151] but only that the mystery of how Jew and Gentile would be in one body. In context, this passage appears to provide strong support for modified dispensationalism.

First, it begins with the statement that Peter showed how "at first [God] showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself." This was demonstrated in principle by Peter (Acts 10) and in practice by the action of the Jerusalem gathering (Acts 15).[152] The mystery as such was not predicted, just ***that*** Gentiles would receive salvation during this current age.

Second, the ***after this***[153] could be James's way of indicating that "in that day"[154] was pointing to a time after this age, namely, a time of tribulation to which Amos refers (9:8–10).

Third, "I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent" could be a reference to Christ's second coming to restore the Davidic covenant in the Millennium.

Objection Fourteen: That the Millennium Would Have a Mixture of Mortal and Immortal People

According to premillennialism, the Millennium will have both mortals and immortals at the same time; some who are already resurrected and some who are not yet resurrected.[155] Those who are resurrected cannot have children (Matt. 22:30), while those who are not yet resurrected can and will (see Isa. 65). The resurrected ones will be perfect and sinless; the others will not. Amillennialists insist that this mixture is implausible and has no scriptural basis.

Response to Objection Fourteen

There is no reason immortals and mortals cannot mix together in the Millennium. The immortals will have physical bodies and can eat and drink,[156] just as Jesus did after His resurrection (cf. Luke 24:36–43; Acts 1:3). Jesus also was sinless and lived for some thirty-three years with sinful people; if anything, it will encourage sinful mortals to live alongside sinless immortals, seeing what they will soon be realizing (cf. 1 John 3:1–3).

Some dispensationalists hold that the church will not reign with Christ during the Millennium but will be His heavenly servants who may (as angels have) visit the earth on divine missions. Verses 4 and 5 of Revelation 20, which speak only of the Tribulation saints being resurrected to reign in the Millennium[157] and the nature of the church as God's heavenly people,[158] are used to support this view, which is difficult to reconcile with other references to church-age believers reigning with Christ during the Millennium.[159]

Objection Fifteen: That Premillennialists Engage in Unbiblical Date-Setting

Some premillennialists have notoriously set dates for the Second Coming. Books about counting down to Armageddon have proven to contain myriad false predictions. Others have given (for instance) “88 reasons Christ will come in 1988” (He didn’t); this is no better than cults that have repeatedly issued false prophecies about the Eschaton. There have even been premillennialists who’ve given up their jobs and ceased to plan for the future, convinced that Christ will come within a certain period of time.

Response to Objection Fifteen

First, we must acknowledge that some premillennialists have embraced unbiblical date-setting. However, many believe that since Christ’s coming is ***imminent*** that this is inconsistent within their own view.[160]
Second, Jesus said that no one knows the “day,” “hour,” “times,” or “seasons” (Matt. 24:36; Acts 1:7) of His return. This covers the entire group of “temporal” terms.
Third, some nonpremillennialists unfortunately have done the same: “Some postmillennial writers, as well as others, have fallen into error.… Dr. Snowden [in ***The Coming of the Lord***], for instance, after showing so clearly the error of the premillennialist in date-setting and in assuming the near return of Christ, went on to make the same kind of error in assuming that the millennium was just about to dawn” (Boetner, ***MMFV***, 130).
Fourth, and finally, the abuse of any view does not itself prove the view false. An inconsistent premillennialist does not prove the falsity of consistent premillennialism.

CONCLUSION

The biblical, theological, and historical basis of premillennialism is solid. Premillennialism is rooted in a consistent literal hermeneutic; so understood, the Bible, based in God’s unconditional covenants with Abraham and David, points

to a literal, political, earthly messianic kingdom. Jesus offered this kingdom to the Jews, but they rejected it; Jesus set up a spiritual kingdom (of which the church is a part), awaiting the day when He will restore the political kingdom to Israel as promised. This will occur at the Second Coming (Rev. 19), when He establishes a thousand-year reign (20), after which God will reign for all eternity in the new heaven and new earth (21–22). Denial of this position forsakes consistent application of the historical-grammatical hermeneutic, and if the allegorical method were applied to other Scripture it would undermine the whole of evangelical Christianity.

Granted the hermeneutical importance of premillennialism, we note in closing that with the exception of extreme preterists,[161] all evangelicals, along with classical orthodoxy down through the centuries, East and West, confess that Christ will literally return to earth in the same physical body in which He died and ascended into heaven. This essential commonality should not be forgotten amid all the differences with regard to the order of events surrounding the physical Second Coming, one of the half-dozen great fundamentals of the faith.

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE TRIBULATION AND THE RAPTURE

For the purpose of this discussion, the Tribulation is a seven-year period that will occur at the end of the age. There are many views on the Tribulation, and most, except preterism, are part of an intramural debate among premillennialists. The Tribulation is considered to be the unparalleled time of trial and judgment just before Christ returns to earth. The main question centers around the rapture of believers and whether it will occur before, during, or after the Tribulation.[1]

THE NATURE OF THE TRIBULATION

The nature of the Tribulation or, more properly, the "seventieth week" of Daniel, is based on a prophecy about a future seven-year period in Daniel 9. Speaking in the context of the seventy-year captivity in Babylon (9:2), Gabriel declares that "seventy sevens" (of years) will be determined on Israel (v. 24). Jesus referred to this passage in the Mount Olivet Discourse, giving a basic outline of its events (Matt. 24:4ff.), but only Revelation spells it out in detail.

Moses Foretold End-Time Tribulation for Israel

Be careful not to forget the [Mosaic] covenant of the Lord your God that he made with you; do not make for yourselves an idol in the form of anything the Lord your God has forbidden. For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God. *After you have had children and grandchildren and have lived in the land a long time—if you then become corrupt and make any kind of idol, doing evil in the eyes of the LORD your God and provoking him to anger … the LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and only a few of you will survive among the nations to which the LORD will drive you*. There you will worship man-made gods of wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or eat or smell.

But if from there you seek the LORD your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul. When you are in distress and all these things have happened to you, then *in later days you will return to the LORD your God and obey him. For the LORD your God is a merciful God*; he will not abandon or destroy you or forget the covenant with your forefathers, which he confirmed to them by oath. (

Deut. 4:23–31

)

Herein are several elements of Israel's Tribulation period:

(1) It will come as a tribulation (v. 30) or punishment of their sins.
(2) It will come after their exile among the nations.
(3) It will be as a result of the wrath of the God who is a "consuming fire" (v. 24).
(4) It will involve a spiritual restoration (v. 30).
(5) It will involve a fulfillment of God's covenant with them (v. 31).
(6) It will be in the "later days" (v. 30).

The Seventieth "Week" of Daniel

The one Old Testament passage that lays out the time and basic nature of the Tribulation is Daniel 9:

Seventy "sevens" are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to

seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy. Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One [Messiah], the ruler, comes, there will be seven "sevens," and sixty-two "sevens." It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble.

After the sixty-two "sevens," the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of *the ruler who will come* will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. He *will confirm a covenant with many for one "seven."* [The last of the seventy "sevens."] *In the middle of the "seven" he will put an end to sacrifice and offering*. And on a wing of the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him. (vv.

24–27

)

As we've noted,[2] most conservative scholars agree that the first sixty-nine "weeks" or "sevens" are the 483 years between Cyrus's "decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem" and the time "the Anointed One [was] cut off" (the Crucifixion).[3] This leaves a single seven-year period after the Crucifixion for the personage of power to make a seven-year treaty with the Jews, rebuild their temple, and reinstitute sacrificial offerings. However, in the middle of this "week," he will cause the sacrifices to cease and pollute the temple with an "abomination." Preterism's claim that this was fulfilled by a.d. 70 contradicts many scriptural texts.[4]

Given that Jesus is speaking of a yet-future seven-year period, the following may be derived from Daniel 9:

(1) There will be a seven-year period (sometime after Christ's advent) in which the prophecies God gave about Jerusalem ("your holy city," vv. 24–25) will be completely fulfilled.
(2) This period will be established by a "covenant" (treaty) made between the Jews ("your [Daniel's] people" in the "holy city," v. 24) and "the prince who is to come" (v. 26 nkjv).
(3) A temple will be rebuilt in which animal sacrifices and offerings will again be made for the first half of the seven years (v. 27); the treaty will be broken after three and one-half years, and an "abomination" that causes

"desolation" (v. 27) will occur in the temple.

Daniel's Elaboration on Antichrist

His armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice. Then they will set up the abomination that causes desolation. With flattery he will corrupt those who have violated the covenant, but the people who know their God will firmly resist him. Those who are wise will instruct many, though for a time they will fall by the sword or be burned or captured or plundered. When they fall, they will receive a little help, and many who are not sincere will join them. Some of the wise will stumble, so that they may be refined, purified and made spotless until the time of the end, for it will still come at the appointed time.

The king will do as he pleases. He will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will say unheard of things against the God of gods. He will be successful until the time of wrath is completed, for what has been determined must take place. He will show no regard for the gods of his fathers or for the one desired by women, nor will he regard any god, but will exalt himself above them all. Instead of them, he will honor a god of fortresses; a god unknown to his fathers he will honor with gold and silver, with precious stones and costly gifts. He will attack the mightiest fortresses with the help of a foreign god and will greatly honor those who acknowledge him. He will make them rulers over many people and will distribute the land at a price. (

11:31–39

)

While much of this refers to Antiochus Epiphanes (Antiochus IV [r. 175–164 b.c.]), an evil, ruthless Syrian invader, and was fulfilled in the second century b.c., some scholars believe that verse 36 on "the king will do as he pleases" is a reference to the end-time Antichrist. In any event, Antiochus is a precursor of Antichrist; he did many things that Antichrist also will do during the Tribulation.[5]

From this passage we learn:

(1) A political power will abolish the daily sacrifice (v. 31).
(2) He will desecrate the temple by setting up an abomination there (v. 31).
(3) He will be resisted by a faithful remnant (v. 32).
(4) They will be persecuted for their stand (vv. 33–35).
(5) He will do as he pleases (v. 36).

(6) He will speak blasphemies against God (vv. 36–38).
(7) He will show no regard for any god, even the one women desire [Christ]? (v. 37).
(8) He will worship the god of military might (v. 38).
(9) He will divide the Land among those who honor him (v. 39).

The Time of Jacob's Trouble

"The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will bring my people Israel and Judah back from captivity and restore them to the land I gave their forefathers to possess.…
"Cries of fear are heard—terror, not peace. Ask and see: Can a man bear children? Then why do I see every strong man with his hands on his stomach like a woman in labor, every face turned deathly pale? How awful that day will be! None will be like it. ***It will be a time of trouble for Jacob, but he will be saved out of it***.
"In that day … I will break the yoke off their necks and will tear off their bonds; no longer will foreigners enslave them. Instead, they will serve the Lord their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them.… I will surely save you out of a distant place, your descendants from the land of their exile. Jacob will again have peace and security, and no one will make him afraid.
"I am with you and will save you.… ***Though I completely destroy all the nations among which I scatter you, I will not completely destroy you***. I will discipline you but only with justice; I will not let you go entirely unpunished.… Your wound is incurable, your injury beyond healing.… All your allies have forgotten you; they care nothing for you. I have struck you as an enemy would and punished you as would the cruel, because your guilt is so great and your sins so many" (Jer. 30:3–14).
A number of facts emerge from this passage:

(1) Israel and Judah will be brought back from captivity (vv. 3, 10).
(2) They will then no longer be enslaved by other nations (v. 8).
(3) Before this, they will endure an unprecedented time of trouble (v. 7).
(4) They will be punished for their sins (vv. 12, 14).

(5) After this they will dwell peacefully and securely in their own land under King David (vv. 9–10).

The Mount Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24)

That the Mount Olivet Discourse is about a future time is clear from the questions that occasioned it: "As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. 'Tell us,' they said, 'when will this happen, and ***what will be the sign of your coming*** and of ***the end of the age***?' " (v. 3). He replied by delineating a series of consecutive tribulational events.

First Event: False Messiahs (vv. 4–5)[6]

"Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many."

Second Event: Wars (vv. 6–7)[7]

"You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom."

Third Event: Famines (v. 7)[8]

"There will be famines."

Fourth Event: Pestilences and Earthquakes (vv. 7–8)[9]

“[There will be] famines and earthquakes in various places. ***All these are the beginning of birth pains***.”
This appears to be the middle of the Tribulation, the first three-and-a-half years being called “the beginning of birth pains” and the second three-and-a-half being hard-labor birth pains or “the great tribulation” (v. 21 nkjv). If this is correct, then the fifth, sixth, and seventh seals of Revelation 6, as well as the trumpets and bowls that follow, will be the last half of the Tribulation. Since Antichrist will erect his own image in the middle of the Tribulation (2 Thess. 2:3–4; Rev. 13:11–18) and attempt to kill all who refuse to worship it (7:13–14; 12:13; 13:10), the next event is understandably about martyrs.

Fifth Event: Martyrs (vv. 9–11)[10]

Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people.

This event of martyrdom is connected with the abomination of desolation (v. 15; cf. Dan. 9:26), which occurs when Antichrist halts temple sacrifices and sets up his own image, demanding that all worship it.

Afterward, the Tribulation saints, known as the 144,000 Jews (Rev. 7:4–8), are scattered into the world, preaching “the gospel of the kingdom” (Matt. 24:14) and winning “a great multitude” of others to Christ (Rev. 7:9). Those who endure until the end of the Tribulation will be saved (Matt. 24:13); unbelievers will be taken in the judgments (v. 39), and believers will be left to go into the Millennium alive (cf. 25:34).

Sixth Event: Cosmic Disturbances (Matt. 24:29)

“Immediately after the distress of those days ‘the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’ ”John added that after an earthquake, the sun went black

and the moon red; the stars fell, the sky receded, and mountains and islands were moved (Rev. 6:12–14).

Seventh Event: Inauguration of the Second Coming (Matt. 24:30–31)

When the seventh seal is opened (Rev. 8:1ff.), it contains the seven trumpets, at the last of which we read: “The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever’ ” (11:15). This signals the Tribulation’s end and the beginning of the Millennium:

> At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other. (
>
> Matt. 24:30–31
>
>)

THE TRIBULATION IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Premillennialist scholars generally agree that the actual Tribulation period is described in Revelation 6–18. There are two main positions with regard to the order of the series of seals, trumpets, and bowls: the simultaneous view and the sequential view.[11]

The Simultaneous View

According to the ***simultaneous view***, each series—seals, trumpets, and bowls—is parallel to the others, covering the same basic ground and ending at the close of the Tribulation with the seventh in each series.[12]

First, there are similarities between parallel numbers in each series.
However, there are also significant differences; for example, many see no real alignment between the first, fifth, or seventh seals and trumpets. If this is true, there is no identity between them.
Second, the seventh judgment in all three series is said to end the Tribulation (cf. 6:16–17; 11:15; 16:17).

In response, the seventh seal is not actually the Second Coming itself,[13] but the anticipation of God's wrath. Further, there is no real parallel with the seventh in each series, since the trumpets flow out of the seventh seal, and the bowls flow out of the seventh trumpet. Even the first bowl indicates a completion of the judgments (15:1), so the bowls are better taken as a whole, indicating the final judgments flowing from the last trumpet.
Third, some see a direct parallel between the objects of the seven trumpets and seven bowls: on the earth, sea, waters, sun, beast, Euphrates, and earthly kingdoms, respectively.
In reply, opponents note that while the objects are the same, the nature and extent of the judgments are different, being more extensive in the bowls than in the trumpets. Accordingly, they seem not to be identical.
Fourth, proponents reason that many other sections recapitulate similar or identical events (e.g., cf. Rev. 7, 12, 13).
Conversely, it is observed that these are parenthetical chapters, not part of a numbered sequence. As such, we should not expect everything in them to be sequential to the series of seven judgments.
Fifth, some point out that each series ends with the same events—thunder, lightning, and an earthquake (cf. 8:5; 11:19; 15:5).
Nevertheless, these are not necessarily the same ending; what we know is that they are the same ***kind*** of endings, signaling the end of each.
To summarize the simultaneous view of the seals, trumpets, and bowls, there are similarities, but the differences are more crucial and determinative.

The Sequential View

The ***sequential view*** holds that the series of seals, trumpets, and bowls occur in order, one after the other. Arguments in favor of the sequential view include the

following.
First, a plain reading of the text supports a sequential view; one numbered series after another would normally be understood as sequential.
Second, phrases like “I saw” and “I looked/heard”[14] and especially “after these things”[15] support sequential events. Even in the parenthetical passages, similar phrases indicate a sequence of events.[16]
Third, the bowls indicate sequence because they are called “the last” of God’s wrath (15:1 nasb), in contrast to the earlier seals and trumpets.
Fourth, the trumpets and bowls cannot be at the same time, since the judgment is more extensive in the bowls, indicating that they are later. For example, the second trumpet will kill only a third of the sea creatures (8:9), whereas the second bowl will kill all living sea creatures (16:3).
Fifth, the fifth trumpet comes after the sixth seal, for the 144,000 are sealed in the sixth seal (7:1–8), and the judgments of the fifth trumpet come only on those who have not been sealed (Rev. 9:4).
Sixth, the ordinal numbers[17] indicate sequence within each succession. The next series does not begin with the next number, because it is a new series of events.[18]
Seventh, there is also a build-to-climax within each series. This leads to the anticipation that the next series will build upon it, which indeed it does; each series of judgments is more intense.
Eighth, the seventh seal has no object of its own; we would expect it to, ***if*** it was a parallel judgment in the series. The seventh seal and seventh bowl simply introduce the next series.
Ninth, and finally, the fourth seal is the beginning of birth pains (6:7–8; cf. Matt. 24:8); it is not the great day of wrath (Rev. 6:17), which will come later, with the seven bowls (cf. 15:1).
The evidence favors some sort of sequence of events, one after the other, with each building on the next. Hence, our analysis begins with the seven seals.

The Seven-Sealed Book

The seven-sealed book is taken to be the title deed to the earth. As noted by Renald Showers (b. 1934):

> The sealed scroll of
>
> Revelation 5
>
> is the deed of purchase for mankind's forfeited inheritance of tenant possession of the earth.... Through breaking the seven seals, Christ will instigate a tremendous bombardment of divine wrath or judgment against the domain of Satan and his forces for the last seven years before His Second Coming. (*MOLC*, 99)

Only Christ, the Lamb, is found worthy to open the books and release on the earth the judgments therein (5:1–7); only He has defeated Satan by His death and resurrection (Col. 2:14; Heb. 2:14–15).

The First Seal: The White Horse (False Messiah)

> I watched as the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals. Then I heard one of the four living creatures say in a voice like thunder, "Come!" I looked, and there before me was a white horse! Its rider held a bow, and he was given a crown, and he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest. (
>
> Rev. 6:1–2
>
> ; cf.
>
> Matt. 24:4–5
>
>)
>
> 19

The Second Seal: The Red Horse (Wars)

> When the Lamb opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, "Come!" Then another horse came out, a fiery red one. Its rider was given power to take peace from the earth and to make men slay each other. To him was given a large sword. (
>
> Rev. 6:3–4
>
> ; cf.
>
> Matt. 24:6–7

)

The Third Seal: The Black Horse (Famines)

When the Lamb opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, “Come!” I looked, and there before me was a black horse! Its rider was holding a pair of scales in his hand. Then I heard what sounded like a voice among the four living creatures, saying, “A quart of wheat for a day’s wages, and three quarts of barley for a day’s wages, and do not damage the oil and the wine!” (

Rev. 6:5–6

; cf.

Matt. 24:7

).

The Fourth Seal: The Pale Horse (Death)

When the Lamb opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, “Come!” I looked, and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth. (

Rev. 6:7–8

; cf.

Matt. 24:7–8

)

The Fifth Seal: The Martyrs

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?” Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed. (

Rev. 6:9–11

; cf.

Matt. 24:9–11

)

The Sixth Seal: Heavenly Phenomena

I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?” (

Rev. 6:12–17

; cf.

Matt. 24:29

).

The time up to the fourth seal is described as “the beginning of birth pains” (Matt. 24:8), and by the sixth seal “the great day of their wrath” will have arrived. The intensity of God’s wrath will be increasing; once again, if God had not foredetermined to shorten these days there would be no flesh alive by the end of the Tribulation (cf. Matt. 24:22).[20]

The Seven Trumpets

The seven trumpets (Rev. 8–9; 11:15ff.) come out of the seventh seal (8:1), which, other than the trumpets, has no content of its own as the other six seals do. By the seventh ***trumpet***, the end of the Tribulation will have come (11:15); that does not seem to be the case by the end of the seventh seal.[21] As far as the trumpets being distinct from the seals, elements occur in the trumpets that do not seem to involve the seals.

The Seven Bowl Judgments

While the bowl judgments (Rev. 15–16) are on the same objects as the trumpets, they are later and more extensive. For example, while with the trumpets only one-third of the object is inflicted, with the bowls the entire object is inflicted; apparently, then, the same objects are later revisited with intensified judgment. By the time of the last judgments, the end of the Tribulation will be reached, and when the sixth bowl is poured out, the battle of Armageddon is being described:

> The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East. Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty.... Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon. (16:12–16)

Earlier, in the sixth trumpet judgment, in preparation for Armageddon, God commanded:

> “Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.” And the four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year were released to kill a third of mankind. The number of the mounted troops was two hundred million. (9:14–16)

No fewer than these facts are clear:

(1) At least the first four seal judgments parallel Jesus’ words in the Mount Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24) and describe the beginning of the Tribulation.
(2) The judgments continually increase in severity. By the end of the seventh bowl judgment the Tribulation will be over.[22]
(3) Just before the last of the judgments, Armageddon will occur, involving all the earth’s nations and two hundred million soldiers from the east who will come across the Euphrates into the Holy Land.
(4) Christ’s return to earth (Rev. 19) will follow this last bowl judgment.

Other Selected Texts Describing These Final Events

Zechariah 12:2–3, 8–9

I [the Lord] am going to make Jerusalem a cup that sends all the surrounding peoples reeling. Judah will be besieged as well as Jerusalem. On that day, when all the nations of the earth are gathered against her, *I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations.…*

On that day the Lord will shield those who live in Jerusalem, so that the feeblest among them will be like David, and the house of David will be like God, like the Angel of the Lord going before them. On that day *I will set out to destroy all the nations that attack Jerusalem*.

Zechariah 14:1–5, 7–9

A day of the LORD is coming when your plunder will be divided among you. I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; *the city will be captured*, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city.

Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle. On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south. You will flee by my mountain valley.…

It will be a unique day, without daytime or nighttime—a day known to the Lord. When evening comes, there will be light. On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half to the eastern sea and half to the western sea, in summer and in winter. *The LORD will be king over the whole earth.* On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name.

Several other pieces are added to the prophetic puzzle. At the end of the Tribulation, at the battle of Armageddon and after it, the following will occur:

(1) All nations of the earth will surround Jerusalem.

(2) Jerusalem will be captured.
(3) A remnant will flee through the valley created by an earthquake.
(4) Christ will return to the Mount of Olives.
(5) Christ will judge the nations.
(6) Christ will restore the "house of David."
(7) Christ will reign "over the whole earth."

This entire event is described as the day of the Lord (2 Peter 3:10).

2 Thessalonians 2:1–10

Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that *the day of the Lord* has already come. Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day *will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed*, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.

Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but *the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way*. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. *The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders*, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing.

(1) The day of the Lord had not yet come when Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians; (2) it will not come until "the lawless one" (Antichrist) comes; (3) currently someone is restraining him. When the restrainer is taken out of the way, Antichrist will be revealed, performing signs that will mislead many (v. 4). This fits with the "abomination that causes desolation," making the Jewish "sacrifice and offering" to cease in "the middle of" the seven-year period (Dan. 9:27).

Revelation 13:1, 4–8, 11–14, 16–18

John speaks of this same event:

I saw a beast coming out of the sea. He had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name.… Men worshiped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshiped the beast and asked, “Who is like the beast? Who can make war against him?”

The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months [three-and-a-half years]. He opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. *He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast —all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.…*

Then I saw another beast.… He exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed. And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men.… He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name.

This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man’s number. His number is 666.

From this we can conclude:

(1) The beast (Antichrist) will claim to be God and demand that all worship be given to him ***in the middle of the Tribulation***.
(2) He will perform impressive, successfully deceptive signs.
(3) He will persecute God’s people.
(4) He will rule the world.
(5) He will not allow people to buy or sell without his mark (666).
(6) His reign will last forty-two months, designated by Daniel as half (the second half) of the seven-year Tribulation period.
(7) During this same time the “woman” (Israel) will flee into the wilderness to be preserved through the rest of the Tribulation, “1,260 days” (which is also three and one-half years, 12:6).
(8) Also during this time, 144,000 Jews—12,000 from each tribe—will be saved, and through them so will a great multitude of others (7:4–9; 14:1–5).

A Summary of the Tribulation

First, the Tribulation begins when a globally known political leader (Antichrist) makes a seven-year treaty with the Jews, allowing them to offer up sacrifices in a rebuilt Jerusalem temple (Dan. 9:27).
Second, during the first part of this period there are wars, famines, mass death by wars and natural disasters, and believers are martyred for their faith in Messiah (Matt. 24:5–11; cf. Rev. 6:1–11). This period is called "the beginning of sorrows" (Matt. 24:8 nkjv).
Third, in the middle of the Tribulation, Antichrist will cause the sacrifices and offerings to cease (Dan. 9:27). He will set up an image of himself in the temple (Rev. 13:14) and demand worship, sitting in the temple and claiming he is God.[2][3] The last half of this period is called "the great tribulation" (7:14), culminating in the judgment called "the day of the Lord" (2 Thess. 2:2).
Fourth, all who do not take the mark of the beast will be forbidden to buy or sell (Rev. 13:16–18). Great numbers of believers will resist Antichrist and be martyred for their faith (v. 14).
Fifth, a faithful remnant will flee into the wilderness, where they will be protected by God for the last half of the Tribulation (12:6). These will be alive at the end of the Tribulation and enter the Millennium in unresurrected bodies (Rom. 11:26); they will be able to produce children, which people in resurrected bodies cannot do (cf. Matt. 22:30). They are the "sheep" of Matthew 25:32–33.
Sixth, just before the end of the Tribulation, two hundred million soldiers from the east will come across the Euphrates (along with the other nations of the earth) to invade Israel (Rev. 9:13–21; 16:12–14). They will surround and capture Jerusalem (Zech. 12:1–3; 14:1–2), the faithful remnant having escaped and been protected by God for forty-two months (Rev. 12:6).
Seventh, God will miraculously intervene, save Israel from utter destruction (Zech. 12:4–8), and restore "the house of David" (v. 8). Christ will return to the Mount of Olives (14:4) and deliver His people.
Eighth, and finally, national Israel will recognize Christ as their Messiah when they look on Him whom they have pierced (12:10). Israel will be re-ingrafted

into the redemptive line, the “times of the Gentiles” having been completed (Luke 21:24). The New Covenant with Israel will be fulfilled (Jer. 31:31), as will the Abrahamic covenant, which guaranteed their Land forever (Gen. 12, 14–15), and the Davidic covenant, which gave assurance that they eternally would have a king on David’s throne.[24]

THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE RAPTURE TO THE TRIBULATION

Now that we’ve laid out the nature of the Tribulation, we’ll endeavor to determine the relationship of the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:17) to this unprecedented time of judgment and wrath. Where does the rapture of the church fit into the events just described—before, during, or after? There are many reasons for concluding that the church is in heaven during the Tribulation period.

PRETRIBULATIONISM

Pretribulationism holds that the Rapture of the church occurs ***before*** the Tribulation, during which the church, Christ’s bride, will be in heaven, standing before His judgment seat (2 Cor. 5:10) and preparing for His return to earth.[25] Pretribulationism holds that Christ’s coming ***for*** His saints will be ***in the air*** and before the Tribulation; after the Tribulation, Christ will come ***with*** His saints and ***to earth*** to reign for a thousand years. Charles Ryrie (see ***WYSKAR***), John Walvoord (1910–2002—see ***RQ*** and ***BHT***), and Dwight Pentecost (see ***TTC***) expound this view.

The Church Is Never Mentioned on Earth During the Tribulation

John addresses Revelation to the “the seven churches which are in Asia” (1:4 nkjv). The word ***church(es)*** is used nineteen times in the first three chapters, and

then not once during the entire Tribulation (6–18). That it reoccurs after the Second Coming (19) and during the new heaven and new earth (22:16) is striking; similar exhortations earlier that had the phrase “unto the churches” (e.g., 2:7, 11 kjv) do not have them during the Tribulation, when, instead, John warns, “If anyone has an ear, let him hear” (13:9).

In fact, after the description of the seven churches (2–3), in chapters 4–5 the scene shifts to heaven, where John is beckoned with a trumpetlike voice, “Come up here,[26] and I will show you things which must take place ***after this***” (4:1 nkjv). Some see these words as reminiscent of Paul’s statement that the Rapture will take place “with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God” (1 Thess. 4:16); others disagree.[27] In any event, like the church, from that point on John views the Tribulation from heaven. After a brief picture of the redeemed around God’s throne (Rev. 4–5), from chapters 6–18 the Tribulation unfolds. In chapter 19 Christ returns to earth and then, after the “first resurrection,” He reigns for a thousand years (Rev. 20:1–7), which is followed by the new heaven and new earth (21–22). ***Nowhere during the entire Tribulation period is there a word about the church being on earth***.

The Church (Bride) Is Mentioned in Heaven During the Tribulation

There is a reference to the church during the Tribulation—in heaven.[28] Near the end of the Tribulation, the fall of “Babylon the Great” is announced—this is the great apostate “church” on earth (18:2). Otherwise, the church, the ***bride*** of Christ, is not mentioned until after the Tribulation, when she is positioned ***“coming down out of heaven”*** (Rev. 3:12) where she has been prepared for the wedding. This fits with a pretribulation Rapture, where during the Tribulation the believers appear before the heavenly judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10) to have their works purified by fire (1 Cor. 3:11–15) and to prepare them as a chaste virgin (2 Cor. 11:2) to meet the Bridegroom in the “marriage of the Lamb” (Rev. 19:7 nkjv).

“One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me [John], ‘Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the

Lamb' " (21:9). "Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready" (19:7). "I [John] saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband" (21:2; cf. 22:17). All of this implies that she was in heaven, raptured before the Tribulation, being prepared to return to earth with her Husband at the end.

The Heaven-Dwellers

The other reference to the church during the Tribulation is in 13:6, where John speaks of "those who dwell in heaven" (nkjv); in contrast to human, unsaved earth-dwellers (cf. 12:12; 13:8, 14), those raptured are human and saved. Further, they appear to have bodies, for the verb ***dwell*** is from the same word used for Christ's incarnation in human flesh (John 1:14) and for a believer's body (2 Cor. 5:1, 4);[29] it is never used of pure spirits (e.g., angels). This supports pretribulationism—that the saved are raptured before the Tribulation and given resurrection bodies in heaven.[30]

Saints, Apostles, and Prophets

At the very end of the Tribulation we read: "Rejoice over her, ***O heaven***! Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets! God has judged her [Babylon the great] for the way she treated you" (Rev. 18:20). Only the church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets,"[31] so this must be a reference to the church, already raptured into heaven. Soon after this, John tells of "the armies of heaven [who] were following him [Christ], riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean" (19:14). If they are coming with Christ at His return to earth,[32] again, they must have been raptured previously (1 Thess. 4:16–

17).[33]

The Twenty-Four Elders

Some have taken the twenty-four elders of Revelation (4:4) to be angelic beings; these interpreters refer to King David's order of twenty-four priests in the earthly temple (1 Chron. 24). However, Gromacki maintains strongly that they cannot be angels: (1) They're sitting on thrones, which is what Jesus promised to believers (Rev. 3:21); (2) they have white robes, the same as believers (3:3, 18); and (3) they were given crowns, as believers are promised (2:10; 3:11). This triple identity delineates redeemed people, notably believers of the church age; they must have been raptured before the Tribulation to have this status in heaven (cited in Ice, ***WTS***, 358–59).

Tribulation References to Earthly Believers Are Not About the Church

Posttribulationists[34] take the several Tribulation statements about "saints" and other believers on earth as references to the church.[35] This is a case of mistaken identity.

The 144,000

The "believers" mentioned twice during the Tribulation are Jewish converts from the twelve ***tribes*** of ***Israel***.[36] The "great multitude" of others are those won to Christ by the 144,000 converted Jews (7:4–9; cf. 14:3).

The Tribulation Saints

The word ***saints***, used several times during the Tribulation, need not mean "those who were believers in Christ before the Tribulation began." There were saints (godly ones) in the Old Testament (Ps. 85:8), there are saints today (1 Cor. 1:2), and there will be saints during the Tribulation (Rev. 13:7); this is a common word for believers of all ages. The identification of saints during the Tribulation is with either the 144,000 saved Jews or the myriad others converted through their efforts.

The Church Is Delivered From the Hour of Testing

Further, God promised to keep the church from the "hour of trial" (the Tribulation). John wrote to the faithful church of Philadelphia: "Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth" (3:10).

God did not say He would keep the church ***through***[37] the Tribulation, as posttribulationists argue (see Ladd, ***BH***, 85–86), but ***from***[38] it. Also, notice the word ***keep***[39]—one can hardly be kept from something he is enduring. This is likewise supported by the use of ***ek*** in verses unrelated to the Tribulation.[40] When New Testament believers are asked to keep themselves "from" offensive practices (Acts 15:29), they clearly are not to participate at all (cf. James 5:20). Even a favorite posttribulational text—John 17:15, in which Jesus says, "My prayer is not that you [the Father] take them [believers] out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one"—supports a pretribulational Rapture, involving removal from the ***world system***, as believers are transferred from Satan's domain to Christ's kingdom (Col. 1:13; cf. 1 John. 5:18).
In addition, the word ***hour*** supports pretribulationism, since the only way to be kept from a section of time, such as an ***hour***, is not to go through any of it. The promise is not merely to keep them from ***trials*** but also from the ***time*** in which the trials occur. Believers cannot be kept from part of the hour, as with

midtribulationism[41] or the pre-wrath view,[42] or none of the hour, as with posttribulationism;[43] the only way to be kept from an hour is not to be in any part of the hour.

The Church Is Saved From God's Wrath

Just after speaking of the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:16–17), Paul encourages the Thessalonians with these words: "God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (5:9), ***and*** "to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath" (1:10). As shown above, both halves of the Tribulation are characterized by God's wrath, which persistently intensifies; Daniel considered the whole "seventieth week" (of seven years) as part of the Day of the Lord, a day of wrath (Dan. 12:1, 7; cf. 9:24).

God's wrath cannot be separated from man's wrath; God's is often delivered through human and natural instruments, like wars, famine, and death.[44]

Further, the famine mentioned in the third seal (Rev. 6:5–6) is not totally man's wrath.[45]

Also, the fourth seal (v. 8) speaks of famine and the sword, both of which are part of God's wrath according to the background verse in Ezekiel (14:19); the Hebrew word for ***fury*** is ***hema***, which means "anger" or "wrath" (cf. Isa. 13:6, 9; Ezek. 38:18–19).

Finally, even the unsaved under the sixth seal recognize the judgment as the "wrath of the Lamb" (Rev. 6:15–16). ***Salvation (deliverance) from God's wrath in 1 Thessalonians 5:9 means deliverance from the whole Tribulation period***.

The Church's Rapture Explains the Sudden Apostasy

Another indication that the Rapture occurs before the Tribulation is that it best

explains the sudden apostasy by the removal of the restrainer (2 Thess. 2:3–7). The ultimate lawlessness of Antichrist (empowered by Satan himself) cannot be restrained by anyone short of God Himself. Thus, the restrainer of all sin is the Holy Spirit of God (Gen. 6:3; John 16:7–8). It cannot be even Michael the archangel, for he could not in his power restrain the devil (Jude 9). Nor can the restrainer be the Roman emperor (cf. Rom. 13:4), for Antichrist will himself be the world's political leader. The only restraint for Antichrist is the Spirit of Christ, ultimate holiness overpowering the ultimately unholy.

Accordingly, it again makes sense to posit the Rapture at the beginning of the Tribulation. The Spirit is the indweller of all believers (John. 14:16) and of the church (1 Cor. 3:17); when He and all believers are taken away, evil will naturally run rampant. The removal of salt and light will leave this world a very unsavory and dark place, one the lawless one will utilize to work against God.

A Realistic Concept of Imminence Implies a Pretribulation Rapture

An additional indication that the church will not go through the Tribulation is that the Rapture is a signless and imminent event. It may happen at any moment, and nothing needs to be fulfilled before it occurs, as numerous passages attest:

> Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.
> [46]

As for the texts that say Christ is coming "quickly,"[47] A. T. Robertson said they should be translated "I am coming (imminently).… We do not know how 'quickly' is meant to be understood. But it is a real threat" (***WPNT***, 7.306). Noted New Testament scholar Leon Morris (b. 1914) commented, "The imminence of the coming is repeated" (***RSJ***, 258), and in his classic commentary on Revelation, J. A. Seiss (1823–1904) affirmed: "Everywhere the promised Apocalypse of the Lord Jesus is represented as close at hand, ***liable to occur at any moment***" (***A***, 523, emphasis added). Further, "quickly" does not necessarily mean "soon," but "swiftly" (see Phil. 4:5 "at hand"; James 5:8 "at hand"; see

also below under “Preterism”).
The concepts of eagerly awaiting, coming quickly, and being near all encourage belief in Christ’s imminent return.[48] As imminent, it will be signless, and as signless, it will have to be pretribulational, since once the Tribulation begins the end of the seven years could be predicted accurately.

The Church Is Not Destined to “the Time of Jacob’s Trouble”

The Tribulation period is called “the time of ***Jacob’s*** trouble” (Jer. 30:7 nkjv), and Daniel was told it is the week determined for ***his people*** Israel (9:24). Thus, there is no reason to suppose that when God resumes dealing with His chosen nation and fulfilling prophecy made to them[49] that this was designed as a time of tribulation for the church: It was ***not***, and there is no reason the church should be in it. Just as God took Enoch to heaven while allowing Noah to endure the Flood, even so God will deliver the church before the Tribulation and allow Israel to endure it. It is Israel’s time of trouble and purification (cf. Zech. 12:6), the era that will prepare Israel to receive her Messiah (v. 10; cf. Rom. 11:25). This is a time of God’s wrath on unbelievers, not on believers; Christ has already borne God’s wrath for us.[50]

The Rapture’s Purifying Hope Implies Its Pretribulational Nature

John declared that Christ’s imminent return has a purifying effect on believers:

> Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure. (1 John 3:2–3)

For those with the expectation, this is a somber reminder, with a sanctifying effect, that the end of the age is at hand.

The Rapture's Blessed Hope Implies Its Pretribulational Nature

Paul affirmed:

> [God's grace] teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. (Titus 2:12–13)

Two elements speak of imminence: First, we "wait" in constant expectation for Christ's return, and second, it is a blessed hope, which wouldn't be true if we had to go through part or all of the Tribulation in order to achieve it.

The Time of Believer's Rewards Implies a Pretribulational Rapture

"We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). Jesus said, "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done" (Rev. 22:12). That is to say, believers will be rewarded immediately after His return, and no such event takes place on earth as is described in 1 Corinthians 3:11–15:

> No one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.

With the Rapture preceding the Tribulation, believers will receive their rewards in heaven while the Tribulation is occurring on earth.

The Difference Between Christ Coming *for* His Saints and Then Later Coming *With* Them Fits a Pretribulational Rapture

The difference between Christ coming ***for*** His saints and coming ***with*** His saints is best explained in this light. Before the Tribulation, Christ comes for His bride (1 Thess. 4:16–17; John 14:3); then, at the end of the Tribulation, He will return with all His saints. Jude wrote, "See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones (v. 14; cf. Matt. 24:29–31). He cannot come ***with*** them until He has first come ***for*** them; we have identified the time interval between these events as seven years. Not only is there is no evidence that these events are at the same time, but when Christ returns in Revelation 19, there is no reference to the Rapture.[51]

The Sheep Nations Going Into the Millennium Supports a Pretribulational Rapture

According to Jesus, there will be "sheep" (believers) who survive the Tribulation and enter the Millennium:

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world' " (Matt. 25:31–34).

The Tribulation's judgments will so severely diminish the world's population that were it to last longer no one would live through it (24:22). During the Millennium, children will be born (Isa. 65:20), and there will be innumerable people by the end of it (Rev. 20:8).[52] People in resurrection bodies do not have children,[53] and according to posttribulationism, the resurrection will take place at the end of the Tribulation, just before the Millennium (v. 4); if this is the case, though, there will be no one in unresurrected bodies to populate the earth during Christ's reign. No such problem exists for premillennial pretribulationism, with the resurrection taking place before the Tribulation; many of the 144,000 Jews saved therein, ***and*** the great multitude of others they win (7:4, 9), will be alive on earth in unresurrected bodies. ***These are the "sheep" of Matthew 25 who will replenish the earth during a thousand years of reproduction under perfect conditions***.

Posttribulationists have set forth speculations to avoid their dilemma, but they are just that—speculation, without demonstrable scriptural grounds. One such interpretation suggests that the 144,000 are not really converted during the Tribulation, and, hence, they will not be resurrected at the end (in a posttribulational rapture) and, thus, will still qualify to have children during the Millennium. In sharp contrast, Revelation 7 says they have "the seal of the living God" on them (v. 2) and that they serve God, not Antichrist (v. 3). Posttribulationists are also "forced" (see Gundry, ***CT***, 137) to move the judgment of the "goat nations" to the end of the Millennium, for if the Rapture occurs at the end of the Tribulation, and all the "sheep" (saved) are taken to heaven, then there will be no saved persons left to populate the earth. The suggestion that some "goats" (unsaved) will enter the Millennium is without any textual support.[54] Jesus said "all" the goats will be judged when He comes (Matt. 25:32). The significant differences between the separation and the judgment are sufficient to show they are not the same.[55]

Sheep and Goat Separation	**Great White Throne Judgment**

No resurrection mentioned	Resurrection of the lost
No books opened	Books opened
Nations are present	Only individuals are present
Saved and lost are present	Only lost are present
Reward mentioned	No rewards mentioned
Occurs on earth	Does not occur on earth
Two destinies: heaven and hell	One destiny: hell

The Time Needed for God's Judgments, After the Rapture, at the End of the Tribulation, Supports Pretribulationism

Posttribulationists have a veritable logjam of events at Christ's second coming, at the end of the Tribulation. They believe that God's wrath must be held off until after the Rapture, but they also believe that the Rapture will be part of the Second Coming (with no significant intervening time). However, a number of events must occur, such as a time of peace and safety (1 Thess. 5:3), that scarcely fit the description of the Tribulation's end, when "all the nations" will converge on Jerusalem (Zech. 12:3; 14:2; Rev. 16:14). Contrary to Robert Gundry (b. 1935; see ***CT***, 92), there isn't even a hint of lull in the wars surrounding Armageddon. Certainly, after all the terrible trumpet and bowl judgments, there will be no sense of "peace and safety." ***This will be at the end of the most intense time of trauma and turmoil in the history of humankind***. Charles Ryrie (b. 1925) notes, "The very form of the statement suggests that peace and safety will not be the actual conditions of the world preceding the Day of the Lord" (***WYSKAR***, 100). The related passages ***contrast*** peace and safety with destruction.

According to posttribulationism, the Day of the Lord will not begin until the judgments of Armageddon (at the Tribulation's conclusion) are poured out … but the Rapture occurs at the same time. This raises another question: "How can

the rapture precede Armageddon and yet be a single event with the second coming, which puts a stop to Armageddon?" (ibid., 94). No such problems for pretribulationism, for with the Rapture before the Tribulation, there is plenty of time for all these judgments to take place before the Second Coming.

Coming in the Air vs. Coming to Earth Supports Pretribulationism

Along with the above discussion is the Rapture being described as Christ coming "***in the air***." Christ will later come ***to earth*** with the saints He will have previously raptured. These two events must not be confused, and ***the time interval between them is the seven years of the Tribulation period***.[56]

The Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be *caught up* together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord *in the air*. And so we will be with the Lord forever. (
1 Thess. 4:16–17
)

The Greek word for "rapture," translated ***caught up***, is ***arpadzô***, which is translated in the Latin Bible (the Vulgate) as ***rapturô***, from which we get the word ***rapture***. The term is used of Paul being caught up into heaven (2 Cor. 12:2–4), of Philip being caught up bodily by the Spirit and carried to another place (Acts 8:39), and of Christ's ascension (Rev. 12:5; cf. Acts 1:11). No such occurrence is anywhere described as being part of Christ's return to reign on earth at the Tribulation's end (Matt. 24–25; Rev. 19); the saints are not being ***taken away*** in Christ's return to reign but are being ***brought back*** to reign with Him. The posttribulationist idea that Christ comes in the air and then immediately turns around and returns to earth is not biblical, but simply a novel invention to avoid the clear separation of these events.

From 1 Thessalonians 4:16–18, Ryrie lists five characteristics that will be part of Christ coming in the air for the church:

(1) a ***return*** of Christ (v. 16);
(2) a ***resurrection*** of dead believers (v. 16);
(3) a ***rapture*** of living believers (v. 17);
(4) the ***reunion*** of believers with departed loved ones (v. 17); and
(5) ***reassurance*** or comfort as we look forward to this event (v. 18).

No such traits are attached to Christ's return at the Tribulation's end.

The Rapture As a Mystery Supports Pretribulationism

Paul said to the Corinthians,

> Listen, I tell you *a mystery*: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. (
> 1 Cor. 15:51–53
>)

Unlike Christ's return to earth, the Rapture will occur in an instant without warning, "in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye" (v. 52; cf. 1 Thess. 4:17).

Like the church, a mystery once concealed but now revealed (Eph. 3:3–5; Col. 1:17), so the church's rapture was unknown. The fact of a future resurrection was known to Old Testament Jews,[57] but nowhere was it revealed that a large body of believers who were neither Jew nor Gentile (Gal. 3:28) but a "new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17) and "one new man" (Eph. 2:15) would be raptured to heaven without either dying or being resurrected from graves.

The Rapture As Not Part of "the Day of the Lord" Supports Pretribulationism

"The day of the Lord" and similar terms, as used of end-time events, refer to the Tribulation period (1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Thess. 2:2)[58] and on through the Millennium (2 Peter 3:10–13). Never once is the Rapture part of this day.
"Day of the Lord" occurs about twenty times in the Old Testament, often of end-time events. A parallel term, "the last days," has fourteen occurrences, always of the end times. "In that day" is used over a hundred times, generally of the same events. ***Isaiah uses all three of the same event*** (Isa. 1:2, 11–12), ***but never once does the Old Testament refer to the Rapture***: "This omission from over one hundred passages seems hard to understand if the rapture is the first event of the Day of the Lord" (Ryrie, ***WYSKAR***, 103).
Further, Paul tells the Thessalonians they will not go through "that day" (2 Thess. 2:3) and it will not overtake them; they will be delivered from it (1 Thess. 5:9) by the Rapture that comes before (4:16–17; cf. 5:1). ***The Rapture is before the Tribulation period***.

Christ's Promise in John 14 to Return Supports the Rapture

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. *I am going there to prepare a place for you*. And if I go and prepare a place for you, *I will come back and take you to be with me* that you also may be where I am. (vv. 1–3)

Several considerations of this text indicate that Christ's promise to His disciples is about rapturing us to heaven before the Tribulation rather than His return to (or, revelation on) earth after the Tribulation.
First, use of the present tense for a future event: "I ***will*** come back" ("I ***am*** coming back") indicates the event's present immediacy.
Second, that He will personally come back implies a separate event. At the end of the Tribulation, at the Second Coming, when Christ returns to earth, it is not He but His angels who will gather the elect (Matt. 24:31).

Third, Christ will take them to heaven to His Father's house, not keep them on earth to go into the kingdom as at the end of the Tribulation (the Second Coming —25:34).

In summation, many future features point to a pretribulational Rapture, which best explains all the data in a consistent and comprehensive manner. Only a pretribulational Rapture fits the signless imminence conveyed in many New Testament passages, and no other model explains the clear difference between the two aspects of His return:

Rapture	**Second Coming**
Meeting them ***in the air*** (I Thess. 4:17)	Taking them ***to the earth*** (Zech. 14:4; Acts 1:11)
Taking believers to heaven (John 14:3)	*Bringing* believers back to earth (Rev. 19:14)
Coming ***for*** His saints (2 Thess.2:1)	Coming ***with*** His saints (Jude 14)
Only believers see Him (1 Thess. 4:17)	All people see Him (Rev. 1:7)
No signs precede it (1 Thess. 5:1–3)	Many signs precede it (Matt. 24:3–30)
The Tribulation begins (2 Thess. 1:6–9)	The Millennium begins (Rev. 20:1–7)

Rapture Passages

There are numerous New Testament passages on the Rapture and also many on the Second Coming. Consider these on the Rapture: John 14:3; 1 Cor. 1:7–8; 15:51–53; 16:22; Phil. 3:20–21; Col. 3:4; 1 Thess. 1:10; 2:19; 4:13–18; 5:9, 23; 2 Thess. 2:1; 1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 4:1; Titus 2:13; Heb. 9:28; James 5:7–9; 1 Peter 1:7, 13; 1 John 2:28–3:2; Jude 21; Rev. 2:25; 3:10; 22:7, 12, 20.

Second-Coming Texts

Passages about the Second Coming, found in both the Old and New Testaments, include the following: Dan. 2:44–45; 7:9–14; 12:1–3; Zech. 12:1–9; 14:1–15; Matt. 13:41; 24:14–31; 26:64; Mark 13:14–27; 14:62; Luke 13:25–28; Acts 1:9–11; 3:19–21; 1 Thess. 3:13; 2 Thess. 1:6–10; 2 Thess. 2:8; 2 Peter 3:1–14; Jude 14–15; Rev. 1:7; 19:11–20:6.

ANSWERING OBJECTIONS TO PRETRIBULATIONISM

There are many objections raised against pretribulationism, but none is insolvable. Consider the following arguments based on specific passages.

The Objection From Psalm 110:1

"The Lord says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.' "Some posttribulationists use this to suggest that Christ will not return until after the Tribulation, for it is not until then that He is completely victorious over His enemies. If He rises before this to come for the Rapture, He will not be seated until the end of the Tribulation.

Response

For one thing, sitting is a figure of speech; Christ has accomplished the work of redemption, and He is seated in a position of honor and power at God's right hand. God does not literally have a "right hand" (John 4:24), nor can He literally sit on a throne. There is also no literal "footstool." While it is literally true that Christ will be so exalted, these figures of speech are not literally true.

Furthermore, even taking “sit” in a literal sense would not mean Christ could never stand. Analogously, the world’s monarchs have always been able to stand by their throne or move from it without losing their “seat of authority.”
In addition, Christ has already “stood up” at least once, since He has been seated; when Stephen died, Jesus stood to receive him (Acts 7:56). If Christ can stand to receive one believer into heaven without losing His seat of authority, there is no reason He cannot stand to receive His bride (the church) into heaven at the Rapture also (1 Thess. 4:16–17).

The Objection From Matthew 24:29–30

Immediately after the distress [tribulation] of those days “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.” *At that time* the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.

Response

First, this does say Christ will return to earth after the Tribulation; however, this is not the Rapture, which occurs before the Tribulation.
Second, again, there is a difference between Christ coming ***for*** His saints (the Rapture) and coming ***with*** His saints (the Second Coming). At the Rapture we meet ***in the air*** (1 Thess. 4:16–17); here He is ***coming to earth*** where He will sit on a throne (Matt. 25:31).
Third, the Rapture is an imminent event preceded by no signs; here there will be “the sign” of His coming (24:30–32).
Fourth, and finally, the disciples’ question that occasioned this discourse was about His return to earth, not His coming in the air: “When will these things be? And what will be ***the sign of Your coming*** and of ***the end of the age***?” (24:3). This is not about the church’s Rapture, but about Christ’s return after the Tribulation to set up His kingdom.[59]

The Objection From Matthew 24:37–40

As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be *taken* and the other left.

Some argue that since this is well into the Tribulation period, those "taken" in the Rapture are not taken before the Tribulation.

Response

The illustrated parallel indicates that those "taken" were not taken in the Rapture, but, rather, like those "taken" in the Flood, at the end of the Tribulation, taken in judgment. This is further supported by the parallel passage, where those "taken" were brought to a place of judgment. The disciples asked where they would go, and Jesus replied, "Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather" (Luke 17:37). Those "left" to go into the Millennium after the judgment of the Tribulation were the ones saved.

Also, that different Greek words for ***taken*** are used of the Rapture does not invalidate this conclusion but merely shows that there are synonyms used in Scripture, just as the same word being used of different events[60] does not prove they are identical. This is a common linguistic occurrence.

The Objection From 1 Thessalonians 5:1–9

Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are

saying, “Peace and safety,” destruction will come on *them* suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. *You* are all sons of the light and sons of the day. *We* do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let *us* not be like others, who are asleep, but let *us* be alert and self-controlled. For *those* who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since *we* belong to the day, let *us* be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. *For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ*.

Some who deny a pretribulation Rapture use this to imply that Paul is instructing the Thessalonians about the day of God’s wrath (i.e., the Tribulation), which they will go through when Christ returns.

Response

First, Paul’s use of ***now*** (Gk: ***peri de***) indicates a new subject in every place he uses it in his writings.[61] Even sole use of the second word (***de***) has the significance of opening a new subject.
Second, the Thessalonians already had a “perfect” (accurate) understanding of the Day of the Lord (v. 2) but were ignorant concerning the Rapture (4:13); the one is not part of the other.
Third, the use of ***we*** for the Rapture (v. 17) and ***they*** for the Day of the Lord (5:3) indicates he is not talking about believers enduring the latter.
Fourth, he clearly disassociates believers from the Day of the Lord in verse 4 (“But you, brothers …”). The contrast between “we” (us) who will be delivered from that day and “those” who will go through it is unmistakable. The exhortations to believers (in vv. 6–9) are not to watch for signs, but to use these future events as motivation for godly living in the present (cf. 2 Peter 3:11).
Fifth, and finally, in verse 9 he clearly affirms that believers will not go through this period.

The Objection From 2 Thessalonians 2:1–3

Concerning *the coming of our Lord* Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that *the day of the Lord* has already come. Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for *that day* [viz., the day of the Lord] will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed.

Paul, in his previous letter, had spoken about the Rapture, when we will be gathered together with departed loved ones in heaven. Referring to believers here on earth after Antichrist has been revealed seems to argue against what he'd already taught.

Response

Both the context and flow of the argument favor a pretribulation Rapture. Some in Thessalonica were claiming revelations (v. 2) that the "coming of our Lord" and "our being gathered to Him" (the Rapture, 1 Thess. 4:16–17) had already occurred. Paul responds that the Rapture could not have already occurred, for "the man of lawlessness" had not been revealed. Thus, "the day of the Lord" (a common designation of a day of God's judgment) had not (and has not) come; i.e., the Tribulation has not started.
Further, this is supported by the comments that such a day will not come until "He who now restrains" this kind of evil is "taken out of the way" (v. 7 nkjv). As noted earlier, the only person capable of restraining the kind of evil to be unleashed by the satanically inspired Antichrist is the Holy Spirit of God, whose indwelling presence in the body of believers will be taken away at the Rapture, before this horrendous period of Tribulation begins.

The Objection From 1 Corinthians 15:51–52

We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at *the last trumpet*. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

Some claim it is contrary to the historical-grammatical hermeneutic to assert that the Rapture occurs before the Tribulation when the only New Testament listing of trumpets puts the last trumpet at the Tribulation's end (cf. Rev. 11:15).

Response

First, this interpretation rejects the historical-grammatical hermeneutic by equating "last trumpet" in one book by one author with "seventh trumpet" in another book by another author. This certainly does not come out of the context in 1 Corinthians 15.
Second, there are no reasons to believe the audience at Corinth knew about the seven trumpets; even an early date for Revelation (c. 68–69) is still well after 1 Corinthians (c. 55–56).
Third, if taken in the broader Old Testament context, a trumpet sound was a sign of God's appearance (Ex. 19:16). Hence, it would be appropriate to refer to His final appearance at the Second Coming as the "last" trumpet.
Fourth, and finally, taken in the immediate context of the preceding chapter, Paul spoke of a "trumpet" that arouses soldiers "to ***prepare*** for battle," implying another trumpet that would ***call*** them to battle. That would be the last trumpet and would parallel his thought in 1 Corinthians 15:51–53. In either case, one does not have to go outside the context of what the Corinthians would be expected to know in order to explain why the Rapture is not associated with the "seventh" trumpet of Revelation 11:15.

The Objection From Matthew 24:27

"As lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming [Gk: ***parousia***] of the Son of Man." All agree that this refers to Christ's coming at the end of the Tribulation. But the same term, ***parousia***, is also used of the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:15), so posttribulationists reason that the Rapture must be at the end of the Tribulation.

Response

Parousia means “arrival” or “presence,” and it is biblically used of the arrival of human beings (see 1 Cor. 16:17) as well as of Christ. He will arrive and be present at the Rapture as well as at the Second Coming; nothing about the term limits it to one or the other.

The same is true of the word ***revelation*** (Gk: ***apokalupsis***), which is used of both aspects of Christ’s return (cf. 1 Cor. 1:7; 2 Thess. 1:7); they will be an “unveiling” (revelation) of Christ to whomever and whenever He appears. Likewise, the word ***manifestation*** (Gk: ***epiphanea***) is used of the believer’s hope of seeing the Lord (2 Tim. 4:8) and of the Second Coming (2 Thess. 2:8). Common words have usages in many contexts, and, as always, meaning is discovered by context.[62]

The Objection From 2 Thessalonians 1:5–10

God’s judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.

Posttribulationists understand this text to assert that “Paul places the release of Christians from persecution at the posttribulational return of Christ to judge unbelievers” (Gundry, ***CT***, 113).

Response

That conclusion does not fit the passage's context for several reasons.
First, it not only addresses the release of Christians at the Tribulation's end but also of the Thessalonians Paul addressed (v. 5).
Second, if release was Paul's chief concern, then why did he not mention death, which also releases a believer from tribulation? Indeed, only those believers living at the time will be released by the Rapture; the rest are released by death.
Third, the Rapture is not described in this text at all. Paul refers to judgment, paying back, trouble, blazing fire, punishment, and everlasting destruction, none of which is connected with Rapture passages.[63]
Fourth, and finally, ***the subject of the passage is vindication*** (release from any sense of injustice). Believers are to rest assured that God will judge unbelievers who trouble them (cf. Rev. 6:9–11).

The Objection From Revelation 7:4, 9; 14:1, 3

> Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel.... After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands....
>
> Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads.... And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth.

Some posttribulationists argue that if, as according to pretribulationism, the Holy Spirit is taken out of the world (2 Thess. 2:7) at the Rapture, then there would be no way all these people could receive salvation, for no one can be saved apart from the Spirit's regeneration.[64]

Response

Pretribulationists agree that no one can be saved apart from the ***regenerating*** work of the Spirit. However, they deny that this is contrary to believing the Spirit's ***indwelling*** in the church can be taken out of the world while people can still be saved. The Spirit is omnipresent (Ps. 139:7–12) and cannot be eliminated from anywhere; His special presence in believers, individually or collectively, is a work that ends on earth at the Rapture.

Old Testament believers were not permanently indwelt by the Spirit (Ps. 51:11; 1 Sam. 16:14), yet everyone who enters God's kingdom must be born again by the Spirit (John 3:3–7), and Old Testament saints are in God's kingdom (Matt. 8:11). The Spirit's regeneration is not identical to the Spirit's indwelling. Even though His restraining influence through indwelling believers will no longer be in the world, He will be present in the Tribulation to regenerate those who believe.

The Objection From Revelation 20:4

I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

Some posttribulationists maintain that this is the only passage indicating the time of the Rapture—at the end of the Tribulation, just before the Millennium (see Ladd, ***BH***, 165). They insist that the rapture is at the time of the resurrection (1 Thes. 4:13–18), but Rev. 20 places the first resurrection at the end of the tribulation.

Response

In reply, no Rapture is mentioned in this passage. There is not a word of anyone being "caught up" to meet Christ in the air (cf. 1 Thess. 4:16–17). The mention of resurrection is limited by the text itself to those who during the Tribulation "had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark." John is not speaking of those who will be resurrected before the Tribulation, when Christ returns for His bride, which is the first stage of the first resurrection.[65] All who die must be resurrected; those who die after Christ raptures His bride into heaven will be resurrected at the end of the Tribulation.

The Objection That Pretribulationism Is a Late Doctrine

Many anti-pretribulationists see the relative lateness of pretribulationism as an argument against it. They claim it began with John Nelson Darby (1800–1882); Darby allegedly got it from Edward Irving (1792–1834), a heretic who was deposed from the Church of Scotland. Others claim it came from a mystic named Margaret MacDonald (c. 1830), and some trace it back a little further to Emmanuel Lacunza (1731–1801).[66] George Eldon Ladd (1911–1982) said, "We can find no trace of pretribulationism in the early Church; and no modern pretribulationist has successfully proved that this particular doctrine was held by any of the Church fathers or students of the Word before the nineteenth century" (***BH***, 31). Accordingly, the pretribulation model is assumed to be unbiblical. However, this conclusion does not follow for many reasons.

Response

These arguments are based on at least two fallacies.
The fallacy of chronological snobbery wrongly argues that truth can be determined by time—that is, since the doctrine is late in origin, it's assumed to

be untrue. However, time has no necessary connection with truth; something can be new and true just as it can be old and false.[67]

Assuming that something is false or invalid because it came from an allegedly bad source is the genetic fallacy. The model for the molecular structure of benzene originated from a vision that the chemist August Kekule (1829–1896) had of a snake biting its own tail. The origin of the alternating current motor was derived from a vision Nikola Tesla (1856–1943) had while reading Johan Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), a pantheistic poet. No one rejects the validity of these on the basis of their weird sources.

What is more, some doctrines in the earliest church were false. Doceticism (the denial of Christ's humanity) existed even in New Testament times (1 John 4:1–6). An incipient form of gnosticism that denied Christ's deity was present in the Colossian church (Col. 2). Baptismal regeneration was taught by some early Fathers. ***That these were early did not make them true, and neither does the relative lateness of a doctrine make it false***. If it did, then by the same token covenant theology, held by many who deny the pretribulationist and premillennial views, would be intrinsically false as well, since it didn't develop until nearly sixteen hundred years after the time of Christ by Caspar Olenianus (1536–1587) and Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669).[68]

Further, it fits with the overall progress of doctrinal development that eschatology was not a primary focus until modern times. As James Orr (1844–1913) noted in his classic ***Progress of Dogma***, certain doctrines occupied different eras, with the doctrine of God coming first in the early centuries and the doctrine of last things coming last in modern times (20–30).

In addition, pretribulationism is not as late as once supposed, for it is now known to have existed in the fourth century. With the discovery of Ephraem of Syria's teaching (c. 306–373),[69] it has been established that pretribulationism was taught in the early church.

As already shown,[70] premillennialism, of which pretribulationism is a derivative, was taught in the early church from shortly after the time of the apostles. The imminence of Christ's return has been emphasized from the start, and pretribulationism is based on a realistic concept of imminence.

Lastly, for an evangelical, the primary question is not whether the doctrine was taught by the ***early*** church, but whether it was taught by the ***earliest*** church—the

church of the apostles. As we have thoroughly established, there is ample New Testament evidence to support pretribulationalism.

The Objection From John 21:18–19

Jesus said to Peter,

> "I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"

Those opposed to pretribulational imminence argue that if this event had to happen before Jesus returned, then His coming was not imminent. The same would be true of Paul being informed by God in advance that he would have a great ministry at Corinth (Acts 18:9–11).

Response

It is true that for the brief time involved, Peter and Paul could conclude that Christ was not coming. Nonetheless, this does not destroy the doctrine of imminence. For one thing, these revelations were to individuals and did not affect the church at large. For another, it was limited to a short period in the first century and does not affect belief in imminence by subsequent believers.

The Objection That Pretribulationism Appeals to Unworthy Motives

The amillennialist Oswald Allis (1880–1973) attempted to refute pretribulationism under the heading "Pretribulationism Appeals to Unworthy

Motives" (***PC***, 207). Gundry states that "sometimes the argument [for pretribulationism] is so stated as to be marred by an appeal to fear" (***CT***, 43).

Response

First, there is nothing wrong with fear as a motive if it is based in truth. Jesus repeatedly warned people of eternal hell.[71]
Second, most arguments for pretribulationism are not based on fear.
Third, misuse does not bar use. That is, even some arguments being incorrectly cast by some pretribulationists does not invalidate the proper use of the argument in particular nor of pretribulationism in general.

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR PRETRIBULATIONISM

Most of the theological points have been made in the above biblical discussion. It remains here to pinpoint and separate them.

The Real Distinction Between Israel and the Church

Some arguments for pretribulationism are based on the theological teaching that Israel and the church are not the same,[72] and that, hence, prophecies for Israel are not fulfilled in the church. Since the Tribulation is Israel's seventieth week (Dan. 9:27 nkjv) and is "determined" upon them (v. 24), there is no reason the church should be included.

The Divine Pattern of Not Judging the Righteous With the Wicked

In this fallen world, believers sometimes experience collateral damage from the evil actions of unbelievers (such as child abuse by an unbelieving parent);

nevertheless, it is God's stated policy and practice not to judge believers with unbelievers (Gen. 18:25). God did not destroy Noah and his family with the wicked world (7–9), nor did He destroy the faithful Israelites with unbelievers but preserved Joshua and Caleb and the younger generation who had not been part of the rebellion (Num. 14). Likewise, Moses and the faithful were saved when Korah and his seditious followers were swallowed up in judgment (16). It is contrary to God's pattern to judge the church (believers) with unbelieving Israel during the Tribulation period.

The Wrath of God Fell on Christ for Us

Another theological principle behind a pretribulational Rapture is that Christ has already experienced God's wrath for believers. "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities" (Isa. 53:5 nkjv); "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21); "Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God" (1 Peter 3:18); "There is now ***no condemnation*** for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). Because Christ bore God's wrath for us, we do not have to endure it. The Tribulation will be an unprecedented time of God's wrath,[73] which there is no reason for the church to experience (1 Thess. 5:9).

God Provides Strong Impetus for Our Sanctification

It is clear from the beginning to the end of Scripture that God has a strong desire that we become like Him. He said repeatedly, "I am the Lord who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy" (Lev. 11:45; 11:15; 19:2). Jesus said, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). Hebrews exhorts, "Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity" (6:1), and we must "make every effort … to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord" (12:14). God is

more interested in our holiness than our happiness. He wants us to “become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13). Given this theological truth, a pretribulational Rapture follows naturally, containing strong motivation for holiness in the here-and-now, knowing we may meet our Maker at any moment (1 John 3:2–3).

The day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives. (
2 Peter 3:10–11
)

PRETERISM

The preceding discussion is based on the premise that the Tribulation is yet future. However, some have adopted a view called ***preterism***, which is derived from the Latin word ***preter*** (***past***). Preterism claims that apocalyptic biblical prophecy—the events described by Jesus in the Mount Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24–25) and by John in the Revelation (especially 6–18)—have already been fulfilled. There are two basic forms of preterism: moderate (partial) and extreme (full).

Moderate (partial) preterism, represented by Gary DeMar (b. 1950—see ***End-Times Fiction*** and ***Last Days Madness***), R. C. Sproul (b. 1939—see ***The Last Days According to Jesus***), Hank Hanegraaff (b. 1950—see ***The Last Sacrifice***), and Kenneth Gentry (b. 1953—see ***Before Jerusalem Fell***), holds that the resurrection and the Second Coming are future, but that all the other prophesies made in Matthew 24–25 and in Revelation 6–18 were fulfilled in the first century, particularly in the fall of Jerusalem in a.d. 70.

Extreme (full) preterism maintains that ***all*** New Testament predictions are past, including those about the resurrection and the Second Coming, which likewise occurred in the first century. This model has been held by Max King (***The Spirit of Prophecy***), Ed Stevens (***Expectations Demand a First Century Rapture***), and John Noe (***Shattering the ‘Last Behind’ Delusion***).

Arguments for and Responses to Partial Preterism

Extreme preterism is heretical, denying two of the great fundamentals of the faith: the physical Resurrection and the literal Second Coming (see Geisler, ***BR***). As we have already established that the Second Coming and the final resurrection (of all humankind) are future, physical events,[74] we will focus here on moderate preterism.

Argument One

Preteristic elements are said to exist in some early Fathers (e.g., Origen [c. 185–c. 254], Eusebius [263–340]), some Reformers (e.g., John Calvin), and some post-Reformation writers (e.g., John Owen [1616–1683], Milton Terry [1840–1914], B. B. Warfield [1851–1921], Loraine Boettner [1932–2000]).

Response

On the contrary, the vast majority of the earliest Fathers[75] openly opposed the idea that such prophecies had already been fulfilled; preterism is not even found in the ***medieval*** Fathers. In fact, it was formulated by the Jesuit scholar Luiz de Alcazar (1554–1613) to counter the Reformation, drawing attention from the Reformers' critique of Roman Catholicism as a fulfillment of the Revelation prophecies about the beast. Furthermore, fragmentary support can be found in church history for many views, including some that are unorthodox and heretical. Such evidence is no definitive argument for preterism.

Argument Two

The repeated use of ***you*** in Jesus' apocalyptic teachings (e.g., cf. Matt. 24:38–

25:3) is alleged to reveal that He was speaking only to His immediate disciples. Otherwise, it would have made no sense to urge His listeners to flee from Jerusalem when those things happened (cf. 24:15–16).

Response

Some predictions ***were*** fulfilled in a.d. 70, but some were for "the end of the age" (Matt. 20:3). The ***you*** is used here proleptically (in advance) in reference to those who will be alive in the times being described, when these events will be fulfilled. Paul similarly referred to "***we*** who are still alive" at Christ's return (1 Thess. 4:17); at best this expresses a possibility and expectation (not a prediction) that he would be on earth during the Second Coming. Furthermore, Isaiah told King Ahaz, "The Lord himself will give ***you*** a sign" that "the virgin will be with child" (Isa. 7:14), which did not find its complete fulfillment until hundreds of years later in the Virgin Birth (Matt. 1:23). Also, the "blessed are you" (Matt. 5:11) in the Sermon on the Mount isn't limited to the first-century disciples, nor is the "you" who murdered the prophet Zechariah (Matt. 23:35) a reference only to New Testament Jews.

Argument Three

This generation, as in "This generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened" (Matt. 24:34), shows that Jesus was speaking of the immediate future (viz., a.d. 70), not a distant-future tribulation. This is common New Testament use of the term,[76] and, further, Jesus said all His predictions here would come to pass on "this generation."

Response

As noted by lexicographers William Arndt (1880–1957) and Wilbur Gingrich (1901–1993), the word ***generation*** (Gk: ***genea***) can mean "clan," "race," or "nation" (***GELNT***, 153), and this is supported by other New Testament usage (e.g., cf. Luke 16:8 nkjv). So taken, the phrase does not necessarily imply that Israel will pass away after the Second Coming; more likely, it means Israel will not pass away before the Second Coming. Also, the phrase may refer to a future generation of Jews alive during the Tribulation—that is, the end-time crisis will not be of indefinite duration.

Some take the verb translated ***takes place*** as meaning "begins to take place," namely, all these things began to take place in a.d. 70 but will not be completed until the Second Coming. Jesus did refer to these as "the beginning of birth pains" (Matt. 24:8). Whatever the case, clearly this cannot mean that all those things, including the Second Coming, were fulfilled by a.d. 70, for the many reasons given above.

Argument Four

Jesus seems to have said He would return before the disciples had evangelized all the cities of Israel (Matt. 10:17–23). This they did immediately, in Jesus' time or at least by a.d. 70.

Response

This text is not part of Matthew 24 (where He speaks of His coming "with power and great glory," v. 30), so it may not be about the Second Coming at "the end of the age" (v. 3). Rather, it may refer to His return to reunite with the disciples at the end of their evangelistic campaign through the cities of Israel, which He commissioned. Or, as in verses 15–31, Jesus may be speaking proleptically of His followers' final mission "at the end of the age," for during the Tribulation, just before His return, they will evangelize not only Israel but the world (Rev. 7:9).

Argument Five

Jesus said there were some of his followers “standing” there who would not taste death until they saw Him return, “coming in His kingdom” (Matt. 16:28). Therefore, this had to occur in the first century, while these contemporaries were still alive.

Response

Jesus was referring to His transfiguration (Matt. 17), which prefigured His second coming. Peter, James, and John ***did*** see Him “coming in His kingdom,” power, and glory, as Peter confirmed (2 Peter 1:16–18). This transfiguration experience was a foretaste of Christ’s final glorious appearance at the end of the age (24:30), when “the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works” (16:27 nkjv). Those who are raptured (1 Thess. 4:13–18) before this time of wrath (5:9; Rev. 3:10) will witness the Second Coming without tasting death.
In any event, Jesus could not have been referring to a.d. 70 for many reasons:

(1) He did not come with His angels at that time.
(2) He did not distribute the rewards at that time.
(3) “Some” (two or more) of the disciples standing were not still alive in a.d. 70, since all but John had been martyred by then.
(4) He did not set up a visible kingdom at that time, wherein He and His twelve apostles reigned on thrones (Matt. 19:28).
(5) There was no physical coming of Christ in a.d. 70; He and His angels promised they would “see” Him (24:30; Acts 1:10–11; Rev. 1:1).

Argument Six

If the Tribulation is to be worldwide, then it would have made no sense for Jesus to tell the disciples to flee to the mountains during it (Matt. 24:16).

Response

This was a specific warning to avoid the center of trouble (Jerusalem) and flee to the mountains, which is what the remnant will do at that time. There they will be safe from the general judgment falling on Jerusalem and the rest of the world. However, contrary to preterism, there is strong evidence that the general Tribulation judgments will be worldwide.[77]

Argument Seven

These events all took place between 66 and 70 in the Jewish Wars with Rome and in the destruction of Jerusalem. Their fulfillment is recorded by Josephus (see ***The Wars of the Jews***), so we need not look for any future fulfillment.

Response

These events did not all take place in the first century. For example, the glorious Second Coming did not occur (24:30), nor did Christ begin His literal enthroned reign in Jerusalem (25:34; cf. 19:28). There is also no evidence that all the astronomical events occurred, such as the stars falling from heaven and the heavens being shaken (24:29).

Argument Eight

Luke 21 is a parallel account to Matthew 24, yet even many futurists[78] hold that Luke 21 was fulfilled by a.d. 70. Why then should not Matthew's passage have also been fulfilled?

Response

Luke omits elements like "the abomination that causes desolation" (21:20), which is still future and is connected with the Tribulation (Dan. 9:27; Matt. 24:15). The "times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24), which intervene between Christ's first and second comings, are still going on in the New Testament era (cf. Rom. 11:25) and will continue until Israel is restored to its ultimate promises.[79] Further, many scriptural predictions have a partial fulfillment now and a fuller fulfillment in the future.[80]

Argument Nine

Revelation is a book of symbols and should not be taken literally. So taken, it ***has*** been fulfilled in the history of the church.

Response

Once again, symbols refer to literal realities, and in the Revelation John gives literal interpretations (e.g., cf. 1:20). The whole Bible should be taken as literally true, but not all the Bible should be taken literally (e.g., cf. John 15:1).[81]

Argument Ten

That the biblical writers thought Jesus was coming soon is indicated by ***many*** passages, such as Romans 13:11–12; 1 Peter 4:7; James 5:8; 1 John 2:18; Revelation 1:1; and Revelation 22:12.

Response

The Bible teaches that Jesus may come at any moment (viz., imminently), but it does not teach the moment at which He is coming (Matt. 24:36; Acts 1:6–7). This argument confuses imminency and immediacy.[82] There are many texts in which Christ's coming is said to be imminent, that is, at any moment.[83] Again, A. T. Robertson said, "***Quickly*** should be translated 'I am coming (imminently).' … We do not know how ***quickly*** is meant to be understood. But it is a real threat" (***WPNT***, 7.306; cf. Morris, ***RSJ***, 258; Seiss, ***A***, 523). The word means "suddenly," not necessarily "soon."

Argument Eleven

John was told that Jesus would come "quickly" (Rev. 22:12, 20 nkjv), which points to an immediate event, not one in the distant future.

Response

If this were so, then it would support extreme (not partial) preterism, since it refers to the Second Coming, which has not yet occurred. Further, the Greek

word ***quickly*** (***tachus***)[84] can and often does mean "swiftly, speedily, at a rapid rate." Thus, it does not necessarily refer to a ***soon*** event, but rather a ***swift*** one, when it occurs.

Argument Twelve

John refers to the events of Revelation as being "near" (Rev. 1:3; 22:10) and coming "shortly" (1:1; 22:6 nkjv). These events must have been fulfilled in a.d. 70, since two thousand plus years is a long time later.

Response

First, the word translated ***shortly*** (1:1; 22:6 nkjv) is ***tachei***, which is from the same root as ***tachu*** and also means "swiftly" or "speedily." As such, it refers to a ***sudden*** but not necessarily ***soon*** event.
Second, *near* (1:3) is translated from the word ***engus***, which means "near" or "at hand." This is a relative term like ***short*** and ***long***, of which one can ask, how near? Compared to what? As measured by whom? What is long ***to us*** is short ***for God*** (2 Peter 3:8), and, furthermore, there are clear biblical examples where a "short" time was actually long ***for us***. Hebrews 10:37, written almost two thousand years ago, says Jesus will come "in just a very little while" and He has not yet returned.[85]
Third, if preteristic reasoning is valid—that is, if these terms mean an event in the near future (e.g., a.d. 70), then moderate preterism is false, since it believes that the Second Coming and resurrection passages (Rev. 19–20) were not fulfilled in the first century.

Argument Thirteen

There is evidence that Revelation was written before a.d. 70 and was fulfilled at that time. Thus, supposedly, we need not look for any future fulfillment of these events.

Response

To the contrary, both external and internal evidence strongly support a later date for Revelation (c. a.d. 95). First, even if it was written before a.d. 70, it need not all have been fulfilled at that time. Partial preterists admit that not all had been fulfilled by then, acknowledging that the Second Coming and the millennial reign of Christ (Rev. 19–21) are yet future.[86]
Further, the evidence for a later date (c. a.d. 95) under Domitian (r. 81–96) is strong, which, since Revelation is still predicting the Tribulation after a.d. 70, would be additional evidence that preterism is wrong. (1) This date for Revelation was upheld by many of the earliest Fathers, including Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202), who said it appeared "not very long ago, almost in our own generation, at the close of the reign of Domitian" (***AH***, 5.30.3). This was confirmed by Victorinus (c. third century): "When John said these things, he was in the island of Patmos, condemned to the mines by Caesar Domitian" (***CABJ***, 10:11). Eusebius (263–340) also confirmed the Domitian date (***EH***, 3.18). (2) Other early Fathers after a.d. 70 refer to the Tribulation and/or Antichrist, spoken of in Revelation, as yet future (see Commodianus [fl. between third and fifth centuries], ***ICAGH***, 44, and Ephraem of Syria [c. 306–373], ***OLTAEW***, 2). (3) The conditions of the seven churches (Rev. 2–3) fit this later period; the Ephesians, for instance, had lost their first love (2:4) and others, like the Laodiceans (3:14ff.), had fallen from the faith more seriously than reflected in earlier New Testament times (before a.d. 70). (4) It was not until the reign of Domitian that emperor worship as reflected in Revelation was instituted. (5) Laodicea appears as a prosperous city in 3:17, yet it was destroyed by an earthquake (c. a.d. 61) during the reign of Nero (r. 54–68), and would not have recovered so quickly (i.e., within just a few years). (6) John's exile on Patmos implies a later date, when persecution was more rampant (1:9). (7) The

references to persecution and martyrdom in the churches reflect a later date (cf. 2:10, 13). (8) Polycarp's reference to the church at Smyrna (***EP***, 11.3) reveals that it did not exist in Paul's day (by a.d. 64) as it did when John wrote Revelation 2:8. (9) The Nicolaitans (cf. 2:6, 11) were not firmly established until nearer the end of the century. (10) The early date does not allow sufficient time for John's arrival in Asia (late 60s) and his replacement of Paul as the respected leader of the Asian church.

Argument Fourteen

That John was told to unseal the revelations he received about the future (22:10) indicates they were to be fulfilled in his day.

Response

John was clearly told there were things in the Revelation that were after his time —they were called "the things which will take place after this" (1:19 nkjv). Again, moderate preterists admit that some of it is future (e.g., 19–20), and since the chapters on the Tribulation (6–18) form a unit with those that follow, there is no good reason why they too cannot be future.

Argument Fifteen

Matthew 24:1–2 clearly refers to the destruction of the temple (in a.d. 70):

> Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its building. "Do you see all these things?" he asked. "I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."

Response

First, futurists do not deny that this refers to the temple's destruction in a.d. 70.
Second, in prophecy there is a principle of continuity, whereby, in this case, the temple can be destroyed and rebuilt and still be considered the same temple. For instance, Haggai refers to both Solomon's temple and Zerubbabel's rebuilt temple as "this temple" (cf. Hag. 2:3).
Third, the principle of multiple references demonstrates the same fact in which one prediction has two or more referents. For example, compare this with the prophecy of Zechariah 12:10—that the Jews will look on the One "whom they have pierced"—for this is applied to both the first (John 19:37) and second comings of Christ (Rev. 1:7).

Argument Sixteen

Preterists contend that futurist interpretation depends on positing a large gap of time between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks in Daniel's prophecy (9:24–27) of the seventy weeks. They insist that no such gap can be found in the text.

Response

First, there clearly is a gap (or break); the prophecy refers to sixty-nine weeks before and "one week" after, separated by the middle in which the oblation ceases (ibid.).
Second, there are other time gaps in biblical prophecy. For instance, Malachi 3:1 foretells the coming of John the Baptist, followed by Christ's second advent, without mentioning the gap of at least two thousand years between the events. Likewise, Isaiah 9:6 speaks of Christ's birth, followed by His earthly reign, without referring to the same span; this is also true of Zechariah 9:9–10.
Third, the events of Daniel 9:24 have never been fulfilled for Israel, to whom they were foretold.

Fourth, and finally, Jesus spoke of the "abomination of desolation" as yet future, and there was a break of at least thirty-seven years between His crucufixion (in a.d. 33, which is the end of the sixty-ninth week) and a.d. 70.

Argument Seventeen

Matthew 26:64 records Jesus saying, "I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." Preterists object that the only event that "all" to whom Jesus spoke could have seen occurred in a.d. 70.

Response

In reply, Jesus did not say when they would see His return; He only said it would be "in the future," which could be either the near future or the distant future. Plainly, it was not in the near future, since many of the accompanying events (noted above) did not happen in a.d. 70. Jesus must have been referring to the distant future, to His second coming, and thus the "you" should be taken proleptically.

The Basic Evidence

Opposing preterism are the ***futurist*** views,[87] which maintain that the prophecies about the Tribulation, the Second Coming, and a following kingdom (relating to the Millennium) are not yet fulfilled and are all future.[88] Favoring the futurist views is the following:

First, Revelation speaks of the Tribulation (6–18) in connection with Christ's Second Coming, the final resurrection, and the subsequent kingdom (19–22).

They are an inseparable unit, and all orthodox Christians hold that they are yet future. To deny this is heresy (2 Tim. 2:18). Thus, the Tribulation must be future as well.

Second, there was no literal fulfillment in a.d. 70 for many of the events described in Matthew 24–25. To mention just a few: The stars did not fall from heaven (24:29); Jesus did not return "on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory" (v. 30); the Romans did not desecrate the temple with "the abomination of desolation" (v. 15 nkjv); Christ did not set up His kingdom, separating the sheep from the goats (25:34–41), sending the latter to hell (v. 41).

Third, most of the apostles' earliest followers upheld futurism. After a.d. 70 they referred not only to the Second Coming and resurrection as future but also the coming Tribulation and Antichrist.[89]

Fourth, again, there has never yet been a literal fulfillment of the unconditional Abrahamic promises that Israel would possess the Holy Land from Egypt to Iraq, including Lebanon, Jordan, the Palestinian Territories, and Syria.[90] Likewise, the unconditional Davidic promise that Messiah would sit on His throne and reign forever has never been fulfilled (cf. Ps. 89:24–37). God's promises cannot fail (Heb. 6:13–18).[91]

Fifth, nor has Jesus' promise been literally fulfilled that "at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28). The only way to avoid the conclusion that this is a future literal kingdom is to deny literal biblical interpretation and to allegorize it away.[92]

Sixth, nor has the promise of Jesus to "restore the kingdom to Israel" (cf. Acts 1:6–8) ever been fulfilled, and certainly not in a.d. 70, since Israel as a nation in their land was decimated at that point. The same is true of Peter's offer of the kingdom to the Jewish nation (3:19–21).[93]

Seventh, Romans 11 was not fulfilled in a.d. 70 but awaits Christ's return (see Rom. 9:3–4; 11:24–26).

Eighth, the events of the Tribulation are not local to Jerusalem and surroundings, as preterists contend, but are universal as is indicated by

(1) the comparison with Noah's worldwide flood (Matt. 24:38–39; cf. 2 Peter 3:5–6; 1 Peter 3:21);
(2) the phrase "all the tribes of the earth" (Matt. 24:30 nkjv);
(3) the fact that "every eye will see him" (Rev. 1:7);
(4) the worldwide judgments listed in Matthew and in Revelation (e.g., Matt. 24:29);
(5) "the kings of the earth and of the whole world" (Rev. 16:14 nkjv) being involved;
(6) judgments that kill "every living creature in the sea" (16:3 nkjv), and the like.

Ninth, the plagues predicted in Revelation have never been literally fulfilled. Just to mention a few: Neither in a.d. 70 nor since was "a third of mankind … killed" (9:18); two hundred million soldiers from the East have never invaded Israel (9:13–15; 16:12) for a battle at "Armageddon" (v. 16); nor has "every living creature in the sea died" (16:3 nkjv). Only by the most radical allegorizing of Scripture, which if applied to the Gospels would undermine our faith, can one avoid the conclusion that these have never yet been fulfilled.

Tenth, in Matthew 23:39 Jesus said, "I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.' "This "you" cannot refer to His immediate disciples, since they died before they "saw" Him coming. Futher, since the "you" is plural, neither could it refer to their seeing Jesus come spiritually in a.d. 70, because all except John were killed before then. Instead, this text implies that Israel's repentance and acceptance of Christ as their Messiah will come before He returns (see also Zech. 14:3–11; Rev. 1:7). What is more, He could not have returned in a.d. 70 because they did not repent as a nation before then, nor have they yet.

Eleventh, in Matthew 24:14 Jesus told of when they would "see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel [9:27]." Jesus said there would be time to escape (Matt. 24:16), and this does not fit with the events surrounding a.d. 70, so the preterist view does not fit with His prediction. In addition, since Matthew related His words to Daniel's prophecy, rather than relating this to anything that happened in the first century, it seems best to take this as a future act that will parallel the actions of Antiochus Epiphanes, which involved both pagan sacrifice and idolatry in the temple.[94]

Twelfth, in Matthew 24:21 Jesus said that “then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again.” It is improbable that (as preterists suggest) this is hyperbole, for the phrase “never to be equaled again,” coupled with “no flesh” kjv, which elsewhere in the New Testament refers to all humanity,[95] argues for a unique future in the “great distress” (24:21). Certainly, Jews living in Judea in a.d. 70 were too limited a group to fulfill “all flesh.”[96]

Thirteenth, in Matthew 24:27 Jesus said that “as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.” Nothing so broad and visible literaly occurred in a.d. 70. This text is better taken as part of the “end of the age” and signs of His coming passage (24:3ff.), for both indicate a future (not immediate) fulfillment.

Fourteenth, when the Jewish high priest asked Jesus if He was the Messiah, He replied, “Yes, it is as as you say.… But I say to all of you: ‘In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven’ ” (Matt. 26:64). As we have observed, contrary to partial preterism, the “you” cannot refer to His immediate disciples; Jesus did not come again during their lifetimes. It is heretical to hold (as do exteme preterists) that this refers to Christ’s second coming having taken place in a.d. 70. Hence, this passage must refer either to Christ coming spiritually in a judgment (cf. Isa. 19:1) or, proleptically, to the literal yet-to-occur Second Coming “at the end of the age” (Matt. 24:3).

Fifteenth, in Luke 21:28 Jesus said, “When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” The great Bible commentator Alfred Plummer (1841–1926) stated, “The disciples present are regarded as representatives of believers generally. Only those who witness the signs can actually fulfill this injunction … at the Second Advent” (***CCGL***, 540–41). It is evident from Mark 13:32, where “that day” refers to the Second Coming, that these words point to the faithful’s deliverance from distress at Christ’s return.

THE PARTIAL-RAPTURE VIEW

The partial-rapture view, a combination of the pre- and postribulationist

positions, is expressed in the writings of Witness Lee (1905–1997) and his Local Church movement. Based on the parable of the ten virgins,[97] the ***faithful*** saints are said to be raptured before the Tribulation; ***unfaithful*** saints are left to endure it.

Argument One

The final resurrection is a reward to be strived for;[98] only those who are worthy will be raptured.

Response

The Rapture is part of salvation, which is begun ***and*** completed by God (Phil. 1:7), not by our works (Titus 3:5–7; Eph. 2:8–9).[99]

Argument Two

The parable of the ten virgins indicates that only some were prepared for the Lord's coming (Matt. 25:1–13); the rest were left behind.

Response

The foolish (unprepared) virgins don't symbolize Christians, but rather unbelieving Jews during the Tribulation.

Argument Three

Those “taken” will be taken in judgment, like those taken in the Flood (see 24:36–41); they are ***not*** those who will be raptured (1 Thess. 4:16–17).

Response

Jesus indicated that at His return some would be taken and others left behind (Matt. 24:40–51).

Argument Four

The New Testament emphasis on watching and waiting implies that not all believers will be raptured.[100] Believers must suffer before they can reign;[101] for some this is now, for others it is during the Tribulation.

Response

Believers work only for rewards (1 Cor. 3:11; Rev. 22:12),[102] not to participate in the Rapture, which is part of their salvation—the third and final part, called glorification.[103]

Argument Five

By sin a believer can forfeit his right to the Rapture and not enter the kingdom (1 Cor. 6:19–20; cf. Gal. 5:19–21).

Response

These verses say nothing about the Rapture. Other verses (1 Cor. 3:13–15; Heb. 12:14) speak of believers losing their rewards but not their resurrection.

Argument Six

Only watching and worthy believers are promised the Rapture (Rev. 3:10).

Response

All true believers[104] will persevere[105] and will be raptured. Only faithful believers will be rewarded (Rev. 3:11; 1 Cor. 3:11–14).

Argument Seven

Only believers who have received the power of the Holy Spirit are in Christ's body (Acts 1:8; 1 Cor. 12:13), so only those who have this power will be raptured (1 Thess. 4:16–17).[106]

Response

Because the Spirit's baptism places all believers in Christ's body,[107] all believers will be raptured, both the living and the "dead in Christ" (1 Thess. 4:16–17).

MIDTRIBULATIONISM

According to midtribulationism, the Rapture will occur halfway through the Tribulation, after the "beginning of sorrows" (Matt. 24:8 nkjv) and before the "great tribulation" (v. 21 nkjv). Proponents have included Gleason Archer (1916–2004), J. Oliver Buswell (1895–1977), and Merrill Tenney (1904–1985).

Argument One

Midtribulationism has some advantages over both pretribulationism and posttribulationism. For example, it explains the verses that seem to place the Rapture ***before*** a time of great tribulation (e.g., 1 Thess. 4), and it also explains the verses where the Rapture appears to be ***after*** the Tribulation (cf. Matt. 24:29–30).

Response

Having advantages over opposing views does not itself make a view true. In addition, midtribulationism has a significant disadvantage: It loses the sense of imminence, for it has signs of the Rapture coming ***before*** it occurs; believers on earth could know when it was coming, which the New Testament rejects.

Argument Two

Paul affirms that there are signs prior to the Rapture: “That day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God” (2 Thess. 2:3–4).

Response

The signs specified are not prior to the Rapture but during the Tribulation. The Rapture is referenced earlier, when Paul speaks of “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” and our “being gathered to Him” (v. 1; cf. 1 Thess. 4:16–17).

Argument Three

The church will be delivered from wrath (1 Thess. 5:9), which is the second half of the Tribulation period, but not from tribulation itself (the first half).

Response

Scripture does not distinguish between tribulation and wrath, for God’s wrath can be delivered through human agency;[108] the church is delivered from ***both***. There is ***no*** reference to the church being raptured in the middle of the Tribulation.[109]

Argument Four

The biblical emphasis on two three-and-one-half-year periods[110] supports midtribulationism.

Response

The division of the Tribulation into two periods is not because the church's rapture occurs there but because Antichrist is fully revealed there.[111]

Argument Five

The seventh trumpet is in the middle of the Tribulation (Rev. 11:15–19); Paul said the church would be raptured at the last trumpet (1 Thess. 4:16–17).

Response

The seventh trumpet is at the end of the Tribulation, when all earthly kingdoms crumble (Rev. 11:15). Further, the Rapture is nowhere called the "seventh trumpet"; it is the "trumpet of God" (1 Thess. 4:16–17 nkjv) and "the last trumpet" (1 Cor. 15:52).

Argument Six

Jesus placed His return before the end of the Tribulation: "***Immediately after the***

distress of those days ‘the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’ At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory” (Matt. 24:29–30).

Response

Matthew 24 does refer to the end of the Tribulation but is not the same as the Rapture, which does not have signs associated with it.

Argument Seven

Midtribulationism allows for unresurrected saints living through the Tribulation to populate the Millennium (as Zechariah and Paul affirm).

Response

This argument is not unique; pretribulationism allows for the same;[112] The case must rest on other evidence.

THE PRE-WRATH VIEW

The pre-wrath view proposes that the Rapture will occur sometime between the sixth and seventh seals (Rev. 6:12–8:1). This will be near the end of the Tribulation, just before God pours out His wrath on the earth, prior to Christ’s return. Robert Van Kampen (1940–2000) represents the pre-wrath belief,[113] as

does Marvin Rosenthal.[114] Arguments for a pre-wrath Tribulation include the following.

Argument One

Pre-wrath proponents maintain a difference between "the Day of the Lord" and "the Great Tribulation." The Day of the Lord is at the fifth seal (Rev. 6:9–11); the Tribulation begins with the seventh seal (8:1). There is no wrath of God during the Tribulation period and no tribulation during the wrath period.

Response

Zephaniah 1:14–15 reveals that the Day of the Lord is both a day of wrath and a "day of trouble" (Heb: ***tsarah***) or "tribulation."[115]

Argument Two

The Bible promises that believers will be delivered from God's wrath, not from tribulation (2 Thess. 1:5–10). Since the word ***wrath*** does not appear in Revelation until after the sixth seal, God's wrath will not be poured out until the seventh seal; hence, the Rapture is between the sixth and seventh seals.

Response

First, again, "wrath" and "tribulation" are not different periods.
Second, absence of a word does not prove absence of the concept. For example,

the word ***wrath*** does not appear in Genesis, yet God's wrath was poured out during the Flood (6–8) and on Sodom and Gomorrah (19).
Third, Matthew 24:22 indicates that if the Tribulation were longer, all flesh, godly and ungodly, would be destroyed. This would have necessitated God's wrath also on the godly.
Fourth, Matthew 24:21 indicates that the Great Tribulation will be unparalleled in human history. This would not be possible without God's wrath; otherwise, an era with His wrath would be greater than the greatest.
Fifth, and finally, the Tribulation and the Day of the Lord have other common characteristics (e.g., both have tribulation, entail unparalleled trouble, ensure great trials, and contain Israel's repentance. See Showers, ***PWRV***, 35).

Argument Three

God's wrath comes only with the seventh seal, so the only wrath in the first six seals will be the wrath of man, not of God.

Response

First, the seven seals are all part of the same sequence. The only differentiation between the seals is intensity; they all unleash God's judgment on the world.

Second, at any rate, God often uses humans to execute His wrath.[116]
Third, the warfare involved in the first six seals is an instrument of God's wrath.[117]

Fourth, famine, mentioned in the third seal, is not totally the wrath of man.[118]
Fifth, the fourth seal speaks of famine and the sword, both of which, according to Ezekiel, are part of God's wrath. The Hebrew word for ***fury*** (14:19), *hema*, which means "anger" or "wrath" (cf. 38:18–19; Isa. 13:6, 9), is also used of the Day of the Lord, which pre-wrath proponents take to mean a day of God's wrath

(cf. Ps. 110:5; Rev. 19:11–21).
Sixth, the authority to inflict death given under the fourth seal (6:8) will come from God, who alone has that power (1:18; cf. Deut. 32:39).
Seventh, and finally, even the unsaved under the sixth seal will recognize the judgment as the "wrath of the Lamb" (Rev. 6:15–16). Isaiah speaks of this day as the Day of the Lord (Isa. 2:12, 20–21).

POSTTRIBULATIONISM

Posttribulationists believe that the Rapture and the Second Coming are one event at the end of the Tribulation, wherein believers will meet Christ in the air and then return to earth immediately with Him to reign for a thousand years.[119]

Argument One

According to Matthew 24, the Rapture is preceded by clear signs. Christ's return is said to be "after the tribulation of those days" (v. 29 nkjv).

Response

These signs do not refer to the church's Rapture before the Tribulation, but to Christ's return at the end of the Tribulation, when He will set up His millennial kingdom (cf. 25:34).

Argument Two

The parable of the wheat and the tares indicates that Christ's return will be at the

end of the age (13:24) when the angels will separate out the tares (v. 40).

Response

This parable is speaking about Christ's return at the end of the Tribulation, not to the Rapture at the beginning of it.

Argument Three

Revelation 20:4–6 indicates that all believers will be resurrected at the end of the Tribulation, just before the Millennium, to live and reign with Christ for a thousand years (v. 4).

Response

Revelation 20:4–6 is speaking of the believers who will have died during the Tribulation, not of those resurrected at the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:1–17): "I saw the souls of ***those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God***. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years" (v. 4).

Argument Four

The New Testament makes no distinction between the use of words like ***coming*** (Gk:
parousia
) for both the Rapture and the Second Coming.

Response

Pretribulationism is not dependent on a distinction between the Rapture and Second Coming based on the use of specific terms. ***Parousia*** is used of the coming of humans (1 Cor. 16:17), Christ, and even Antichrist (2 Thess. 2:9).

Argument Five

Revelation 3:10 can mean saved from Satan's wrath while the Tribulation is going on.[120] It need not mean pretribulational rapture.

Response

In context, this statement about being saved "out of" (Gk: ***ek***) the time of trial does mean saved from it (not through it). One cannot be saved from an entire hour by being in any part of it.

Argument Six

The apostasy is a sign that will precede Christ's return: "The lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming" (2 Thess. 2:8).

Response

Paul is not speaking of any sign (e.g., apostasy) before the Rapture, but only of this sign occurring before Antichrist is revealed in the middle of the Tribulation (Dan. 9:27; 2 Thess. 2:3–4).

Argument Seven

Much of Jesus' teaching about the end times is meaningless if it doesn't apply to the church, to whom the New Testament was being written (cf. Matt. 24:15–20); this is advice on how to perceive and handle these events.

Response

Jesus' discourse in Matthew 24–25 ***does*** make sense in context, since the disciples were asking him about "signs" and "the end of the age," which refer to His Second Coming, not the Rapture. The advice is given proleptically for those who will be alive on the earth when these events occur. Jesus said they would come at the time of His return (24:27), which did not take place in the first century.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR CHRIST'S IMMINENT RETURN

As we saw in the previous chapter, the evidence for premillennialism is early and strong. Likewise, even though the more refined and detailed position of pretribulationism does not enjoy widespread and early support, this is understandable in view of doctrinal progress. Being early does not make a view true (there were early heresies), nor does being later make it false; the question is not one of time but of truth. At any rate, since at the heart of pretribulationism is the imminence of Christ's coming, it is interesting to observe the support for this

concept down through the centuries, beginning with the first.

Clement of Rome (c. first century a.d.)

In these earliest apostolic Fathers the sense of imminence is found (see Ice, ***WTS***, chap. 4). Consider the following from one believed to be an apostolic contemporary (cf. Phil. 4:3):

> Of a truth, soon and suddenly shall His will be accomplished, as the Scripture also bears witness, saying, "Speedily will He come, and will not tarry;" and "The Lord shall suddenly come to His temple, even the Holy One for whom we look" (*FECC*, 23).

He forewarns us: "Behold, the Lord [cometh], and His reward is before His face, to render to every man according to his work." … Let us therefore earnestly strive to be found in the number of those that wait for Him in order that we may share in His promised gifts. (ibid., 34–35)

Ignatius of Antioch (d. c. 110)

> Be watchful, possessing a sleepless spirit.... Be ever coming more zealous than what thou art. Weigh carefully the times. Look for Him who is above all time, eternal and invisible, yet who became visible for our sakes. (*EP*, 1, 3)

The Epistle of Pseudo-Barnabas (c. 70–130)

> The Day is at hand on which all things shall perish with the evil [one]. The Lord is near and His reward.... It therefore behooves us, who inquire much concerning events at hand, to search diligently into those things which are able to save us. (21)

The Shepherd of Hermas (c. early second century)

> Go, therefore, and tell the elect of the Lord His mighty deeds, and say to them that this beast is a type of the great tribulation that is coming. If then ye prepare

yourselves, and repent with all your heart, and turn to the Lord, it will be possible for you to escape it, if your heart be pure and spotless, and ye spend the rest of the days of your life in serving the Lord blamelessly. Cast your cares upon the Lord, and He will direct them. Trust the Lord, ye who doubt, for He is all-powerful, and can turn His anger away from you, and send scourges on the doubters. Woe to those who hear these words, and despise them: better were it for them not to have been born. (1.4.2)

The Didache (c. 120–150)

"Let grace come, and let this world pass away. Hosanna to God (Son) of David! If any one is holy, let him come; if any one is not so, let him repent. Maranatha. Amen" (10.6).
"Watch for your life's sake.… Be ye ready, for ye know not the hour in which our Lord cometh" (16.1).

Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)

When in the end the Church shall be suddenly caught up from this, it is said, "There shall be tribulation such as has not been since the beginning, neither shall be." For this is the last contest of the righteous, in which, when they overcome they are crowned with incorruption. (*AH*, 5.29)

Tertullian (c. 155–c. 225)

"As yet those whom the coming of the Lord is to find on the earth, have not been caught up into the air to meet Him at His coming" (***TS***, 55).

Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 315–c. 387)

"Let us wait and look for the Lord's coming upon the clouds from heaven. Then shall Angelic trumpets sound; the dead in Christ shall rise first" (***CL***, 15.19).

Commodianus (fl. between third and fifth centuries)

We shall arise again to Him, who have been devoted to Him. And they shall be incorruptible, even already living without death. And neither will there be any grief nor any groaning in that city. They shall come also who overcame cruel martyrdom under Antichrist, and they themselves live for the whole time, and receive blessings because they have suffered evil things; and they themselves marrying, beget for a thousand years … the earth renewed without end pours forth abundantly. (*ICAGH*, 44)

Larry Crutchfield (b. c. 1955) summarizes the early apostolic Fathers:

The student of patristic literature quickly discovers that the position of the early fathers on the Tribulation and its relation to the saints and Christ's return is impossible to decipher and synthesize completely. Many of them, especially in the first century, make explicit statements which indicate a belief in the imminent return of Christ. The doctrine of imminence is especially prominent in the writings of the apostolic fathers.

However, later Fathers seem to combine imminence with a kind of posttribulationism:

The reason for this peculiar hybrid is that, on the one hand, Scripture clearly teaches that Christ's coming could occur at any moment, and therefore the believer is to live his life in holiness and with an expectant attitude.…

[On the other hand, the severe Roman persecutions before Constantine's Edict of Milan (313),] coupled with the belief that Christians must be tested and purified by fire … to make them fit for God's kingdom, led to something like the Thessalonian error (

2 Thess. 2

). The church, it was thought, was already in the Tribulation and could therefore expect the any-moment return of the Lord. (cited in Ice and Demy, *WTS*, 101–02)

In short, the seeds of pretribulationism were there; were it not for the Alexandrian allegorism brought on by Augustine (354–430), these could have matured into an even earlier pretribulational crop.

Medieval Fathers

Not only were most early Fathers premillennialists who believed in imminency, but some, like Ephraem the Syrian, were explicitly pretribulationists.

Ephraem the Syrian (c. 306–373)

We ought to understand thoroughly therefore, my brothers, what is imminent or overhanging. Already there have been hunger and plagues, violent movements of nations and signs, which have been predicted by the Lord, they have already been fulfilled, and there is no other that remains, except the advent of the wicked one in the completion of the Roman kingdom.... All saints and the Elect of the Lord are gathered together before the tribulation which is about to come and are taken to the Lord, in order that they may not be seen at the time of the confusion which overwhelms the world because of our sins. (*OLTAEW*, 2, as cited in Ice, *WTS*, 110–11)

John Chrysostom (c. 347–407)

He Himself shall speak the word at the last day, and all shall rise, and that so quickly, that "they which are yet alive, shall in no wise precede them that are fallen asleep," and all shall come to pass, all run together "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" (*HE*, 3).

Reformation and Post-Reformation Theologians

While the Reformers were amillennialists, they do refer to the Rapture, and, occasionally, mention imminence.

John Calvin (1509–1564)

Though those who are surviving at the last day shall not die after a natural manner, yet the change which they are to undergo, as it shall resemble, is not improperly called, death, "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed," What does this mean? Their mortal life shall perish and be swallowed up in one moment, and be

transformed into an entirely new nature. (*ICR*, 2.16.17)

"No other attitude is possible for believers but to await in keen vigilance His second coming" (***CR***, 83.274).
"[Paul] means by this [1 Thess 4:15] to arouse the Thessalonians to wait for it, nay more, to hold all believers in suspense, that they may not promise themselves some particular time" (***CFET***, 21.282).
"As he has promised that he will return to us, we ought to hold ourselves prepared, at every moment, to receive him, that he may not find us sleeping" (***CHE***, 17.163).
"He wished them to be uncertain as to his coming, but yet to be prepared to expect him every day, or rather every moment" (ibid., 17.156).

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1648)

"Shake off all carnal security and be always watchful, because [we] know not at what hour the Lord will come" (33.3).

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758)

The apostles seem often to speak of the coming of Christ to judgment, as if they thought it near at hand.... Considering the scope of the apostle in these verses [1 Thess. 4:15–17], all that can be inferred from such a manner of speaking, is, that it might, for ought was then revealed, be while they lived....

It is but just to suppose that it was only the uncertainty of the time that was the ground of the apostle's using such a manner of expression; because he, in this very context, speaks of the time as altogether uncertain....

That the apostle did not intend to be understood as though it were certain that Christ would come while they were living is evident, from what he himself says, speaking of those very words, and expressly denying that he intended any such thing; or that he supposed it to be certain, that the coming of Christ was at hand, in any such sense. (*MOITS*, 1.2.1–3)

George Whitefield (1714–1770)

Perhaps today, perhaps this midnight.... Let that cry, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh!" be continually sounding in your ears, and begin now to live as though you were assured that this night you were to go forth to meet Him. (in Silver, *LR*, 122)

John Wesley (1703–1791)

"Expect Him every hour. Now He is nigh, even at the doors" (in ibid., 161).

Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892)

The date of that coming is concealed. When he shall come, no man can tell. Watch for him, and be always ready, that you may not be ashamed at his [second] advent. (*SSC*, 134)

The Scripture has left the whole matter, as far as I can see, with an intentional indistinctness, that we may be always expecting Christ to come, and that we may be watching for his coming at any hour and every hour.... He may not come for a thousand years; he may come tonight. (ibid., 137–38)

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

There is a wide gamut of views on the Tribulation, most of which are within the pale of orthodoxy. Nonetheless, a few concluding comments are in order.

First, extreme preterism is heretical, since it claims that the final resurrection and Christ's second coming have already occurred (cf. 2 Tim. 2:18). However, belief in none of the other views is a test of doctrinal orthodoxy, as judged either by being part of the great creeds or confessions of the early church or by its salvific importance.

Second, any particular view's degree of certainty on the Tribulation within orthodoxy falls significantly short of absolute or even moral certainty. There simply is not enough evidence to be beyond all doubt on this matter.

Third, it does seem, however, that one can attain a reasonable degree of probability on the matter, at least on the central points. This is what we have attempted above. Or, to put it another way, there does seem to be a best explanation of the many possibilities. By this is meant the view which, given all

the biblical data, offers the most plausible explanation. It is in this context that we offer a pretribulational conclusion to the rapture question.

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APPENDIX ONE

ONLY THE APOSTLES SPOKE IN TONGUES AT PENTECOST

While it is widely held that all one hundred twenty in the Upper Room received the gift of tongues on the Day of Pentecost, Scripture nowhere says this. In fact, there is good evidence to indicate that the gift of tongues was limited only to the apostles or to those to whom they gave the gift. Of the unique "signs of an apostle" (2 Cor. 12:12 nkjv), the ability to resurrect was one (Matt. 10:8), and tongues-speaking was another, called a "sign" gift (1 Cor. 14:22).

At Pentecost the gift of tongues apparently was given only to the twelve apostles, not to all the disciples. This is supported by the following evidence.
First, only apostles were promised before Pentecost: "You will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:5). It is clear from the context that "you" refers to "the apostles" (v. 2).
Second, the "they" (2:1) on whom the Holy Spirit fell refers back to the previous verse, namely, the "apostles" (1:26).
Third, likewise, "they" and "them" (2:3) on whom tongues of fire fell refer to the same "apostles."
Fourth, further, the crowd heard "them" (the "apostles") speak in tongues (v. 6).
Fifth, also, those who spoke in tongues were "all … Galileans" (2:7), as the apostles were; even the angel called them "men of Galilee" (1:11). The others

present in the Upper Room were not all Galileans; some were from Jerusalem and Judea (vv. 12–14).

Sixth, the group that responded when "they" (2:13) had been accused of drunkenness was "Peter … with the Eleven" (v. 14). This again indicates that those speaking in tongues were the apostles.

Seventh, according to Gleason Archer (1916–2004), noted expert on biblical languages, the fifteen geographical areas listed (vv. 9–11) probably represent no more than twelve language groups, since some nations spoke the same basic language. So each apostle could have been speaking in one of the languages represented by these twelve language groups. Even if there were more than twelve languages represented, some apostles could have spoken in more than one language successively.

Eighth, since tongue-speaking was one of the "signs" unique to apostles (1 Cor. 14:22; 2 Cor. 12:12), initially giving it only to apostles makes sense.

Ninth, later, whenever anyone received the gift of the Spirit and/or tongues in the early church, it was only through an apostle (Acts 8, 10, 19). Acts 8:18 teaches explicitly that "the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands."

Tenth, supernatural gifts were given in the early church by apostles, as Paul said to Timothy, "Fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands" (2 Tim. 1:6; cf. 1 Tim. 4:14).

Eleventh, since the church was "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets" (Eph. 2:20), the apostles used these special powers to convey supernatural gifts to the leaders of the churches they founded. In this way the early church had an authoritative basis on which to function in the absence of an apostle or written Scripture.

Twelfth, and finally, only some were apostles and only some spoke in tongues (1 Cor. 12:10). Paul said emphatically: "All are not apostles, are they? … All do not speak with tongues, do they?" (vv. 29–30 nasb).

CONCLUSION

This conclusion has significance for the whole debate about tongues. If tongues were only a sign gift to apostles and only apostles had the gift or could give it to others, this would be confirmation of its temporary nature in laying the foundation of the church on the foundation of Christ's apostles. Thus, once this basis was established, it would be natural that the gift of tongues would cease—

there being no more need for it. Indeed, this seems implied in the phrase “whether there are tongues, they will cease” (1 Cor. 13:8 nkjv), since it is in the middle voice and can be translated “They will cease of their own accord.”

APPENDIX TWO

WERE TONGUES A REAL LANGUAGE?

Tongues at Pentecost were authentic languages, for everyone present from the various countries (Acts 2:9–11) heard the apostles speaking "in his own native language." Nevertheless, some claim that the gift of tongues spoken of in Corinthians was not the same as that experienced on the Day of Pentecost (2:1ff.); they believe that the tongues at Corinth were private tongues or prayer languages without necessarily having the linguistic pattern of a real language.

Arguments Given in Favor of Private Tongues

Several reasons have been offered by supporters of this "private tongues" view.
First, they argue that Corinthians was written later and speaks to a different situation.
Second, they contend that Paul speaks of these private tongues as "the tongues … of angels" (13:1), which are not a known language.
Third, they are called "unknown tongues" (14:2, 4, etc. kjv).
Fourth, Paul said he spoke "mysteries" (v. 2) in his spirit.

Fifth, they are called “groans that words cannot express” (Rom. 8:26).
Sixth, “anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God.… no one understands him” (1 Cor. 14:2).

A Response to the Arguments in Favor of Private Tongues

First, Corinthians was not written later but ***earlier*** than Acts; the former was written in a.d. 55–56, while the latter was completed by about a.d. 62. Furthermore, the last Acts reference to tongues (Acts 19) is during the same time period of the Corinthian church (Acts 18), so there are no grounds for supposing that tongues in Corinth were a later and different experience.
Second, “tongues of … angels” (1 Cor. 13:1) is probably a figure of speech meaning “to speak most eloquently.” Even if this is to be taken literally, every time angels spoke in the Bible they did so in actual language that people could understand.[1]
Third, the King James rendering of the Greek word for ***tongues*** (***glôssolalia***) as “***unknown***” tongues is misleading. Many readers do not understand that the italicized word ***unknown*** is not in the original language (the Greek text), and most modern translations correctly omit it.

Fourth, “mysteries” in the Bible are not unintelligible—as we have observed,[2] biblical “mystery” is something ***once concealed but now revealed***. In fact, Paul speaks of a “mystery” as that of which “I have already written” (Eph. 3:3). He wrote it in Greek, a known language; “mystery” here is not an unknown, unintelligible, or inexpressible private language.
Fifth, when Paul speaks of “groans that words cannot express” (Rom. 8:26), he is not speaking about tongues, a gift nowhere mentioned in this passage or anywhere in Romans, not even in the list of spiritual gifts (12:6–8). Furthermore, these “groans” “cannot be uttered,” while the private tongues are something that people do utter, so they cannot be the same. Also, since the “groans” are expressed by the Spirit (op. cit.), there is no need for the believer to put them into words.
Sixth, Paul says an unknown tongue speaks to God but not to men because unless it is translated, only God can understand it. Hence, it is not unknown,

unintelligible, or untranslatable—the very fact that he demands it be interpreted for the church (1 Cor. 14:10–19) reveals that it is a meaningful, translatable language.

Arguments for Tongues in 1 Corinthians Being Real Languages

In addition to the above responses to arguments for "private tongues" in Corinthians, there are several other indications that the spiritual gift of tongues mentioned in 1 Corinthians involved knowable languages.

First, as mentioned above, every time tongues appear in Acts they are real languages. In Acts 2 each foreigner heard the apostles speaking "in his own native language" (v. 8). Peter declares that the "tongues" in which Cornelius and the Italians spoke in Acts 10 were "the same gift as he gave us [in Acts 2]" (11:17). Acts 19, containing the only other mention of tongues in the book, says that the Ephesian converts had the same experience (receiving the Spirit and speaking in tongues). Thus, tongues ***throughout*** Acts (c. a.d. 33–62) were real languages. Since Corinthians was written during this same period (a.d. 55–56), there is no reason to believe it involved anything but real languages.

Second, even within the same context in 1 Corinthians 14, Paul compares tongues to real languages, saying, "There are all sorts of languages in the world, yet none of them is without meaning" (v. 10). Obviously, then, the gift of tongues, with which he makes the comparison, has actual meaning.

Third, that these tongues of which Paul spoke could be "interpreted" denotes meaningful language; otherwise, it would not be "interpretation" but creation of meaning. The gift of "interpretation" (12:30; 14:5, 13) supports tongues utilizing language that could be translated for the benefit of all.

Fourth, when Paul says "tongues … are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers" (14:22), he quotes the Old Testament (Isa. 28:11–12): "With foreign lips and strange tongues God will speak to this people" (v. 11). The "strange tongues" were real languages used by Israel's captors, the Assyrians.

Fifth, and finally, the positing of a "private language" is suspect because it is unfalsifiable—there is no way to test it. Furthermore, there is nothing unique about it, for anyone can speak in unintelligible gibberish, including people in cults and false religions. Even those who believe in the current existence of tongues acknowledge that unsaved people have such experiences.

One charismatic tells of an unsaved woman who "had a 'tongues experience'—nothing more." Because this woman "knew nothing about repentance and regeneration,"[3] the author concludes that "whatever has happened [to her] was not the Holy Spirit's work."[4] By contrast, there ***is*** something unique about speaking complete and meaningful sentences and discourses in a knowable language to which one has never been exposed. This is what the real New Testament gift of tongues entailed; anything short of this, like "private tongues," is not the biblical gift of tongues.

Are Today's "Tongues" Real Languages?

William Samarin, professor of anthropology and linguistics at the University of Toronto, wrote the first comprehensive book-length study of speaking in tongues.[5] In this work he takes Christian charismatic ***glossolalia***—the common contemporary practice of speaking in unknown and unintelligible speech, which Samarin distinguishes from what he calls ***xenoglossia*** (the miraculous gift of tongues in which the speaker communicates in an unlearned human language)—and the "tongues" of other religions (including those of healers, occultists, and shamans) and compares them with known human languages. He concludes from his linguistic analysis that "glossolalia is a perfectly human, perfectly normal (albeit anomalous) phenomenon" (***TMA***, 235). If this is the case, then "speaking in tongues" as commonly practiced today is a creation of the human mind and not the miraculous, divine activity recorded in Scripture. Below is a brief summary of Samarin's seminal work.

Lexically Meaningless and Repetitive "Words"

When Samarin and other linguists attempted to transcribe recorded glossolalia, they found that they continually came up with different results due to the difficulty of finding thoroughly distinct words in the utterances:

> On analysis these transcriptions will always expose the linguistically deviant nature of a glossolaic discourse ... notwithstanding a charismatist's claim that glossolalia is neither repetitious nor meaningless banality, no "jabber-babble or twattle-twaddle," but clear, distinct, precise, and uncluttered speech. (ibid., 78)

Samarin concludes from his analysis:

> The illusion of word-structure is destroyed when one tries to dissect all the breath-groups of a text.... So it is not surprising that a linguistically trained respondent was no more successful in "breaking down" her [the subject's] speech than I was. (ibid., 81)

This is not the case with a real language, and these results were not limited to the investigators. In a similar experiment with another "tongues-speaker," Samarin noted:

> When his [the subject's] own prayer was played back several hours later, he was unable to fulfill the function of the normal speaker of language. In other words, he could not, listening to his own speech, repeat for me what he had just said. (ibid.)

The reason for this linguistic defect is that "there is no grammar for glossolalia, because it is a phenomenon, like a human language in general, and not like a specific language" (ibid., 73). Thus, when it comes to these supposed tongues, "nobody can learn a set of rules that would enable him to speak a 'language' that is the same as someone else's. Even what one person speaks on different occasions is not the same in the linguistic sense" (ibid.).

Native Speech Patterns

Even in light of these apparently random "word salads," we discover an interesting trend. When glossolaic verbal patterns are analyzed regarding the use of consonants, vowels, and other features, they are revealed as strikingly close to the speaker's native language.

> The explanation for this similarity, to put it simply, is that [the subject] is “doing what comes naturally”! In other words, he and every other creator of extemporaneous pseudolanguage tends to use what is common in his native language.… What makes a person’s glossa different from his native language is how he uses its sounds. (ibid., 83, 87)

This is to be expected if tongues are the product of an intentional speaker.

Because the speaker is making some form of syllabic selection,

> Glossolalia, even though it is lexically meaningless, is not a randomized collection of sounds and sound sequences. It is a derivative phenomenon. Its basic features depend on the linguistic competence and knowledge of each speaker. This will surprise no one who came to this study already convinced that glossolalia was some kind of gibberish. However, now he knows that it is not *simply* that.… It is on looking closely at glossas that their artificiality becomes apparent. This is as true of their construction as it is of their function. (ibid., 127, 121, emphasis original)

Artificial Function and Construction

As to function,

> Glossas and natural languages are responsive to the world outside the speaker in different ways. In normal speech it is content, and not merely manner of delivery, that changes constantly in response to topics, person, setting, time, and so forth.…
>
> In construction as well as in function glossas are fundamentally different from languages.… If glossas do not have grammatical structure, we might nevertheless expect them to be like languages phonologically, because they sound so much like languages. Even here we are deceived. The total number of different sounds appears to be smaller than one finds in most languages.
>
> Glossas are strikingly unlike natural languages in the rank frequency curves of the sounds.… This cannot happen in normal language, because the occurrence of sounds is determined by the words in which they occur. (ibid., 122–26)

False Glossolalia

The implications of these findings are demonstrated by the possibility, in both the religious and secular senses, to fake the "gift of tongues." Samarin writes, "The possibility of false glossolalia, that is, something linguistically indistinguishable from genuine glossolalia but not inspired by God, puzzles many glossolalists" (ibid., 75). While some may state that they do indeed have the ability to distinguish between true and false use of glossolalia, "there is no claim, as far as we know, that the discernment is based on linguistic evidence." This leads Samarin to ask, "If glossolalists were tested for their ability to distinguish religious (to them, real) from imitation glossolalia entirely on auditory perception (using tape recordings, for example), would they be able to do so?"

> The only experiment I know of (by A. Carlson) used non-glossolalists as subjects, thirty university students in elementary psychology. They listened to twenty-two samples of pseudolanguage, half of which were religious and the other half imitation, with many different speakers in each group, and were asked to judge the resemblance of all the 45-second samples to real language, based on the sound content rather than style of delivery. The two groups of utterances were graded so much alike that Carlson concludes that there is potentially little difference phonologically between the two types of pseudolinguistic material, that is, religious and non-religious. (ibid., 76)

Today's "Tongues" Are Not Real Languages

After these and other analyses, Samarin concludes his investigation with these words:

> When the full apparatus of linguistic science comes to bear on glossolalia, this turns out to be only a façade of language—although at times a very good one indeed. For when we comprehend what language is, we must conclude that no glossa, no matter how well constructed, is a specimen of human language, because it is neither internally organized nor systematically related to the world man perceives. (ibid., 127–28)

In closing, he replies to the possible incredulity of charismatics:

> [Linguists] know enough to declare what is and what is not a language. We know as much as a mathematician, who can tell the difference between a real formula and a pseudo-formula—one that *looks* like mathematical language but does not *say* anything. … The glossolalist must grant this, because one of his proofs for the existence of God is orderliness in creation. A hodge-podge of DNA produces biological nonsense just as much as a hodge-podge of syllables produces linguistic nonsense. (ibid., 234, emphasis original)

To argue (as some do) that these are coded forms of language fails; codes have meaningful linguistic patterns and can be broken, while tongues do not and cannot. Any other so-called code-without-pattern places a tongue out of the realm of the intelligible and into the unverifiable domain of the mystical. Finally, Dr. Gary Maxey, longtime student of African religions and president of a large Nigerian seminary in Lagos, reports that glossolalia is present in pagan religions he has researched. Surely God would not be the cause of such a phenomenon, nor could it therefore be used to support the supernatural nature of Christianity.

APPENDIX THREE

HAS THE GIFT OF MIRACLES CEASED?

The intramural debate among those who accept biblical miracles (as to whether miracles have ceased since apostolic times) has special significance for Christian theology in at least two areas. First, if apostolic-type miracles exist today, how were biblical miracles unique in confirming the truth claims of the prophets and apostles?[1] Second, if there are contemporary miracles that confirm divine truth claims, then is normative divine revelation also still being delivered? Further, if they do, are these new revelations on a par with Holy Scripture?[2] If so, is the canon of Scripture closed, or is it still open to new revelation?[3]

Before proceeding further, the question at hand is not whether miracles are ***possible*** today—of course they are. As long as God exists, miracles are possible (see Lewis, ***M***, 109). Nor is the question whether miracles are ***actual*** today. A miracle can and does exist whenever and wherever God decides (cf. Heb. 2:4; 1 Cor. 12:11). We cannot lock God out of His universe.

The question before us is: Does the ***gift*** of miracles exist today? Or, more specifically, do the supernatural powers given to the apostles exist today?

DEFENSE OF THE EXISTENCE OF MIRACULOUS GIFTS TODAY

Those who defend the present existence of miraculous gifts offer several arguments for their belief, foremost among which are the following.

God Has Performed Miracles Throughout History

Both sides of the dispute agree that God has performed miracles throughout redemptive history. Miracles begin in Genesis and continue through Revelation. Accordingly, why should we believe that they have now ceased? Why should they be cut off immediately after the apostles' lives ended?

God Has Not Changed

Further, God has not changed (Mal. 3:6). Jesus is "the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8 nkjv). The miracle-working God has not changed, so why should we maintain that miracles have ceased?

Jesus Promised Miracles Would Continue

Proponents argue that Jesus promised His disciples that miracles would continue: "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father" (John 14:12).

These signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands;

and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well. (
Mark 16:17–18
)
[4]

The Need for Miracles Still Exists

Miracles are performed to manifest God's greatness (Ex. 7:17) and glory (John 11:40), to deliver God's children in need (Dan. 3), and to communicate God's messages to His people (Ex. 4:8; Heb. 2:3–4). There are some two hundred fifty biblical occurrences of miracles, many of them involving multiple acts. Many of the ***conditions*** that occasioned scriptural miracles still exist today, so there is no reason to believe that the same God would cease to perform the ***miracles***.

Apostolic-Type Miracles Occur Today

Finally, some argue that the same kinds of miraculous manifestations performed through the apostles still exist today. As evidence, they have pointed to the gift of tongues, to special healings, and even to people being raised from the dead (e.g., see Wimber, ***PE***, 44).

THE CESSATION OF APOSTOLIC-TYPE MIRACLES

Many Christian scholars who accept all biblical miracles believe that the special apostolic gift of miracles has ceased.

Miracles of the Past Are No Proof for the Present

That God gave the gift of miracles in the past does not prove that this gift exists in the present. Logically, there is no connection; what happened in the past is past, and what happens in the present is present.
Historically, miracles occurred largely in clusters in three periods: the Mosaic, Prophetic, and Apostolic eras. Miracles were neither continuous nor unpurposeful in their manifestation.
Theologically, the three great periods of miracles had common elements that do not necessitate miraculous continuance: Each epoch was marked by declension, transition, and the giving of new revelation. Moses needed miracles to deliver Israel from Egypt (Ex. 4:8); Elijah and Elisha performed miracles to deliver Israel from idolatry (cf. 1 Kings 18); Jesus and the apostles utilized miracles to confirm the transition from the old covenant to the new (Heb. 2:3–4). That miracles occurred at special times in special places for special purposes doesn't show they will persist when such conditions no longer prevail.

God's Attributes Do Not Change; God's Actions Do

While God never changes, His program on earth does—there are different stages with different requirements.[5] For example, it is no longer true that God forbids us to eat the fruit of a particular tree lest we die, as with Adam and Eve (Gen. 2:16–17). Nor are we required to offer a lamb as a sacrifice for our sins, as the children of Israel did, who were under the Mosaic Law (cf. Ex. 12).[6] Neither (as both sides of this dispute agree) do we have apostles in existence today, as they did in New Testament times. Such apostles do not exist, so do apostolic miracles exist? These miracles were called "the signs of an apostle" (2 Cor. 12:12 nkjv).[7]

Jesus' Promise About Miracles Was Given to the Apostles

Jesus did promise that miracles would continue after His time, but not after the time of the apostles. In fact, it was specifically to the apostles with Him in the Upper Room that He made His promise that they would do greater miracles than He did (John 14:12; cf. 13:5ff.). Even His promise to give the Holy Spirit's baptism[8] was given only to the apostles (cf. Acts 1:2–8), and only they received the fulfillment of this promise at Pentecost.[9] They gave the gift to no others after that time,[10] and there was no promise that miracles would exist after their time.

Some Non-Apostles Did Possess the Same Miraculous Powers

The cessationist argument does not depend on only the apostles possessing miraculous gifts (cf. 1 Cor. 12:4–11)—the apostles themselves had power to grant them. The gifts emanate from Christ, and they were His authorization for the apostles to proclaim truth they had received directly from Him. To show their unique authority as the church's foundation (Eph. 2:20; Acts 2:42) they were given the ability to convey supernatural gifts to others; this was often done by the "laying on of the apostles' hands" (cf. 8:17–18; 2 Tim. 1:6) or in the personal presence of an apostle's proclamation (Acts 10:44; cf. 11:15). Paul's reference to the signs of an apostle (2 Cor. 12:12) would make no sense if these gifts were possessed by anyone other than apostles or those to whom Christ and the apostles had given them.

The Desire for Miracles Does Not Prove Their Existence

First, not all felt needs are real needs—often what we think are real needs are actually desires. For example, Paul desired a miraculous healing that God never gave Him (2 Cor. 12), and though Joni Eareckson Tada (b. 1950) felt she needed a miracle (see ***SF***), God, so far, has not decided to miraculously heal this amazing woman (a quadriplegic as a result of a diving accident).
Second, when measured accurately against the real need for miraculous gifts that

biblically prompted them, there is no actual need for them today. Miracles were used to confirm new revelation from God,[11] and God's special (scriptural) revelation is complete. Because the Bible is fully sufficient for faith and practice (2 Tim. 3:16–18), there is no need for further miraculous confirmation of new revelation. Pentecost does not need to be repeated any more than Calvary or the resurrection of Christ needs to be repeated.

Third, even in the Bible, where miracles abound, not everyone who "needed" to be healed was miraculously healed. Job wasn't for some time. Paul wasn't (2 Cor. 12:12), and neither was Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:26). The same is true today: Many godly people with health conditions that are a great ministerial handicap have not been healed, such as the blind hymnist Fanny Crosby (1820–1915). Again, while miracles have been performed to manifest God's greatness (Ex. 7:17) and glory (John 11:40) and to deliver His children (Ex. 12), there are others ways He can and does accomplish these things. The heavens declare His glory and greatness (Ps. 19; Isa. 40). His spiritual deliverance is accomplished daily all over the world by the gospel's power (Rom. 1:16), apart from outward supernatural acts. He also works through both general and special providence without suspending any natural laws by providential timing and concurrence of events.[12]

Fourth, as regards divine intervention, there are some things for which God does not normatively intervene today, viz., delaying death from its appointed time (Heb. 9:27). Everyone is dying, and no amount of faith or prayer for miracles stops the process (Rom. 5:12). This does not mean God cannot or will never supernaturally intervene to meet this need; it simply means that He does not always do it in this life. He ***will*** eventually do it at the resurrection (1 Cor. 15); meanwhile, we are "waiting for … the redemption of our body" (Rom. 8:23 nkjv).

The claim that apostolic sign gifts are still in existence is subject to several heavy criticisms. For one, it fails to distinguish between the ***fact*** of miracles and the ***gift*** of miracles, a difference that can be summarized in this way:

Gift of Miracles	**Fact of Miracles**
In biblical times	At any time

Temporary	Permanent
Done through humans	Done without humans
Confirms new revelation	Does not confirm revelation
Apologetic value	No apologetic value

Confusion Between the Gift of Miracles and the Fact of Miracles

The view that the gift of miracles ceased with the apostles does not demand that God perform no miracle after the first century; it only argues that the ***gift*** of doing miraculous feats, possessed by the apostles and their associates, ceased once it was used to confirm their message's divine origin. The writer of Hebrews (c. a.d. 68–99) referred to these apostolic sign gifts as already past when he spoke of the message "***confirmed*** [in the past] to us by those who heard him [namely, apostles]. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will" (2:3–4). Jude, written possibly after a.d. 70, speaks of "the faith that was ***once for all entrusted*** [in the past] to the saints" (v. 3), exhorting his hearers to "remember the words which were spoken ***before*** by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 17 nkjv). Here too the miraculously confirmed apostolic message was spoken of as past. In spite of the profusion of apostolic miracles up to the end of Acts (cf. 28:1–10), there is no record of any apostolic miracle in Paul's epistles after this time.[13]

This argument from the later and sudden ***absence*** of miracles after their earlier abundance is not to be confused with a fallacious argument from ***silence***. The Bible is not silent on the nature, purpose, and function of these apostolic miracles (cf. Heb. 2:3–4; 2 Cor. 12:12), and this function (of confirming apostolic revelation) fits with their cessation, since they were not needed after the revelation was confirmed. They were the sign confirming the sermon; the miracle establishing the message; the confirmation of the new revelation.

That Paul was inflicted with a physical infirmity (Gal. 4:13) during the time God was still granting miracles (cf. 3:5) does not disprove this thesis. If Galatians

was written early, his illness could have been a divinely inflicted infirmity resulting from his being blinded (Acts 9:17–18; cf. Gal. 6:11); or, if Galatians was written later, the affliction could have been simply to humble him after his exalted revelations (2 Cor. 12). Further, there is no New Testament indication that those with the gift of healing exercised it on themselves; the gifts were given to confirm the truth of revelation to others (Heb. 2:3–4), not to benefit one's personal needs, and they were exercised only "according to His [God's] will" (ibid.; 1 Cor. 12:11). There is every evidence that the apostle-confirming miracles had ceased even before the apostles' deaths.

In short, cessationism does not eliminate the possibility or even actuality of God directly performing a miracle today. It merely concludes, based on both Scripture and history, that such extraordinary powers as the apostles had have not been possessed by any person since their time. That is, while the ***gift*** of miracles has ceased, the ***fact*** of miracles has not necessarily vanished; God can and does perform miraculous events anytime He chooses.

The Unique Nature of Apostolic Miracles

One of the reasons many wrongly believe that apostolic-type miracles are still in existence today is that they fail to recognize the unique character of such, so they incorrectly assume that other unusual events measure up to the standard of an apostolic miracle. Apostles were given certain unmistakable sign gifts (2 Cor. 12:12), including the ability to raise the dead on command (Matt. 10:8), immediately heal naturally incurable diseases (10:8; John 9:1–7), perform instantly successful exorcisms (Matt. 10:8; Acts 16:16–18), speak messages in languages they had never studied (2:1–8 cf. 10:44–46), and pass on supernatural gifts to others so that they could assist in their apostolic mission of founding the church (6:6; cf. 8:5–6; 2 Tim. 1:6). On one occasion they pronounced a supernatural death sentence on two people who had "lied to the Holy Spirit," and the two dropped on the spot (Acts 5:1–11); there is no evidence that anyone possesses these kinds of powers today. Given the media's penchant for sensation, if anyone had such powers it would be one of the world's most widely publicized phenomena. The people who do claim to have these supernatural powers are known to make false predictions, unmistakable evidence that they are not true prophets of God (cf. Deut. 18:22).

Apostolic miracles had at least three characteristics not found in the powers performed by any so-called miracle-worker today.

New Testament Miracles Were Instantaneous

When Jesus or the apostles performed a miracle, the results were always immediate. When Jesus saw the man with a lifelong infirmity, He said: " 'Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.' ***At once*** the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked" (John 5:8–9). Likewise, Peter, "taking [a lame man] by the right hand, he helped him up, and ***instantly*** the man's feet and ankles became strong" (Acts 3:7). Paul instantly raised the young man Eutychus from the dead (20:9), as did Peter with Dorcas (9:40). Even the one two-stage scriptural miracle (Mark 8:22–25) took but a few moments, and each stage had the immediately intended results. There are no gradual healings that came as a sign of an apostle.

New Testament Miracles Always Lasted

Not only were apostolic miracles instantaneously successful, but there is no record that anyone who received one ever relapsed into his former condition. Given the penchant of their enemies to find fault, had there been any such relapse, the authorities surely would have seized upon it to discredit Jesus and/or the apostles.

Of course, those who were raised from the dead, like all other mortals (Rom. 5:12), physically died again; Jesus was the first to receive a permanent, immortal resurrection body (1 Cor. 15:20).[14] Permanent resurrection of believers will only occur at the Second Coming (vv. 52–53).[15] Immediacy and permanence cannot be attributed to the powers of any so-called contemporary healer, and the reason is simple: A miracle is a special act of God, and God cannot fail (Matt. 19:26).

New Testament Miracles Worked Even on Incurably Ill/Dead Persons

The miracles of Jesus and His apostles were effective on ***everyone***, even people born blind (John 9) or lame (Acts 3) or who had died (John 11). On occasion,

Jesus healed everyone in the area who was sick (Luke 4:40; cf. Matt. 10:8), as did Paul (Acts 19:11–12).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The arguments for the continuance of the apostolic gift of miracles miss the mark. While God does not change, His actions can be different at different times. The purpose of special signs and wonders was to confirm new revelation (Heb. 2:3–4; Acts 2:22), which ceased with the apostles (John 14:26; 16:13; cf. Heb. 2:3–4), as did the need for miraculous confirmation.

No one since the time of the apostles has possessed their unique miracle-working power to instantaneously heal incurably sick people and even raise the dead. This does not mean that God cannot or does not do miracles today. The ***fact*** of miracles is always possible, even though the ***gift*** of miracles has ceased.[16] Of course, the fact of miracles is not connected with any truth claim,[17] and they are not a gift possessed by any individual, so whatever truly miraculous event that may occur today has no apologetic value to confirm a new revelation.

Jesus was the full and final revelation of God as predicted in the Old Testament (Heb. 1:1–2). Jesus informed the apostles that "the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you ***all things*** and will remind you of ***everything*** I have said to you" (John 14:26); "when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into ***all truth***. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come" (16:13). The apostles were the divinely authorized agents to proclaim this full and final revelation of God through Jesus Christ, God's Son.[18]

Indeed, the apostles claimed this very revelatory power, yet they, the final divinely and miraculously authorized channel of truth, all died in the first century.[19] Therefore, it follows that divine revelation ceased in the first century, and, consequently, there is no need for miraculous gifts today.

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APPENDIX FOUR

ULTRA-DISPENSATIONALISM

A summary of ultradispensationalism[1] is found in ***Bible Truth: What We Believe and Why***, in which Charles Baker (1910–2002) argues that Peter's plan of salvation for Jews is different from Paul's message of grace. This appendix is largely a review of Baker's book.

Names of the Movement

Ultradispensationalists call themselves the grace movement. This is not to be confused with the free-grace view, led by Zane Hodges (b. 1932),[2] a moderate dispensationalist who stresses that salvation is an absolutely free gift from God with only one condition—faith. In opposition is the position of John McArthur (b. 1939),[3] who represents lordship salvation, viz., that one needs to accept Christ as both Savior and Lord in order to be saved.[4]

Ultradispensationalists also call themselves the Grace Gospel Fellowship, a grouping of Grace Churches that may loosely be called a denomination, though

they would repudiate the title. The grace movement often uses the term ***dispensationalists*** to describe themselves; this, however, is confusing because less-extreme dispensationalists designate themselves by the same term.[5] Compared to even more moderate dispensationalists like John Walvoord (1910–2002) and Charles Ryrie (b. 1925), the grace movement is ultra- or hyperdispensational.

Proponents, Organizations, and History of the Movement

Charles Baker was a graduate of the nondispensational Wheaton College and of the moderately dispensational Dallas Seminary. Cornelius Stam (1909–2003) was longtime editor of ***The Berean Searchlight***, one of the movement's popular literary organs. J. C.O'Hair (1877–1958) was pastor of North Shore Church in Chicago and board chairman of Grace Bible College and Grace Mission, the agencies that represent the movement's educational and missionary arms.
The Worldwide Grace Fellowship, organized in 1939, was renamed the Grace Gospel Fellowship in 1944. The following year, the Milwaukee Bible Institute organized, later called Milwaukee Bible College and now Grace Bible College (in Grand Rapids, Michigan). Their mission agency is currently called Grace Ministries International, and while their churches are generally called Grace Churches or "Grace Movement" churches, there are other (non-ultradispensational) churches that use the word ***Grace*** in their title or description. Primarily, ultradispensationalists hold fundamental or conservative views on the central doctrines of the faith, including the Trinity, the Virgin Birth, the deity of Christ, the substitutionary Atonement, the bodily resurrection, and the Second Coming. However, they also have several distinctive teachings, one being that they accept only one ordinance for the church—the Lord's Supper.

The Doctrine of the Lord's Supper

Baker wrote: "The communion of the Lord's Supper as revealed through the

Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:23–26 is for members of the Body of Christ to observe 'until He comes' " (***BT***, 50). "There is no place in Scripture where the Lord's Supper and water baptism are linked together either as ordinances or as sacraments for the Church" (ibid., 51). Hence, water baptism is denied as an ordinance for the church today.

Earlier and more extreme ultradispensationalists, following E. W. Bullinger (1837–1913), rejected both baptism and the Lord's Supper, offering four basic reasons,[6] to which Baker then responded:

(1) It was not lawful for the uncircumcised to eat the Passover (Ex. 12:43, 45, 48). ***Answer***: The Lord's Supper is not the Passover, which was initiated fifteen hundred years earlier.
(2) The Lord's Supper has to do with the new covenant, which is made only with Israel. ***Answer***: It was given to Gentiles too (1 Cor. 12:2). In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul said he was a minister of the new covenant. Romans 15:27 says Gentiles partake of spiritual things (viz., the new covenant).
(3) It uses earthly elements (Col. 2:20); we seek only things above (3:1). ***Answer***: This confuses standing and state—there is a difference between "earth" and "world." Bibles and church buildings are also earthly. Paul condemns carnal ordinances only because they denote an unfinished work, not because they are physical.[7]
(4) Paul said, "It is not the Lord's Supper you eat" (1 Cor. 11:20). ***Answer***: He is speaking about it not being possible ***in their divided and drunken state***. He affirms that they should do it, but do it properly.

Baker offered six reasons why the Lord's Supper is for today (***BT***, 55–56):

(1) The Supper was a specific part of Paul's commission to the Gentiles.[8]
(2) There is no set time or particular manner or ritual connected with it. It is simply "As oft as ye do this."[9]

(3) There is no magical transformation of elements, no idea of a sacramental means of grace, and no meritorious work connected with its observance.
(4) It is done for one reason: “This do in remembrance of Me.”
(5) There is no promise of visions, ecstatic experiences, or other emotional reactions.[10]
(6) It is to be observed “till He come.” If there is no place for its observance today, then there never was or ever will be a place for its observance.

The Doctrine of Water Baptism

If anything is evident from the pages of the epistles it is that the ritual has given place to the spiritual. And that is exactly what we of the Grace Movement believe: that the ritual baptism has ceased, leaving us with the one baptism which is spiritual; not the Spirit’s baptism in miraculous powers as at Pentecost, but the Spirit’s baptism of believing Jews and Gentiles into the Body of Christ. (ibid., 32–33)

Baker listed various arguments against water baptism today:

(1) Ephesians says there is only “one baptism” (4:5), namely, into Christ, which is a saving baptism (Rom. 6:3–4; Gal. 3:27; 1 Cor. 12:13; Col. 2:12).
(2) Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:17 that he was not sent to baptize.
(3) Nowhere in Paul’s epistles is water baptism mentioned. But they alone are the basis for the “body” truth of this dispensation (Col. 1; Eph. 1).
(4) Water baptism at its best was but a shadow of something far better. We have given up the shadow, but we have the reality. We have the Real Baptism. (***BT***, 60–61)

The Doctrine of Spirit Baptism

John the Baptist announced that Christ would baptize with the Holy Spirit (

Matt. 3:11
). This doubtless took place on the day of Pentecost (
Acts 1:5
). In the Spirit, baptism, which forms the Body of Christ, is not Christ baptizing with the Spirit, as happened at Pentecost, but the Holy Spirit baptizing into Christ. We must not confuse the Persons of the Trinity, and yet that is exactly what they do who make these two Spirit baptisms one and the same; for they have Christ baptizing into Christ. (ibid., 31–32)

The Doctrine of the Church

We contend earnestly for the distinctive truth of the Pauline revelation. We see that it bears an important influence upon every doctrine of our Christian faith.…

In the present dispensation there is only one true Church, which is called the Body of Christ (
1 Cor. 12:13
;
Eph. 1:22–23
;
3:6
). The historical manifestation of the Body of Christ began with the Apostle Paul before he wrote his first epistle (
1 Thess. 2:14
; cf.
Acts 13:45–46
;
Phil. 1:5–6
; cf.
Acts 16
;
1 Cor. 12:13
,
27
; cf.
Acts 18
)….

As long as one … fails to see the distinction between the church, which is His Body (
Eph. 1:22–23
), and the prophesied church of the kingdom in Matthew and Revelation, he is bound to bring great confusion into church doctrine for today. (ibid., 14, 35)

There Are Two Churches: An Early Jewish Church (Beginning at Pentecost) and a Later Gentile Church (Beginning With Paul)

These are the reasons given by ultradispensationalists in defense of earlier and later dispensations. The church in Matthew is part of the messianic kingdom to be set up when this age is over.

But the fact that one of the groups is to be completed in heaven while the other is on earth and still functioning in the matter of growth is sufficient evidence to prove that there is a difference between them.…

Perhaps the most evident distinction … is the fact that the church of Matthew and of Pentecost is one which was prophesied by the Old Testament prophets, whereas the church of Paul's epistles is specifically declared to be a part of a great body of truth which in former ages has been hidden in God and never before revealed to the sons of men (

Eph. 3:5

,

9

;

Col. 1:24–26

).

Psalm 22:22

, as quoted in

Hebrews 2:12

, is evidence that there was a church predicted in the Old Testament scripture.

The words of the Spirit-filled apostle in

Acts 3:21

,

24

show that everything that was happening at Pentecost and thereafter was in fulfillment of the prophets. Now if that which was spoken by the mouth of all the prophets is identically the same as that which was hidden in God and never made known to the prophets, we can logically say the two churches under consideration are the same. [But] if the above language indicates a difference, then we must say that there is a difference. (ibid., 36)

Against the Bullingerites, they[11] argue:

According to this view the church in Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, and 1 and 2 Thessalonians was a kingdom church, and only in Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians do we find a reference to the church of this present dispensation. We wish to make it very plain that we do not in any sense of the word embrace any such teaching—in fact, we believe it is a dangerous error and we do all we can to combat

it. We believe that the Body of Christ had its historical beginning with the ministry of Paul before he wrote his first epistle. (ibid., 38)

We recognize that there was a transition going on in the latter half of the book of Acts, from kingdom to Body dispensation, and we believe there is a significance to Paul's action in pronouncing blindness upon Israel in

Acts 28

. We believe that the end of Acts marks the end of the transition period, and the passing away, as far as God's designed program for the Body is concerned, of everything Israelitish including the sign gifts and water baptism. (ibid.)

[We have] shown from Scripture that the church of this present dispensation is separate and distinct from the churches of other dispensations (God has always had His church or called-out ones), and that it had its historical beginnings, not with Peter or on Pentecost but with Paul's ministry, and that the church to which Paul ministered during Acts was the same to which he ministered until his death and the same which still exists today … regardless of having had or not having had the ceremony of baptism practiced upon them. (ibid., 39)

The Doctrine of Salvation

Ultradispensationalists teach that Old Testament salvation included national deliverance from Israel's enemies (ibid., 18). The requirements of salvation differ in the New Testament (ibid., 19–20); Peter's plan of salvation for Jews (Acts 2:38) is different from Paul's message of grace (ibid., 20).

There is just no use in trying to reconcile Peter's preaching in

Acts 2:38

with Paul's teaching for the Body of Christ, because they concern two different dispensations.... Salvation is given under Paul's gospel apart from all works of righteousness (

Titus 3:5

), apart from the law (

Rom. 3:21

), apart from covenants and Israel's intervention (

Eph. 2:13

), and apart from water baptism (

1 Cor. 1:17

). (ibid.)

Baker also offered thirty-three arguments for eternal security (***BT***, 5–28).

The Doctrine of Ministry Gifts

Some of these gifts were permanent in nature and some were to pass away.... Since the New Testament canon was completed through the ministry of Apostles and Prophets, we believe these two offices have been fulfilled and no longer exist. Likewise the sign gifts, such as tongues, miracles, and healing, which were addressed primarily to the nation of Israel (

1 Cor. 14:22

), have fulfilled their purpose and have passed away (according to

1 Corinthians 13:8–11

).... [For instance,] compare

2 Timothy 4:20

, which speaks of Paul leaving behind sick his most faithful worker. (ibid., 40, 42)

The Doctrine of the Church's Mission

There are a number of good reasons why we do not believe that the Matthew and Mark commissions are for us today: (1) It is the gospel of the kingdom (which did not have death and resurrection in it, cf.

Luke 9:6

;

18:31–34

), not the gospel of grace. Peter's gospel was sad, not glad, as Paul's. It was not good news but one of guilt and condemnation. [We preach Christ's death as good news; Peter preached it as sad news. Peter preached the gospel of circumcision; Paul the gospel of uncircumcision.]
12
(2) Peter's message required baptism, but Paul's did not. (3) [Signs followed Peter's gospel but not Paul's:] A further objection to applying this commission to us is the fact that it contains certain substantiatings which since

Acts 28

do not accompany the preaching of the gospel of grace.
13
(4) Peter's gospel gave priority to the Jews only; Paul's was for Jew and Gentile. Peter's was local; Paul's was worldwide. (ibid., 68–71)

The Doctrine of the Second Coming

Baker attacks Bullinger's view that there is no Rapture for the mystery body of Christ (since 1 Thessalonians is supposedly for an earlier church).

> The church of this dispensation will disappear from the earth by its members all dying. After the last member of the Body has died, then there will be the secret "out-resurrection" of
>
> Philippians 3:11
>
> , which will of course be unobserved by anyone upon the earth. (Bullinger, *TSSA*, 63)

Baker responded:

(1) If so, then no one alive can be sure he is a member of the Body, since the last member of the Body may have already died.
(2) Paul holds out the same hope to all believers in all his epistles (cf. 1 Cor. 15:51; 1 Thess. 1:10; Col. 1:23; Phil. 3:20; 1 Thess. 4:16). The latter Paul says explicitly he got by revelation, just as he did the "Body" truth.

Additional Beliefs/Statements of Ultradispensationalism

The following points are from ultradispensationalist J. C. O'Hair's ***The Unsearchable Riches of Christ***.

(1) O'Hair claims there are "different Gospels," which contradicts Paul (Gal 1:8; cf. 3:8): "No intelligent student of the Scriptures believes, or teaches, that there is only one gospel in the Scriptures" (***URC***, 97). The kingdom gospel (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 9:35) is not the same as Paul's gospel (Rom. 16:25–26).
(2) The "Joint-Body" church of Ephesians 3:6 did not start at Pentecost; the former is Gentilish and the latter is Jewish (***URC***, 133–34).
(3) Peter supposedly said it is unlawful for Gentiles to be in the church (Acts 10:28).
(4) "After Saul became Paul, Israel was set aside. The ministry of reconciliation for Gentiles was committed to Paul" (***URC***, 136).

(5) Differences between the "Gospel of the uncircumcision and [the] Gospel of Circumcision" (ibid., 136) show it is not the same church.

(6) "In the first eleven chapters of Acts, the Lord, by the Twelve, presented a kingdom program different from the present 'Body' program" (ibid.).

(7) "James was the second one of the original twelve apostles to die. Judas was the first. Judas died and a successor was chosen. James died, and no successor was chosen." Hence, "God required twelve apostles from the day of Pentecost to the death of James. After Acts 13:2, God no longer required twelve apostles" (***URC***, 192). Why? So that "we should know that there was a Divine purpose in it, and that God was dealing with that Nation after the New commission of Acts 13:2. Then the new Divine movement was declared in Romans 11:15" (ibid.).

(8) "Let us always recognize the difference between the prophesied Kingdom of heaven and the unprophesied 'Body' of Christ: Ephesians 3:5–9 and Colossians 1:24–27" (***URC***, 194).

(9) Peter applied the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy to Israel, not the church (ibid., 215).

(10) Joel knew and said nothing about the church (cf. Eph. 4; ibid., 215).

(11) If "me" in Acts 9 proves it is the church, then "me" in Matthew 25:41 proves it is Israel (***URC***, 216).

(12) Admittedly, Galatians 1:13 proves the church began before Paul was converted (ibid., 216), but "church" is a reference to the Jewish church, not the Body of Christ.[14]

(13) Acts 5:31 says "they were added to the Lord," but not in the same relationship as to Christ as Head of the Body (ibid.).

(14) Peter opened the door to the Gentiles (Acts 11:15; 15:7), but this was not the Body of Christ (***URC***, 217).

A BRIEF EVALUATION OF ULTRADISPENSATIONALISM

Several ultradispensationalist doctrines call for examination; we'll evaluate two.[15]

Critique of the Idea That the Church Began With Paul

(1) This confuses the beginning of the ***revelation*** about the church with the beginning of the ***church itself***.

(2) It makes ***distinctions without real differences*** (e.g., gospels of circumcision [Peter] and uncircumcision [Paul]). While these are different ***audiences***, they are not different ***gospels***.

(3) It creates distinctions where there are none (e.g., no signs with gospel of grace).

(4) It confuses Old Testament prophecies ***that*** Gentiles would be blessed with there being no predictions as to ***how*** they would be on the same level with Jews.

(5) It manifests gnosticlike tendencies, such as (A) avoiding "earthly" elements (e.g., water baptism) and (B) special, exclusive, in-group knowledge of the mystery of Christ's body.

(6) It unjustifiably assumes that there are two kinds of Spirit baptism.

(7) It fails to note that Gentiles were baptized into Christ in Acts 2 and 8, which defeats the argument that there was no joint-body before Paul's ministry.

(8) It claims "that there just was no joint-body until some Gentiles as such were saved, and we know that could not have been until the salvation of Cornelius at least" (***BT***, 32); there were Gentiles in Acts 2 and in Acts 6, well before Paul was saved (Acts 9).

(9) Its assertion that "we must not confuse the Persons of the Trinity, and yet that is exactly what they do who make these two Spirit baptisms one and the same; for they have Christ baptizing into Christ" (***BT***, 32) confuses the procession in the Trinity—Christ sent the Spirit to do His work for Him (John 15:26).

(10) It claims that "if anything is evident from the pages of the epistles it is that the ritual has given place to the spiritual" (***BT***, 32–33), but the Lord's Supper involves a ritual using physical elements.

(11) It leads to unorthodox (works-based) soteriological views of the Old Testament and early New Testament, claiming that Peter's plan of salvation

for Jews (Acts 2:38) is different from Paul's message of grace (ibid., 19–20).
(12) It claims there are "different Gospels" (***URC***, 97), which opposes scriptural teaching (Gal. 1:8; cf. 3:8).

Critique of the Idea That There Is No Water Baptism for the Church Age

(1) It overlooks that Paul practiced water baptism late in the book of Acts (19:1ff.), and this could not have been for Jewish believers, for they were rebaptized after they had John's Jewish baptism.
(2) It discounts Paul's own baptism with water, which was the commencement of his ministry to the Gentiles (Acts 22).
(3) It fails to understand Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 1:17, in which he was not rejecting baptism but stressing his primary mission, preaching the gospel.
(5) It ignores water baptism in Paul's epistles (e.g., Rom. 6:3–4; Col. 2:14).
(6) It doesn't demonstrate that Ephesians 4:5 can't be about water baptism.
(7) It has a gospel of works (salvifically necessary baptism) for Jewish Christians.
(8) It marginalizes the Great Commission's inclusion of baptism, which is for us, since it is "to the end of the age."[16]
(9) It says "the Supper was a specific part of the commission of Paul to the Gentiles." Baptism was as well (Acts 22).
(10) That baptism and the Lord's Supper are not linked in any one passage doesn't mean they're not both ordinances.[17]
(11) Communion involves a ritual, but O'Hair rejects baptism because it is a ritual.
(12) It accepts the Lord's Supper because it has a special relationship to "Body" truth (***BT***, 56). Baptism also has this relationship (cf. Rom. 6; 1 Cor. 12).

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APPENDIX FIVE

DOES THE RESURRECTION BODY HAVE THE SAME PARTICLES AS BEFORE DEATH?

One of the objections to the resurrection body's material nature is a form of the old socinian contention that this would involve an absurdity: that the resurrection body has all the same particles it once possessed (cf. Harris, ***RI***, 126). This seems clearly impossible; for example, consider a cannibal who ingests someone else's body—surely the particles cannot be part of both bodies at the resurrection.

While it is true that some defenders of the orthodox view have insisted that the resurrection body will have all the same material particles it had before death, other orthodox teachers have not. To clarify the issue, three views must be distinguished.

Orthodox View		**Unorthodox View**
Material body		Immaterial body
Particle view (Every particle	Substance view (Material body	No material restored

restored)	restored)	

First, there is a vast difference between the orthodox and unorthodox views. In fact, they are exact opposites—both cannot be true. The orthodox position holds that there is a literal, material resurrection body, and the unorthodox view denies it.

Second, the intramural debate within the evangelical camp does not affect the positions' orthodoxy. An omnipotent God can do anything that is not actually impossible, and such a God would have no difficulty in restoring every particle to its original owner at the resurrection.

Third, belief that every particle of the pre-resurrection body must be restored is not critical to the orthodox view. A person gets the same substantial material body he had before without holding that every particle of it will be restored in the resurrection. Just as there is identity and continuity in our material bodies that are continually taking on and giving off particles (molecules), even so the resurrection body can be the same material body without having all the same material particles as the pre-resurrection body.

As shown in chapter 8, we will be raised in the same physical bodies in which we died. At His resurrection, Jesus' body vacated the tomb, was physical and tangible, and even had crucifixion scars (Luke 24:3, 39–40). Our bodies will be like His body (Phil. 3:21).

First, what is left in the grave from the buried body will come out and be part of the resurrection body. Jesus said, "All who are in ***the graves***" (i.e., bodily remains) will "come forth" (John 5:28–29 nkjv). Ezekiel spoke of the "bones" of the dead coming back together (Ezek. 37:1–6), and "many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake" (Dan. 12:2 nkjv). After Jesus was resurrected, "The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. ***They came out of the tombs***, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people" (Matt. 27:52–53).

Second, what was never placed in the grave or has been taken from the grave will either be reassembled by God from wherever it is or replaced with other particles by His omnipotent hands. God is not limited by scattered particles or in finding others.

Rejecting the view that the very same particles in the body at death will be in the resurrected body does not thereby argue in favor of the unorthodox view that we will not have the same physical body, made immortal, in the resurrection that we

had before. ***It can be the same material body without containing all the same particles***. Nonetheless, whatever remains will be used to reconstitute the resurrection body. Belief in the material nature of the resurrection body and the empty graves of believers is rational and biblical.

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APPENDIX SIX

REINCARNATION

The word ***reincarnation*** means "to come again in the flesh." Christians speak of Christ's incarnation, because He came in the flesh (John 1:14; 1 John 4:1–2). ***Re***incarnation means that after death the human soul returns to a body—another body—and lives another life. Of reincarnation's many forms, the most common spring from Hinduism and Buddhism and are based in the inexorable law of karma, which dictates that every action in this life has a reaction or consequence (either in this life or in the next).

Reincarnation is an ancient belief. Many scholars think its original source is the Hindu Vedas, from which the Buddhist, Jainist, and Sikhist forms seem to have been derived, as have the teachings of Transcendental Meditation and Hare Krishna. In the ancient Near East, the Pythagoreans, Plato (c. 427–347 b.c.), and Plotinus (205–270) were reincarnationists. More recently, psychic Edgar Cayce (1877–1945) and theosophist Helena Blavatsky (1831–1891) also taught multiple lives. Several theologians have attempted to harmonize forms of reincarnation with Christianity; among these are Geddes MacGregor (b. 1909) and John Hick (b. 1922).

THE NATURE OF REINCARNATION

Plato taught that the immortal soul takes on a body only as punishment for some sin, for which he will suffer tenfold; hence, the soul is forced to leave the ideal realm and enter into the material world.

> [Man is] a soul in a body, and his soul needs to grow toward the highest good, that it may no longer have to suffer continued rebirth but go into that state in which it may like God, behold and enjoy forever the hierarchy of ideal forms, in all their truth, beauty, and goodness. (Noss, *MR*, 52)

Before this final blissful state is realized, we may come back even as animals.

The similarities between Plato and the Hindu doctrine are striking, especially the "personal" system of Ramanuja (1017–1137). This school developed from the earlier "impersonal" view, but the key ingredients are the same for both. The soul, called ***jiva*** (or ***jivatman***), survives death as a mental entity called the subtle body. This entity will enter a new embryo and bring along with it the karma of all its past lives. Karma is both the deeds done and the ethical consequences attached to them; if you do good deeds, you are born into a "pleasant womb," and if you do evil, your destiny will be proportionately less noble. You might even find yourself in a "foul and stinking womb," like that of an animal, vegetable, or mineral. The cycle of death and rebirth (***samsara***) is often depicted as a wheel, with death as the gateway to new life. The goal is to escape from this cycle.

This escape is called ***moksha***, and it is here that the difference arises between the personal and impersonal forms of reincarnation. The impersonal version says that once all karmic debt is eliminated, the soul loses all identity and simply becomes one with the One; the self merges with ***brahman*** (the divine, the impersonal force). The personal view says that the soul is simply liberated to be itself, fully devoted to ***bhagwan*** (the personal god).

Other forms of reincarnation differ on what happens at the point of death and on the nature of the ultimate state of ***moksha***, but the general pattern is retained. Buddhists say that the unconscious soul (***vinnana***) continues, that the self (its intellect, emotions, consciousness, etc.) is obliterated at death, but its karma remains in cyclical ***samsara***. The final state, wherein one is delivered from the cycles of reincarnation, is nirvana, the cessation of all striving, the final state of nothingness.

Most of the so-called Christian forms of reincarnation do not differ in their basic

concept. During this life a decision is made about whether to accept or reject Christ. The simplest model has those who accept Christ going to be with God, while those who reject Him are reincarnated until they do recognize Christ; in this way, all will eventually be saved.[1] MacGregor's "Christian reincarnation theory" provides ultimate punishment for those who are lost causes, and the "punishment" is annihilation.[2] Hick's theory is somewhat novel in that he supposes humans will be reincarnated to live on other planets.

REASONS OFTEN GIVEN FOR BELIEF IN REINCARNATION

Three of the most basic rationales given for reincarnation are belief in an immortal soul, psychological evidence of past lives, and the need for justice.

Immortality of the Soul

Plato's main reason for believing in transmigration of souls (i.e., the soul's movement from one body to another) was that he considered the immaterial part of man to be uncreated and indestructible. It exists before we are born, continues to exist after we die, and nothing, either good or evil, can corrupt it. Reincarnationists, then, argue that it is likely that the soul appears in the world in different bodies at various times—this is part of its perfecting process. Pantheistic philosophies[3] assume that all is eternal and divine, so the soul is equally incorruptible.

Psychological Evidence of Past Lives

Ian Stevenson (b. 1918), a parapsychologist and researcher of past-life recall,

claims:

> The idea of reincarnation may contribute to an improved understanding of such diverse matters as: phobias and philias of childhood; skills not learned in early life.... [Reincarnation explains] abnormalities of child-parent relationships; vendettas and bellicose nationalism; childhood sexuality and gender identity confusion; birthmarks, congenital deformities and internal diseases; differences between members of monozygotic twin pairs; and abnormal appetites during pregnancy. ("EVIR" in *JNMD*, 305)

Past lives recalled during hypnosis or other altered-consciousness states have been helpful to some in explaining feelings that a patient cannot account for or overcome. By allegedly finding some such experience, many have been relieved of the feelings of fear, depression, or unwantedness. Though psychologists and hypnotists who work with past-life recall often don't actually believe the events recounted by their patients are real, they use it because it works. As one therapist said, "It doesn't matter if it is real or imagined if it helps someone make sense out of their lives.… If it works, who cares?" (Boeth, "ISPL" in ***DTH***).

The Need for Justice

For some people, the idea of having more than one chance at life seems to be the most equitable solution. If you do bad things, you pay the price; if you do good, you get a reward. Punishment is in proportion to how bad your karma is rather than "all or nothing." The idea of condemning someone to an infinite hell for finite sin sounds too harsh; karma is just. Suffering in this life can be justified if it is really an outworking of our karma from past lives, and this explanation eliminates the need to make God responsible for suffering in any way. All suffering can be explained as the outworking of bad deeds done in former incarnations.

Quincy Howe (b. 1934) observed, "One of the most attractive aspects of reincarnation is that it removes entirely the possibility of damnation" (***RC***, 51). If the doctrine of eternal punishment seems totally incompatible with God's love, reincarnation suggests a way in which God can punish sin (through the law of karma), demand faith in Christ (during at least one lifetime), and still ultimately save everyone. If someone rejects Christ, he gets a second chance, and a third,

and so on, until he does believe. This even protects human freedom, because God does not coerce anyone to believe; He merely gives them more time to exercise their freedom. Moral progress and spiritual growth can also occur during successive lifetimes, which will allow individuals to better understand God's love. Indeed, some think that moral perfection cannot be attained without reincarnation.

Accordingly, reincarnation also makes salvation a personal matter between the individual and God. Instead of dealing with problems of imputed guilt from Adam's sin or being reckoned righteous by faith, everyone is responsible for taking care of his own karma. Howe, arguing that atonement by a substitute is no longer valid, says, "Man himself must make his peace with God" (ibid., 107). MacGregor explains, "My karma is particular to ***me***. It is ***my*** problem and the triumph over it is ***my*** triumph." This eliminates the injustice of being punished, in any way, for Adam's sin and the injustice of Christ dying for sins that He did not commit. Instead, Jesus' death becomes our inspiration, "the perfect catalyst" for working out our salvation and assuring us "that one stands in the unfailing light of God's love" (***CK***, 4). Jesus died as our example, not as our substitute.[4]

Biblical Arguments Given for Reincarnation

Some have attempted to scripturally justify reincarnation, using several passages in this regard.

Job 1:21

Job cried, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there" (nkjv). Some reincarnationists take this to indicate the cycle of death and rebirth (***samsara***).

However, nothing of the kind is asserted in the text. This is simply a poetic expression of the truth that we bring nothing with us into this life and we take nothing with us when we die. The word ***womb*** (Heb: ***shammah***) is often used figuratively of the earth.[5]

Jeremiah 1:5

God declared to Jeremiah, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you” (tlb). This is sometimes taken to refer to the soul’s preexistence.

In response, the phrase “I knew you” does not refer to a preexistent state before conception, but to a prenatal state before birth. This state, referenced elsewhere in Scripture,[6] supports the humanity of the unborn, but not the preexistence of the soul before conception (let alone cycles of reincarnation after death).[7]

Matthew 11:14

“Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him” (nasb). This allegedly refers to Elijah being reincarnated as John the Baptist (cf. Mal. 4:5).

In response, the parallel passage in Luke demonstrates that John was not a reincarnation of Elijah; Jesus speaks of John coming “in the spirit and power of Elijah” (1:17). Elisha received this same anointing of Elijah’s “spirit” after Elijah went to heaven (2 Kings 2:9–18), but obviously he was not a reincarnation—he already had his own soul.

John 3:3

Some use Jesus’ statement “You must be born again” as support for reincarnation’s death-rebirth cycle.

Here too, though, the verse is taken out of context. Jesus is referring to the new birth, that is, a spiritual birth. He explained this when He said, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit” (v. 6 nkjv). Further, the Greek word for ***again*** (***anôthen***) is better translated “from above,” meaning a spiritual birth. There is nothing here about another physical birth after death.

John 9:1–3

Jesus' words about the blind man not sinning before his birth is supposed to support the reincarnationist belief that one's sins in a previous existence cause his fate in this life.

There is no such teaching in this context; Jesus was debunking a Jewish belief of the time that birth defects were due to prenatal sins in the womb. Further, if the reference is taken to refer to a preexistent state, then it is a strong condemnation of reincarnationist belief that sins in a previous state cause bad conditions in this life. Jesus rebuked those who held this: "Neither this man nor his parents sinned [before birth], [that he should be born blind], but that the works of God should be revealed in him" (v. 3 nkjv).

1 Corinthians 15:35–55

In this passage Paul says, "To each seed its own body" (v. 38 nkjv), which some take to be a Christian correlation to karma.

A close look at the context shows that Paul is not speaking of reincarnation but of resurrection. Resurrection is a one-time event into one's own body, now made immortal; reincarnation is a many-time event into other bodies, all of which are mortal. Paul declared, "This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality" (v. 53 nkjv).

AN EVALUATION OF REINCARNATION

Comments here fall into three categories: First, a response to arguments for reincarnation; second, some arguments against reincarnation; and finally, the biblical basis for rejecting reincarnation.

A Response to the Arguments for Reincarnation

In addition to the alleged biblical arguments for reincarnation, the other arguments also lack any real foundation. At best they show only the possibility

(not the reality) of reincarnation.

Immortality Does Not Prove Reincarnation

Even if one could demonstrate the platonic sense of the soul's immortality (i.e., indestructibility), it would not thereby prove reincarnation for two reasons: (1) The soul could survive forever in a disembodied form, or (2) the soul could be reunited with its body in a permanent immortal resurrection body.[8]

Past Life "Memories" Do Not Prove Reincarnation

There are other ways to explain so-called "memories" from supposed past lives. For one thing, they may be false memories. Many "recollections" have been shown to be untrue. Some people have "remembered" things that were empirically false.

In addition, these "memories" of previous lives are more abundant among those who have been reared in cultures or contexts where they were exposed to the teaching of reincarnation, which suggests that they received these ideas when they were young and later revived them from their memory bank.

What is more, there are notable cases like that of Bridie Murphy, whose alleged memories of past lives turned out to be nothing more than stories her grandmother read to her when she was a little girl.

Finally, some false "memories" have been implanted by hypnosis (the power of suggestion) or guided imagery therapy during counseling or teaching sessions. False-memory syndrome is recognized by the field of psychology.

Reincarnation Does Not Solve the Issue of Justice

Rather than solving the problem of unjust suffering, reincarnation simply says that suffering is just after all: The innocent are not really innocent because the karma of their past lives is causing suffering in this life. Reincarnationists complain that when a Christian is faced with giving a reason to the grieving mother of a dying infant, he can only say, "I don't know." The law of karma can give her an answer: "Your sweet little angel was a demon in a previous life."

This is not a ***solution*** to the problem but a ***subversion*** of it. Reincarnation doesn't ***deal*** with the difficulty but rather ***dismisses*** it.
Karma is not a moral prescription. Karma is a system of retribution only; it has no content that tells us what to do. It is enforcement but not law itself; it is a penal system without a legislature. It is an impersonal, amoral principle of act/consequence relations.

Some Arguments Against Reincarnation

The Argument From the Lack of Moral Grounds

In pantheistic systems there is no source for the moral benchmarks that karma enforces. Why punish people if there is no ultimate standard of right and wrong? ***Pantheistic morality is relative***! Alan Watts (1915–1973), a spokesman for Zen Buddhism, wrote,

> Buddhism does not share the Western view that there is a moral law, enjoined by God or by nature, which it is man's duty to obey. The Buddha's precepts of conduct—abstinence from taking life, taking what is not given, exploitation of the passions, lying and intoxication—are voluntarily assumed rules of expediency. (*WZ*, 52)

This poses real problems for reincarnation. Relativism is a self-obliterating ethical position. You can't say "Relativism is true" or even "Relativism is better than absolutism," because these statements assume an absolute value that contradicts relativism. C.S. Lewis (1898–1963) explains,

> The moment you say that one set of moral ideas can be better than another, you are, in fact, measuring them both by a standard, saying that one of them conforms to that standard more nearly than the other. But the standard that measures the two things is something different from either.... You are, in fact, comparing them both with some Real Morality, admitting that there is such a thing as real Right, independent of what people think, and that some people's ideas get nearer to that real Right than others. (*MC*, 25)

In other words, in order to say that relativism is right, you have to assume that

some absolute Right exists, which is relativistically impossible. Unless something is absolutely right, nothing can be actually right; and if nothing is right (or wrong), then karma has no business punishing anyone for it.

The Humanitarian Argument

Reincarnation is ultimately anti-humanitarian, generating no social compassion. Anyone who helps the millions of poor, crippled, maimed, homeless, and starving people lining Indian streets is working against the law of karma. People suffer to work off their karmic debt; if you help them, then they will have to come back again and suffer even more to work off that debt. Therefore, social compassion in India is largely the result of Christian influence.

The Psychological Argument

Reincarnation depends on the premise that an individual had highly developed self-consciousness before birth to receive, store, and recall information. By contrast, it is a scientific fact that this ability does not develop until a person is about a year-and-a-half old, which is why we don't remember our first year. That every human being somehow mysteriously "forgets" his/her highly developed consciousness and that most never regain it—unless trained and "enlightened" to do so—is highly implausible. The hypothesis is without foundation and entirely *Deus ex machina*.

The Scientific Argument

An individual, unique human life begins at conception, when the twenty-three chromosomes of a male sperm unite with the twenty-three chromosomes of a female ovum and form a forty-six-chromosome human zygote that has life (soul) and body.[9] To claim that this soul (life) existed in a previous body has no scientific basis. The biological evidence points to conception as the point of origin for an individual human being.

The Social Argument

If reincarnation were correct, society should be improving. After all, if we have had hundreds (even thousands) of chances to improve over countless millions (or billions) of years, there should be some evidence. The problem is, we have no evidence of such ***moral*** progress, even after thousands of years of recorded history. What we have improved is the means by which we can manifest hate, cruelty, and barbarism toward other human beings.

The Logical Argument

Putting guilt back one lifetime begins an infinite regress of explanations that never pays off with an explanation. If the suffering of each life depends on the sins of a former life, then how did it all begin? If there was a first life, from where did the karmic debt come to explain the suffering in that life? Is evil an eternal principle, right alongside God? We can't keep backpedaling forever to solve the problem of evil; the law of karma fails to resolve the conflict.

An infinite regress in time is not possible, since if there were an infinite number of moments before today, today would never have come. Today ***has*** come, so there was not an infinite number of previous lives.

On the other hand, if there were not an infinite number of lives before this one, then there must have been a first life in which a previous incarnation was not the cause of its evil. This is what theism holds, viz., that evil originated because of an individual's free choice in that first lifetime (e.g., the angel Lucifer and the man Adam).[10]

The Moral-Perfection Argument

Even on the reincarnationist assumption that there has been an infinite amount of time before today, the view faces another serious problem: In an infinite amount of moments, there is more than enough time to achieve the perfection of all souls. As such, all souls should have received oneness with God by now, if there had been an infinite amount of time to do so. They have not, and, hence, reincarnation has failed as a solution to the problem of evil. Further, if perfection has not been achieved in an infinite amount of time, then what reason do we

have to believe that more time will help?
Further, if each incarnation is the result of evil done in a previous incarnation, then there was no way to get reincarnation going in the beginning; if there was no evil done to deserve the first incarnation, then there was no impetus to be punished by being incarnated in a body in the first place. Reincarnation does not explain the very first incarnation (punishment), and if it attempts to avoid the dilemma by positing another reason than karma, then it forsakes the very law that makes reincarnation necessary.

The Anthropological Argument

As was shown earlier,[11] humans are a soul/body unity. That it's wrong to claim that a human being ***is*** a soul and merely ***has*** a body is supported by Scripture, science, and reason. The human soul is united not only to ***a*** body but to ***its own*** body, and, alone, the soul is incomplete, naked, desiring to be "clothed" (2 Cor. 5:2), awaiting reunion with ***its*** body, not reincarnation into ***a*** body.

Biblical Arguments Against Reincarnation

Human Beings Are Created; They Are Not Eternal

The Bible is God's inspired Word,[12] with divine authority in whatever it teaches. According to Scripture, human beings were created (Gen. 1:27). Only God is eternal (1 Tim. 6:16); all other things were created by Him (John. 1:3; Col. 1:15–16) and exist because God brought them into existence from nothing, *ex nihilo*.[13] This is not only true of Adam and Eve, the first humans, but of all others after them.[14] All humans since Adam began and begin at conception (Ps. 51:5; Matt. 1:20), before which they did not exist. Consequently, there can be no reincarnation—a soul has had no preincarnate existence.

The Intermediate State Is Disembodied

Upon death the soul leaves the body and goes into the spirit world, where it awaits resurrection back into its body.[15] God's Word contains not the slightest hint that the soul after death goes into another body.[16]

The State After Disembodiment Is Resurrection, Not Reincarnation

Reincarnation is the belief that, after death, the soul passes on to another body. By contrast, the Bible declares that, after death, the same physical body is made incorruptible at the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:53). Rather than a series of bodies that die, resurrection makes alive forever the same body that died. Rather than a soul in a body, resurrection sees man as a soul/body unity. Reincarnation is a never-ending process toward so-called perfection; reincarnation is an intermediate state in which the soul longs to be disembodied and absorbed. Resurrection is a perfected state, the ultimate state, in which the whole person, body and soul, enjoys God's goodness. In reincarnation one is saved ***from*** his body; in resurrection one is saved ***in*** his body.[17]

Resurrection	**Reincarnation**
Happens only once	Occurs many times
Into the same body	Into a different body
Into an immortal body	Into a mortal body
A perfect state	An imperfect state
Salvation in the body	Salvation from the body
The ultimate state	An intermediate state
A reward	A punishment

Humans Die Only Once

According to Holy Scripture, human beings die once, followed by the judgment (Heb. 9:27). We are born once, we live once, and we die once. According to reincarnationism, we live many times, repeatedly born and reborn, which the renowned Hindu apologist Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888–1975) recognized as the definitive difference between Christianity and Hinduism (***HVL***, 118).

The Finality of Judgment Is Opposed to Reincarnation

Not only do human beings live and die once, followed by judgment, but the judgment is final, eternal—of salvation or of damnation.[18] If it lasts forever, there is no possibility of reincarnation into another body; we instead will be resurrected into our own bodies.[19]

Jesus Rejected Reincarnation

When asked whether a man's sin before birth was the cause of his sin, Jesus replied: "Neither this man nor his parents sinned … but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life" (John 9:3). Whereas, again, this is a reference to the false Jewish belief that one could sin in the womb before birth, thus producing physical deformity, Jesus' reply fits reincarnationism's belief that pre-birth sins affect one's lot in this life. Elsewhere, Jesus made it emphatic that one person's unfortunate lot is not necessarily because of sin (Luke 13:4–5), which is true whether referring to early life, prenatal life, or the alleged preincarnate life.

Reincarnation Is Contrary to the Doctrine of Grace

Reincarnation is based in the doctrine of karma, an inexorable law with no exceptions. Sins cannot be forgiven; if one does not receive his due in this life,

then he must get it thereafter.

The Christian gospel is that forgiveness is possible. Jesus forgave His enemies who crucified Him. Christians are to forgive as Christ forgave us (Col. 3:13). Grace renders reincarnation entirely unnecessary.

Salvation is a "gift"[20] received by faith.[21] Rather than working to merit God's favor, the believer is given grace, unmerited favor, by which he is pronounced righteous. God's justice is satisfied because Jesus was punished for the world's sins in His death.[22] Our sins were not ignored; Jesus paid for our guilt by bearing it as our substitute.[23] All of this is profoundly contrary to karmic doctrine and crushes the need for reincarnation.

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APPENDIX SEVEN

THE GENERAL COUNCILS OF THE CHURCH AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF ROMAN CATHOLICISM

The earliest post-apostolic church Fathers held to the New Testament form of government, with a plurality of elders (bishops) and deacons in each independent, self-governing church.[1] By the middle of the second century, one person (called a bishop) had emerged as leader over the elders; later, a head bishop would assume authority over a whole region. Eventually, this led to the primacy of the bishop of Rome, the capital of the empire, in assumption of authority over the whole church; finally, in 1870, this bishop (the pope) was pronounced infallible when speaking officially on matters of faith and practice. Along with the increasing authoritarianism in the Roman Catholic Church, there was also a growing departure from orthodox biblical Christianity. Both of these emerged gradually and can be traced through the general church councils.

These councils, which played an important role in the development of monolithic Roman episcopalism, allegedly are councils involving the whole church, even though sometimes major portions of the church were only sparsely

represented. Local councils were in specific geographical areas and are not considered binding on the whole church unless affirmed by a later ecumenical (church-wide) council. The first eight councils were convened by emperors and the last thirteen by popes.
From the very first council (Nicea I, 325), called by Constantine (c. 274–337), there were forces moving toward authoritarian ecclesiastical structure. By the eighth (Constantinople IV, 869), this was becoming more evident, and from the twelfth council (Lateran IV, 1215) on, the structure of what is currently known as Roman Catholicism was taking shape. The counterreformational Council of Trent (1545–63) solidified Romanism, Vatican I (1870) infallibly permanentized imperial ecclesiastical Romanism, and the nineteenth and twentieth councils perpetuated Roman dogmas.

THE CHURCH COUNCILS

Christendom is divided over the number and nature of the ecumenical church councils. Roman Catholics accept twenty-one ecumenical councils; the Eastern Orthodox accept the authority of only the first seven; Protestants reject the authority of all but the first four; and many Free churches do not accept any church council as authoritative, though they concur generally with Protestants on the major doctrines stated in the first four councils. A survey of the councils is necessary before the pros and cons of these views can be examined.

(1) The First Council of Nicea (325)

The First Council of Nicea was called by the professing Christian Emperor Constantine, who desired to unite the church and solidify his empire. The council affirmed the Trinity and upheld the full deity of Christ as eternal and of the same nature as the Father. The council also formulated the famous Nicene Creed, a condemnation of the heresy of arianism (which denied Christ’s deity and thereby divided Christendom).
In addition, Nicea set forth numerous canons that claim to be universally binding on the whole church. These include that bishops should only be appointed by

other bishops (Can. 4), that excommunication is to be done by a bishop (Can. 5), and that bishops have jurisdiction over their own geographical areas (Can. 6).[2] Likewise, “it is before all things necessary that they [who convert to the church] should profess in writing that they will observe and follow the dogmas of the Catholic and Apostolic Church” (in Schaff, ***CC***, 19).

(2) The First Council of Constantinople (381)

The First Council of Constantinople was convened by Emperor Theodosius I (r. 379–395) to unite the church. It reaffirmed the Nicene Creed, proclaimed the deity of the Holy Spirit, and united the Eastern Church (which had been divided by the arian controversy). Theodosius is said to have “founded the orthodox Christian state. Arianism and other heresies became legal offenses, sacrifice [to pagan gods] was forbidden, and paganism almost outlawed” (in Cross, ed., ***ODCC***, 1361).

The practices of Theodosius I were later codified by Emperor Theodosius II (404–450) into the “Theodosian Code” (proclaimed in 438). This was later superseded by the Justinian Code (539), which added the “Novella” that provides the classic formula for the relation of church and state, in which the church would take care of religious matters and the state, civil matters. This code was later expanded into the *Corpus Juris Civilis* (***Body of Civil Law***), and during the latter Middle Ages this became the basis for Western canon law (ibid., 771), considered binding on all churches under the Roman Church’s administration.

(3) The Council of Ephesus (431)

Ephesus condemned nestorianism (which affirms two natures and two persons in Christ). Since Christ is one person with two natures, the council concluded that Mary was truly the mother of God, i.e., the God-bearer, the one who gave birth to the person (Jesus) who is God ***and*** man. Extracts from Cyril to Nestorius in Session I read:

This was the sentiment of the holy Fathers; therefore they ventured to call the holy Virgin, the Mother of God, not as if the nature of the Word or his divinity had its beginning from the holy Virgin, but because of her was born that holy body with a rational soul, to which the Word being personally united is said to be born according to the flesh. (in Schaff, *SLNPNF*, 14.198)

(4) The Council of Chalcedon (451)

Chalcedon was called by Emperor Marcian (396–457) to deal with the eutychian (monophysite) heresy that merged the two natures of Christ, making a logically incoherent combination of an infinite/finite nature. Of five-hundred-plus bishops present, only two were from the West (plus two papal delegates). Eutyches (c. 375–454) had said, “I confess that our Lord was of two natures before the union, but after the union I confess one nature” (in ibid., 258). The council agreed with Archbishop (Pope) Leo I (r. 440–461) to “anathematize” this as “absurd,” “extremely foolish,” “extremely blasphemous,” and “impious” (ibid.). They reaffirmed the decisions of all three previous general councils (in Session IV) as well as “the writings of that blessed man, Leo, Archbishop of all the churches who condemned the heresy of Nestorius and Eutyches, [to] shew what the true faith is” (ibid., 260). The presence of an archbishop (bishop over bishops) represents a new state in the long development of the Roman episcopal hierarchy, which eventually culminated in his supposed infallible authority at Vatican I (1870).

The council also asserted its authority in the excommunication of Bishop Dioscorus (d. 454), declaring, “On account of your disregard of the divine canons, and your disobedience to his holy ecumenical synod,” you are “deposed from the episcopate and made a stranger to all ecclesiastical order” (ibid., from Session III).

The most controversial canon (28) affirms that “Constantinople, which is New Rome … enjoys equal privileges with the old imperial Rome” and hence “should in ecclesiastical matters also be magnified as she is, and rank next after her” (ibid., 287). Though this was rejected by “Archbishop Leo” of the old Rome, of historic importance is the statement that gives the reason any primacy was given to Rome in the first place: “The Fathers rightly granted privileges to the throne of the old Rome, because it was the royal city” (ibid.). This confirms the

interpretation of Irenaeus's (c. 125–c. 202) statement that the primacy of Rome was reflective, not authoritative; that is, Rome was given more ***respect*** (not authority) because it was in the empire's capital and, therefore, more reflective of the whole church than any other, since representatives from around the empire would naturally consort there. Louis-Sébastien le Nain de Tillemont (1637–1698) spoke to the point: "This canon seems to recognize no particular authority in the Church of Rome, save what the Fathers had granted it, as the seat of the empire" (in ibid., 288).

(5) The Second Council of Constantinople (553)

Constantinople II, convoked by Emperor Justinian I (c. 483–565), issued fourteen anathemas, the first twelve directed at Theodore of Mopsuestia (c. 350–428). A later insert places Origen's name in the eleventh anathema, which was accepted by later popes. Among the heresies condemned are arianism, nestorianism, eutychianism, and monophysitism (Stats. I-XI) and also adoptionism (XII). Mary's perpetual virginity was affirmed, she being called the "ever-virgin Mary, the Mother of God" (Stats. V and XIV).
Karl Joseph von Hefele (1809–1893) recorded that this "Fifth Ecumenical Council should strike the name of the reigning Pope [Virgilius] from the diptychs [double-leafed tablets] as the father of heresy" (in Schaff, op. cit., 305).[3]

(6) The Third Council of Constantinople (680)

Constantinople III, convened by Emperor Constantine IV (Pogonatus—r. 668–685), upheld the "five holy ecumenical councils" (ibid., 345). In addition, it reaffirmed that Christ had two natures united in one person and that he had two wills, one human and one divine, which had a moral unity resulting from the complete harmony between the two natures of the God-man (in opposition to the monothelites). The council also referred to Mary as "our Holy Lady, the holy,

immaculate, ever-virgin and glorious Mary, truly and properly the Mother of God" (ibid., 340). Macarius, Archbishop of Antioch (d. c. 684), was condemned, along with "Honorius, some time Pope of Old Rome" (ibid., 342, Session XIII). Catholic apologists have not agreed on an explanation for the dilemma of how an allegedly infallible pope can err when teaching doctrine. One scholar (Pennacchi) thought the council erred and the pope was right. Another (Baronius) held, contrary to fact, that manuscripts have been corrupted—even most Roman Catholic scholars reject this, pointing to the manuscript and citation evidence.[4] Thus, most are left with the claim that Pope Honorius I (r. 625–638) was not speaking ***ex cathedra*** at the time; this, however, seriously undermines the claim of papal infallibility, since the pope ***was*** teaching on doctrine, and if his teaching was not infallible, then there is no meaningful distinguishable criteria as to when the pope is speaking ***ex cathedra***. If a pope can be fallible sometimes when affirming doctrine, then how can we be sure he is really infallible at other times when affirming doctrine? In fact, ***how can we be sure he was infallible when he pronounced his own infallibility in 1870***?

This council claimed to be not only "illuminated by the Holy Spirit" (ibid., 350) but also "inspired by the Holy Spirit" (ibid., 347), purportedly providing "a definition, clean from all error, certain, and infallible" (foreshadowing Vatican I—ibid., 350). Notable from the church/state standpoint[5] is that following the council, the emperor posted an "imperial edict" in the church, noting "heresy" and warning that "no one henceforth should hold a different faith, or venture to teach one will [in Christ] and one energy [operation of the will]. In no other than the orthodox faith could men be saved" (ibid., 353). Punishments also were listed.

(7) The Second Council of Nicea (787)

Nicea II was called by the Emperor Constantine VI (r. 780–797) and Empress Irene (c. 752–803) and attended by legates of Pope Hadrian I (r. 772–795). Dealing with the iconoclastic controversy, it ruled in favor of venerating images:

> Receiving their holy and honorable reliques with all honor, I salute and venerate these with honor.... Likewise also the venerable images of the incarnation of our Lord Jesus

Christ … and of all the Saints, the Sacred Martyrs, and of all the Saints—the sacred images of all these, I salute, and venerate. (ibid., 533)

Further, “anathema to those who do not salute the holy and venerable images” and “anathema to those who call the sacred images idols” (ibid.). In zealous overkill, the council declared “to those who have a doubtful mind and do not confess with their whole heart that they venerate the sacred images, anathema!” (ibid.). They also encouraged prayer to Mary and the Saints, saying, “I ask for the intercession of our spotless Lady, the Holy Mother of God, and those of the holy and heavenly powers and those of all the Saints” (ibid.).

In theory, the council distinguished between worship of God and veneration of images, saying, “The worship of adoration I reserve alone to the supersubstantial and life-giving Trinity” (ibid., 539). However, ***in practice*** there is no real way to differentiate the two. Further, the Bible forbids making graven images of God or heavenly beings and bowing before them (Ex. 20:4–5).

The canons forbid the secular appointment of bishops, thus solidifying the independent authority of church over against state, and they emphasize the primacy of Peter and apostolic succession (ibid., Session II). In addition, “the holy Roman Church, which has prior rank … is the head of all the Churches of God” (ibid.).

The contemporary iconoclast’s objections to the council’s decisions are expressed in another council (the Iconoclastic Council of Constantinople [754]), which claimed to be the true seventh ecumenical council. They declared flatly that “Satan misguided men, so that they worshiped the creature instead of the Creator” (ibid., 543). They argued that “the only admissible figure of the humanity of Christ is bread and wine in the holy Supper” (ibid., 544). Based on Exodus 20:4, “supported by the Holy Scriptures and the Fathers, we declare unanimously, in the name of the Holy Trinity, that there shall be rejected and removed and cursed out of the Christian Church every likeness which is made out of any material and colour whatever by the evil art of painters” (ibid., 545). The council concluded: “If anyone does not accept this our Holy and Ecumenical Seventh Synod, let him be anathema” (ibid., 546). They condemned Germanus of Constantinople (d. c. 740), calling him “the double-minded worshiper of wood!” (ibid., 547).

(8) The Fourth Council of Constantinople (869)

Constantinople IV, the last council to be called by an emperor, explicitly affirmed the Second Council of Nicea (787) and condemned the schism orchestrated by Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople (c. 815–c. 897). Photius challenged the *filioque* (lit.: “and the Son”) clause of the Second Nicene Creed (which affirmed that the Holy Spirit also proceeded from the Son), which later became a gargantuan bone of contention between the Western and Eastern Churches (in 1054); again, the Eastern Church rejects the authority of any councils after the seventh.

(9) The First Lateran Council (1123)

Lateran I was the first council to be called by a pope (Callistus II [r. 1119–1124]), which signals a further step in Roman Church development. First Lateran confirmed the Concordat of Worms (1122), which granted the pope, not the emperor, the sole right to invest a bishop-elect with a ring and staff and to receive homage from him before his consecration.

(10) The Second Lateran Council (1139)

Lateran II, convoked by Pope Innocent II (r. 1130–1143) for reforming the Church, condemned the schism of Arnold of Brescia (c. twelfth century), a reformer who spoke against confession to a priest in favor of confession to one another.

(11) The Third Lateran Council (1179)

Lateran III was convened by Pope Alexander III (r. 1159–1181) to counter

antipope Callistus III (John de Struma). The council affirmed that the right to elect the pope was restricted to the college of cardinals and that a two-thirds majority was necessary for the pope's election.

(12) The Fourth Lateran Council (1215)

Lateran IV, called by Pope Innocent III (r. 1198–1216), is considered by many to be a key turning point in the development of Roman Catholicism in distinction from non-Catholic forms of Christianity. The council pronounced the doctrine of transubstantiation, the primacy of the Roman bishop, and the dogma of the seven sacraments. It also gave the Church authority to set up the office of the inquisitors, which gave the Church authority to investigate heresy and turn suspects over to the state for punishment. This was exercised in the Inquisition of Emperor Frederick II (1194–1250) and continued in full force up to the Spanish Inquisition in the fifteenth century. Pope Innocent IV (r. 1243–1254) even allowed torture to break the resistance of the accused.

(13) The First Council of Lyons (1245)

The First Council of Lyons was convened by Innocent IV to heal the Church's "five wounds":

(1) moral decadence within the clergy;
(2) the danger of the Saracens (Arab Muslims against whom the Crusaders fought);
(3) the Great Schism with the Eastern Church;
(4) the invasion of Hungary by the Tartars; and
(5) the rupture between the Church and Emperor Frederick II.

Lyon I condemned and formally deposed Frederick II for his imprisonment of

cardinals and bishops on their way to the council. It instituted minor reforms while leaving primary issues untouched.

(14) The Second Council of Lyons (1274)

Lyons II was called by Pope Gregory X (r. 1272–1276) to bring about union with the Eastern Church, to liberate the Holy Land, and to reform morals within the Catholic Church. Albert the Great (1206–1280) and Bonaventure (c. 1217–1274) attended, but Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) died en route. The council (1) unsuccessfully demanded affirmation of the double procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son, which the Eastern Church rejects; (2) approved some newly founded monastic movements, including the Dominicans and the Franciscans; and (3) defined the procession of the Holy Spirit (the *filioque* clause). The Church's union with the East was short-lived, ending in 1289.[6]

(15) The Council of Vienne (1311–1312)

The Council of Vienne was convoked by Pope Clement V (r. 1305–1314) to deal with the Templars (a military order of the Church), accused of heresy and immorality. The council announced reforms, suppressed the Templars, provided assistance for the Holy Land, encouraged missions, and made decrees concerning the Inquisition (instituted formally in 1232 by Frederick II but claimed for the Church).

(16) The Council of Constance (1413–1418)

The Council of Constance was convened by John XXIII (1370–1419) in order to end the Great Schism (of having three simultaneous supposed popes), to reform

the church, and to combat heresy.[7] Over two hundred propositions of John Wycliffe (1324–1384) were condemned. Reformer John Hus (c. 1372–1415), who held similar doctrines, refused to recant and was burned at the stake. The council proclaimed the superiority of an ecumenical council over the pope, declaring (in *Haec Sancta*, "Conciliar Decree"), "This Council holds its power direct from Christ; everyone, no matter his rank of office, even if it be papal, is bound to obey it in whatever pertains to faith" (cited in Cross, ***ODCC***, 336–37). This ended the long history of increased authority for the Roman bishop that had begun in the second century with the emergence of one fallible bishop in each church and eventuated with one infallible bishop over all the churches.

(17) The Council of Basel-Ferrara-Florence (1431–1445)

The Council of Basel-Ferrara-Florence, called by Pope Martin V (r. 1417–1431), was a series of councils beginning with Basel (1431), moving to Ferrara (1438–1439), then Florence (1439–1443), and finally Rome (1443–1445). Its chief object was union with the Eastern Church, which sought support from the West against the Turks, who were nearing Constantinople. The controversy centered around double procession of the Holy Spirit, purgatory, and the primacy of the pope. By July 1439, there was East-West agreement on "The Decree of Union," but many bishops subsequently recanted, and the union ceased when the Turks captured Constantinople in 1453. The council and its members were later pronounced heretical.

(18) The Fifth Lateran Council (1513)

Lateran V was called by Pope Julius II (r. 1503–1513) to invalidate the decrees of the antipapal Council of Pisa (1409). Lateran V began a few minor reforms but did not treat the main issues of the coming Protestant Reformation. An Augustinian monk named Martin Luther (1483–1546) ***did***, posting his Ninety-five Theses on the door of the church at Wittenburg (October 31, 1517).

(19) The Council of Trent (1545–1563)

The Council of Trent was called to counter the Reformation. Trent declared many of the characteristic doctrines of Roman Catholicism, including the equal validity of tradition with Scripture, the seven sacraments, transubstantiation, good works as necessary for justification, purgatory, indulgences, the veneration of saints and images, prayers to the dead (saints), and the canonicity of eleven apocryphal books. Many Protestants believe Rome apostatized at this point by a denial of the true gospel; others see it as a significant deviation from biblical and historic orthodoxy but not a total apostasy.[8]

(20) The First Council of the Vatican (1870)

Vatican I, called by Pope Pius IX (r. 1846–1878), denounced pantheism, materialism, and atheism. It also pronounced papal infallibility, rejecting Antoninus of Florence's (1389–1459) formula that the pope "using the counsel and seeking for help of the universal Church" cannot err. Instead, it ruled that the pope's definitions are "irreformable of themselves, and not from the consent of the Church" when speaking ***ex cathedra***, that is, as the pastor and doctor of all Christians.

(21) The Second Council of the Vatican (1962–1965)

Vatican II attempted ecumenicity (with Eastern Orthodox and Protestant observers), instituted ritualistic changes (like mass in local languages), pronounced reforms, declared inclusivism for "separated brethren," and accepted the salvation of sincere non-Christians.
In all of this, it is not difficult to see the parallel between increasingly

authoritarian church government and the increase of unorthodox views.

THE AUTHORITY OF THE CHURCH COUNCILS

Many consider the first seven councils as ecumenical, since they occurred before the East-West split between Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism. However, even some of these did not have strong representation from both sectors, and some affirmed doctrines many consider contrary to biblical teaching (such as the perpetual virginity of Mary and the veneration of images).
Further, many pronouncements of later councils did not attain to the benchmark affirmed by Trent, which demanded "the universal consent of the Fathers" as a doctrine's test for orthodoxy. Some councils pronounced dogmas that have little or no (let alone universal) consent in the early Fathers.

The Roman Catholic View

Roman Catholics maintain that all twenty-one of these councils are ecumenical and binding on the whole Christian church, arguing that it is inconsistent to accept some councils and reject others. However, there are serious problems with this perspective.
First, it entails the claim that the Roman Catholic Church is the only true church on earth. This exclusivistic claim is implausible on its face, since there was a church in the East before there was one in the West. Why, then, should Eastern Orthodoxy be excluded from the true church?
Second, it assumes incorrectly that the true universal church must be identified with a single visible organization rather than with a general category of all individual churches confessing historic biblical Christianity.
Third, some councils accepted by Rome had inconsistent pronouncements. For example, the sixteenth (Constance) proclaimed an ecumenical council's superiority over the pope. By contrast, Vatican I claimed that when speaking ***ex cathedra***, the definitions "of the Roman Pontiff ***from himself***, but not from the consensus of the Church, are unalterable" (in Denzinger, ***SCD***, 1840). Clearly, both cannot be true—either the pope can make infallible proclamations alone, or

he cannot without the aid of a council.
Fourth, there are good biblical reasons to reject the proclamations of many councils, beginning with the fifth (see Geisler and MacKenzie, ***RCE***, Part 2). These include the perpetual virginity of Mary (Constantinople II), the veneration of images (Nicea II), the pope's authority (Constantinople IV and Lateran I), the condemnation of not confessing sin to a priest (Lateran II), the authority of the college of cardinals to elect a pope (Lateran III), the primacy of the Roman bishop, the seven sacraments, transubstantiation (Lateran IV), and the condemnation of Wycliffe and Hus (Lyons I). This is to say nothing of the additional errors pronounced by Trent and later councils, including apocryphal works added to the Bible, prayers for the dead, veneration of saints, worship of the consecrated host, the necessity of works as a condition for salvation, papal infallibility, and the bodily assumption of Mary.
Fifth, and finally, there are no logical reasons why all twenty-one councils must be accepted. The history of many organizations reveals the same pattern as Rome; namely, they start out well and then deviate from their founders' teachings somewhere along the line. The U.S. Supreme Court's interpretations of the U.S. Constitution are a case in point; note particularly its interpretation of the First Amendment, which did not even contain the words "separation of church and state"; these have subsequently been taken out of context from a private letter (of Thomas Jefferson) in a revision of the framers' intention that "Congress" (the ***federal government***) should make "no law respecting the establishment of religion."[9] Knowing it is not an uncommon occurrence of organizations to stray from their original intentions, other explanations of the councils must be examined.

The Eastern Orthodox View

The Eastern Church is sometimes called "the church of the seven councils," since those councils are believed to be infallible in their pronouncements. The Orthodox reject as heretical some Roman pronouncements, such as, for example, papal infallibility. They embrace the continuing presence of the Holy Spirit in the church. Whereas they consider the Bible to be the inspired Word of God, they also see it as part of the larger concept of tradition. As Eastern Orthodox

theologian Timothy Ware (b. 1934) puts it, the Bible "must not be regarded as something set up ***over*** the Church, but as something that lives and is understood ***within*** the Church" (***OC***, 199).

Protestants reject the Eastern Orthodox view for several reasons.

First, councils five through seven accept some unbiblical teachings, such as the perpetual virginity of Mary and the veneration of images (a violation of the second commandment).

Second, the Orthodox position is a rejection of *sola scriptura*, affirmed by early Fathers and reaffirmed by Reformers (see Keith Mathison, ***SSS***).

Third, the Eastern view is highly mystical, setting forth no objective criteria by which the Spirit's voice is discerned in the church traditions.

Fourth, contrary to the Eastern Orthodox view, the church did not create the canon (ibid., 227) but simply recognized the prophetic books that God, by His inspiration, determined to be canonical (see Geisler and Nix, ***GIB***, Chap. 13).

Fifth, there are no objective criteria by which ecumenical and non-ecumenical councils are distinguished. Even Orthodox scholar Timothy Ware admits: "What it is that makes a council ecumenical is not so clear" (***OC***, 252).

Sixth, the Orthodox believe the Fathers are an inspired source of apostolic tradition. However, their justification of the mind of the Fathers is circular, using the mind of the Fathers to justify the mind of the Fathers on Scripture. The Bible doesn't say they were inspired, nor did the Fathers consider themselves inspired.

The Protestant View

Most Protestants, and many Anglicans, demur on the authority and catholicity of any ecumenical council after the fourth, though they may agree with individual statements of later councils. The primary criterion used to determine whether councils are correct is whether they agree with Scripture, since the Bible alone is infallible. Furthermore, as noted above, some councils (like Vatican I and Constance) made contradictory conclusions, and so-called infallible popes (such as Honorius) have taught views that even Rome considers heretical. Thus, many Protestants believe that the true church, the one heir to the pre-Roman Catholic Church, is the Protestant church (the Roman Church having apostasized at Trent).

The Free-Church View (Including Anabaptists and Others)

Many churches in Christendom deny the authority of any council, though they agree with individual statements by them, particularly in the early ones. These churches insist strongly that only the Bible has binding authority, that all creeds and confessions are manmade, and, thus, that no authority is attached to any church councils, whether local or so-called universal.

This view is unfairly dubbed "solo scriptura" by some (see Mathison, ***SSS***, 331) in contrast to the Reformed view of *sola scriptura*, since the latter read the Bible in light of the early Fathers and creeds, whereas the former do not.

However, by holding a free-church view, one need not deny there is ***value*** to the creeds and councils. In fact, all orthodox Christians, Catholic and non-Catholic, agree with the basic doctrines affirmed in the earlier so-called ecumenical councils, such as the Trinity, the Virgin Birth, Christ's deity, and Christ's hypostatic union (two natures in one person). The main point of the free-church view is simply that, whatever in them may be true, there is no ***authority***, either divine or ecclesiastical, to the creedal and conciliar pronouncements.

The founders of the Anabaptist movement made confessions of their own even before the mainline Reformers did. For example, the "Eighteen Dissertations" of Balthasar Hubmaier (c. 1480–1528) took on a kind of confessional status among early followers, and the earliest formal confession was the Schleitheim Confession of Faith (1527).[10] The introduction to the former even speaks directly to the issue of confessions in a favorable way:

> Beloved men and brethren: it is an old custom to us from the times of the apostles, that when evil things befall concerning the faith, all men who wish to speak the word of God, and are of a Christian way of thinking, should assemble to search the Scriptures.... Such an assembly has been called the synod, or chapter, or brotherhood.

Anabaptists not only believed in confessions by synods of believers, but they believed this was a valid practice going back to apostolic times—many Anabaptists accepted the Apostles' Creed. However, they were likewise

emphatic (to quote Hubmaier's introduction to his dissertations) that the confession must have "Scriptural foundations," which alone is the authority of our faith.

The Plymouth Brethren View (Darbyism)

A more radical view is found in the writings of John Nelson Darby, founder of the Plymouth Brethren movement. Darby not only rejected any authority for church councils, he denied that there was any church over which they could have authority, holding that the church Christ announced in Matthew 16 was ruined.[11] In short, the apostles failed in their mission, so there is no visible church of Christ, but instead there are assemblies of believers to break bread and edify one another. Because no single organization on earth can be identified as the visible church, no so-called church council is binding.

CONCLUSION

In summary, it took many centuries for authoritative episcopal church government to gradually emerge from the simple, self-governing, independent New Testament churches to authoritarian Roman Catholicism. Along with this development was an increasing acceptance of false doctrine and practices.
The seeds were found even in New Testament and apostolic times (cf. 3 John 9; John 21:22–23). False traditions could spring up from the start, and they could spread more easily without apostles there to squelch them. Tradition is neither authoritative nor reliable except insofar as it is accurately transmitted; written transmission (such as exists in Scripture and other writings based on it) are the only reliable source we have of apostolic teaching.
By the mid-second century apocryphal gospels were emerging. Due to the attacks on Christianity at the time, there was strong motivation to develop an ecclesiology that would provide a united front against divergent heretical groups, reflected in Irenaeus's emerging episcopal view of church government, which achieved a more mature form in Cyprian (by the mid-third century).

Even if some second-century writers ***can*** be shown to have favored the primacy of Rome as the center of Christianity, this does not support later Catholic pronouncements on papal infallibility. The early Fathers constantly appealed to the original "apostles" (plural) as the God-established authority, and Peter, at most a cofounder of the church at Rome, stressed biblical primacy, demonstrating that all ecclesiastical authority is based on Scripture, not the reverse.

If Irenaeus's words (in ***AH***, 3.3.2) ***are*** understood to mean that "every Church should agree with this Church [at Rome]"in his day, it still does not follow that Rome could not later deviate and become an unreliable source for essential truth. This is precisely what Protestants believe, pointing to numerous Catholic teachings supported neither by Scripture nor the early Fathers (see Geisler and MacKenzie, ***RCE***, Part 2).

Finally, Constantine's conversion and his use of state power to influence the emergence of an imperial church structure was a significant catalyst in the formation of monolithic episcopal government. This, combined with the natural penchant for power, produced the Roman Church with its claim to papal infallibility and other unbiblical teachings, well underway by Lateran IV, heightened in the doctrinal deviations of Trent, and culminating in the disastrous dogma of papal infallibility at Vatican I.

Where, then, is the true visible church? Organizationally, there is none, and in fact, there never was one except for a short time in Jerusalem after Pentecost. Rather, as shown earlier,[12] from the earliest times there was not one church but many independent, autonomous New Testament churches (Acts 14:23), each built on the authority of apostolic teaching (Eph. 2:20; Acts 2:42) as inscripturated in the New Testment. Other than the one invisible universal church known as the "body of Christ,"[13] the only real sense in which there ever was one universal ***visible*** church on earth was the first one in Jerusalem before anyone died. The apostles themselves started many churches that were not unified under one organizational structure. The only other way it is proper to speak of a universal visible church is as a generic generalization of the many individual self-governing churches that follow apostolic doctrine and practice. The true visible church of Christ on earth is not in any single denomination or organization of churches, but in the collective body of believers who confess the

basic saving truths of the Christian faith.[14] This spiritual brotherhood is composed of all true believers, whether Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox, whether Protestant or Anabaptist; in Christ there is neither ethnic nor denominational difference, and rather than any organizational banner or denominational structure, Christ alone is the invisible Head of all visible churches. While they have ***unity*** in doctrine and practice, they have no uniformity in ritual or governmental form. The visible unity of believers is the result of their manifestation in the doctrine and deeds of their invisible Head (Christ), regardless of what label is on the local assembly to which they belong. (See William Nix, "The True Church and Its Message.")

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APPENDIX EIGHT

THE ROLE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT APOSTLES

Only certain persons were called apostles in the New Testament. The first group is called "the Twelve," the apostles directly chosen by Jesus while on earth. They are named in the Gospels and Acts.

The root meaning of the term ***apostle*** (Gk: *apostolos*) is "messenger" or "one sent." In this sense Jesus was called an "apostle" (or messenger—Heb. 3:1) from God. Also, some who were messengers, or representatives, of the church or of the apostles were called apostles (cf. 2 Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:25), as were some associates of the apostles who sent them on missions (Acts 14:14–15).

In addition to the title of "apostle," used by the Twelve,[1] an apostle was an elder by office (1 Peter 5; 2 John 1), but he was an apostle by gift (Eph. 4:11; 1 Cor. 12:28). The New Testament uses the terms ***bishop*** (1 Tim. 3:1–2 nkjv) and ***overseer*** (Titus 1:5, 7; Phil. 1:1) synonymously for ***elder*** (cf. Acts 14:23); as we noted in chapter 4, ***elder*** is of Jewish origin and ***bishop*** of Greek origin.

THE TWELVE APOSTLES

In Matthew 10:2–4 the apostles' names are given as follows:

> Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him [Jesus].

In Luke 6:13–16, a parallel text, they are named thus:

> Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

In Acts 1:13 we read:

> Those present were Peter, John, James, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James.

After Judas Iscariot's death, he was replaced by Matthias, who was "added to the eleven apostles" (v. 26).
If the lists are merged, we get the following twelve apostles:

(1) Simon (called Peter);
(2) Andrew (Peter's brother);
(3) James (the son of Zebedee);
(4) John (the younger brother of James);
(5) Philip;
(6) Bartholomew;
(7) Thomas;
(8) Matthew (also known as Levi);
(9) James (the son of Alphaeus);
(10) Thaddaeus (known as Judas, the son of James—John 14:22);
(11) Simon the Zealot; and
(12) Judas Iscariot (replaced after death by Matthias).

So two apostles were named James, two were called Simon, two were named Judas, two were gospel writers (Matthew and John), and then there were Bartholomew, Andrew, Philip, and Thomas.

THE APOSTLE PAUL

Another category of apostle is that of Paul. He was not chosen by the Twelve, nor was he a delegate of theirs: He was directly chosen by Christ (Gal. 1:1ff.) and was an independent eyewitness of Christ.[2] Three main facts are of note. *First*, Paul was a true apostle (1 Cor. 9:11; 2 Cor. 12:12). Though he was called independently of the Twelve, they confirmed his apostleship (Gal. 1–2). *Second*, contrary to the claim of some, Paul was not "the twelfth apostle" as opposed to Matthias, who had been legitimately elected after prayer by a vote and was, according to the inspired text, "added to the eleven" (Acts 1:26; cf. 2:14).

Third, Paul is distinguished from the Twelve in many passages,[3] and his special apostleship was to the Gentiles (1 Tim. 2:7; Gal. 2:9).

The Prerequisites of an Apostle

Apostleship necessitated certain qualifications.

First, the Twelve were companions of Jesus.[4] Regarding this condition, Paul's situation was unique, since he was not an earthly companion of Christ.

Second, they were all (even Paul) directly called by Jesus.[5]

Third, they were all eyewitnesses of the Resurrection.[6]

Fourth, their message was supernaturally confirmed.[7]
There were, of course, some false apostles who did not meet these qualifications; their presence in the church was mentioned by both John (Rev. 2:2) and Paul (2 Cor. 11:13).

The Powers of an Apostle

The "signs of an apostle" (2 Cor. 12:12) included the ability to perform certain supernatural acts (Acts 2:43; 5:12). Such special powers, held ***only*** by the apostles or those to whom the apostles gave them, included the following:

(1) the power to open the kingdom (Matt. 16:19; cf. Acts 2, 10).
(2) the power to bind and loose from sin (Matt. 18:18).
(3) the power to heal all (even incurable) sicknesses (Matt. 10:8; Acts 28:8–9).
(4) the power to exorcize demons (Matt. 10:8).
(5) the power to perform miraculous signs (Acts 5:12; Heb. 2:3–4).
(6) the power to raise the dead (Matt. 10:8; Acts 9:40; 20:9–10);
(7) the power to bestow the Holy Spirit and the gift of tongues (Acts 8:14–19; 10:44; 19:6).
(8) the power to give other spiritual gifts (Acts 6:6; Rom. 1:11; 2 Tim. 1:6).
(9) the power of capital punishment (used on those who lied to the Spirit, Acts 5:9–10).

The Purposes of an Apostle

The apostolic purposes included the following:

(1) to proclaim Christ's kingdom (Matt. 10:7; Mark 3:14; 6:7; Luke 6:1–13; 9:1);
(2) to be the foundation of His church (Eph. 2:20);
(3) to give the Spirit and tongues to others (Acts 8:18; 19:6);

(4) to establish the church's doctrine (Acts 2:42; 15:1–29);
(5) to complete the canon for the church (John 16:13; Heb. 1:1; 2:3–4);
(6) to reveal the mystery of the church (Eph. 3:4–6);
(7) to give witness to the Resurrection (Acts 1:22; 4:33; 1 Cor. 9:1).

The Prominence of Some Apostles

Some Were Considered Different Due to Their Ministries

Certain apostles had prominent roles. For example, Peter had the "keys" to open the door of the gospel (Matt. 16:18–19), and these he used first for the Jews (Acts 2) and later for the Gentiles (Acts 10).
Among the Twelve, there was an inner circle of apostles composed of Peter, James, and John (Matt. 17:1); these same three were called "pillars" of the church (Gal. 2:9). While some were considered more eminent than others (2 Cor. 11:5; 12:11), their prominence was by reputation due to their ministry (Gal. 2:2), not by official role. Peter was the apostle to the Jews, the "circumcised" (v. 7 nkjv), and Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles (Rom. 11:13; 1 Tim. 2:7; Gal. 2:9).

All Were the Same in Authority and in Miraculous Power

Both Peter and Paul healed the sick and raised the dead (Acts 3, 9, 20, 28). Both could give the Holy Spirit and tongues to others (2, 8, 10, 19). All the Twelve were part of the church's foundation (Eph. 2:20; cf. Rev. 21:14), and had the power to bind and loose from sins (Matt. 18:18).

The Proxy of an Apostle (Apostolic Delegates)

Apostles were not without associates. Some of these associates are even called "messengers" (Gk: ***apostolos***). They were sent out by an apostle or a church to aid in the work of the apostolic ministry.
Barnabas, an associate of the apostle Paul, was called an "apostle" (Acts 14:14; cf. 4:36). The same term is used of Epaphroditus, called "your messenger" (Phil.

2:25). Titus and other unnamed “brothers” also were called “representatives [Gk: ***apostolai***] of the churches” (2 Cor. 8:23).

Andronicus and Junia “were of note among the apostles” (Rom. 16:7). This may mean they were prominent in apostolic circles; whatever it means, they were not apostles, but rather messengers of the apostles or, specifically, of a church or of Paul.[8]

Although not all are called “apostles,” many New Testament figures qualify under this broad sense of an apostolic messenger, including:

(1) Timothy,[9]
(2) Titus (Titus 1:5),
(3) Luke,[10]
(4) Silas (Silvanus—Acts 15:22, 32),
(5) John Mark (Acts 15:36–37),
(6) Tychicus (Titus 3:12; 2 Tim. 4:2),
(7) Clement (Phil. 4:3),
(8) Epaphras (Col. 1:7; 4:12–13),
(9) Trophimus (2 Tim. 4:20),
(10) Demas (2 Tim. 4:10),
(11) Apollos (1 Cor. 3:6; Acts 18:24),
(12) Barnabas (Acts 1:14), and
(13) others.

These were delegates of the apostles (Phil. 2:25; 2 Cor. 8:23), so their authority was delegated also (Titus 2:15) rather than being inherent to their function. The actual office of apostle was limited to the Twelve and to Paul—those who were directly called by Christ, had seen Him after the Resurrection, and were given special “sign” gifts.

The Permanence of an Apostle

The ministry of the apostles was both temporary and permanent. While their office and function as founders of the church were completed in the first century, their influence lives on through the church and through their New Testament writings.

The Apostolic Office Was Not Continued

Other than replacing Judas with Matthias (Acts 1:26) to complete their number before receiving the Holy Spirit, the twelve apostles never appointed successors before or when they died. Once they had received the Holy Spirit, they and they alone composed the authoritative, foundational group that Christ made the basis of His church, Himself being the chief Cornerstone (Eph. 2:20; 1 Peter 2:6). The apostle James is a clear case in point: When he died, no replacement was made (Acts 12:1–2). Instead, apostles appointed elders (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5) in each church to oversee the work for which they had laid the foundation (Acts 2:42). Consequently, in this sense, there is no apostolic succession.

Apostolic Influence Did Continue

Almost all the apostles had died before the canon of Scripture was completed; during their lifetime they wrote the works that formed it. Paul spoke of exchanging inspired books with other churches (Col. 4:16) and cited Matthew 10:7 in 2 Timothy 1:9–12; Peter referred to a collection of Paul's writings as "scripture" (2 Peter 3:15–16). Not only does the apostles' influence live on in their writings, but the church, of which they laid the foundation, ever abides and is still being built (Eph. 2:21–22).

Apostolic Destiny

The apostles' influence also lives on in heaven, where they appear during the Tribulation (Rev. 18:20). After this, they will reign with Christ in the messianic kingdom (Matt. 19:28; Rev. 20:1–6) and, finally, will live with Him in the heavenly city—indeed, their names are on its gates (21:14).

Conclusion

While the apostolic office did not continue after the apostles' time, their written authority continues to exist in the New Testament, composed under their direction. Jesus had promised to lead them into "all truth" and bring "all things" to their remembrance (John 14:26, 13). The only authentic record we have of their teaching is found in the New Testament's twenty-seven books. As such, only these books are the divinely inspired (2 Tim. 3:16) and infallible Word of God (John 10:35; cf. 2 Peter 3:15–16).

Since the apostolic signs died with the apostles, the special gifts of exorcizing demons on command, raising the dead, instant healing of even incurable diseases (Matt. 10:8), and speaking in tongues also died with them.[11] Even though the fact of miracles exists, since God can perform one whenever His chooses, there is no evidence that anyone alive today possesses these apostolic powers, which were necessary only then to confirm the new revelation and to establish the church's foundation.[12]

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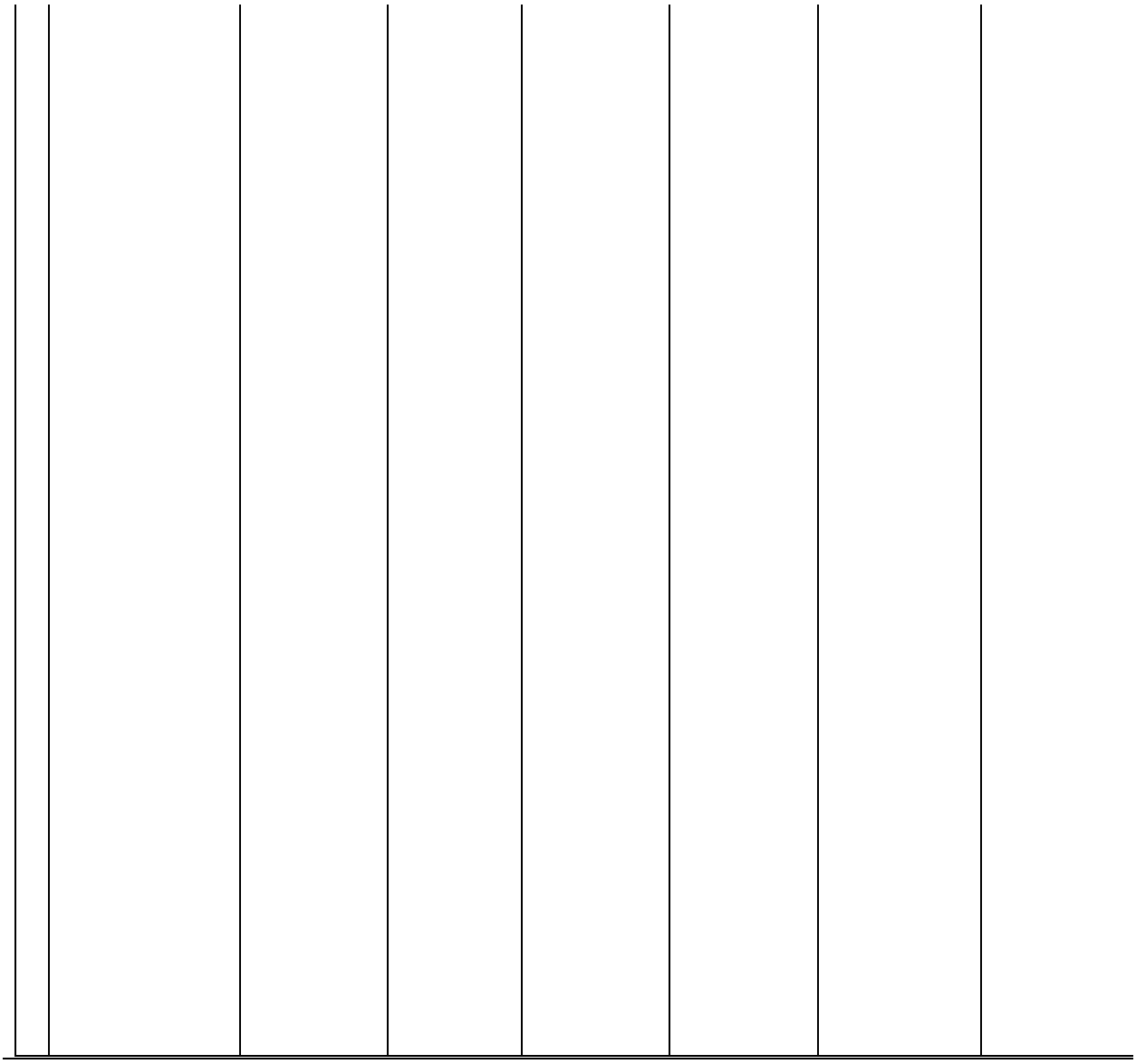
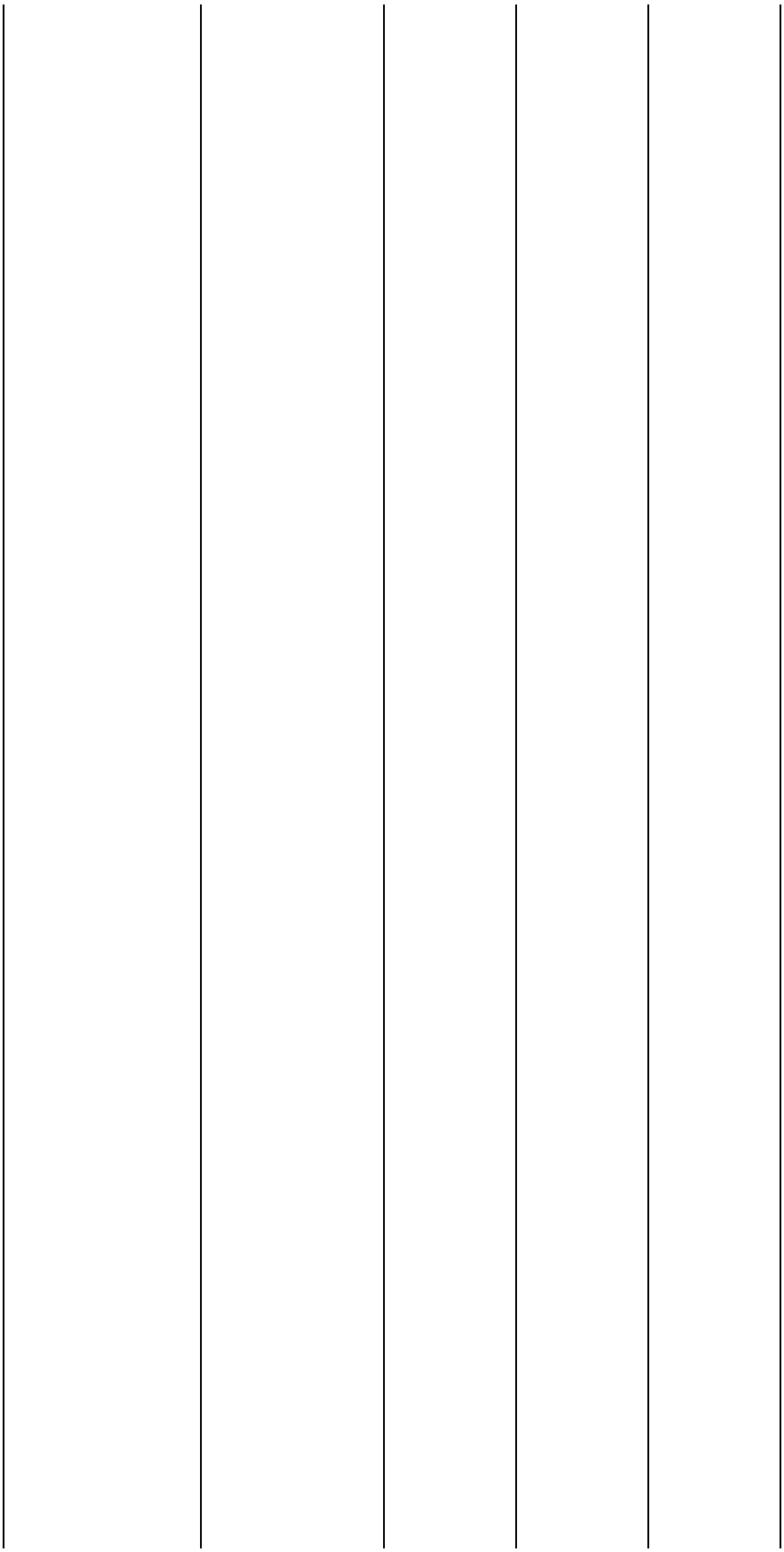
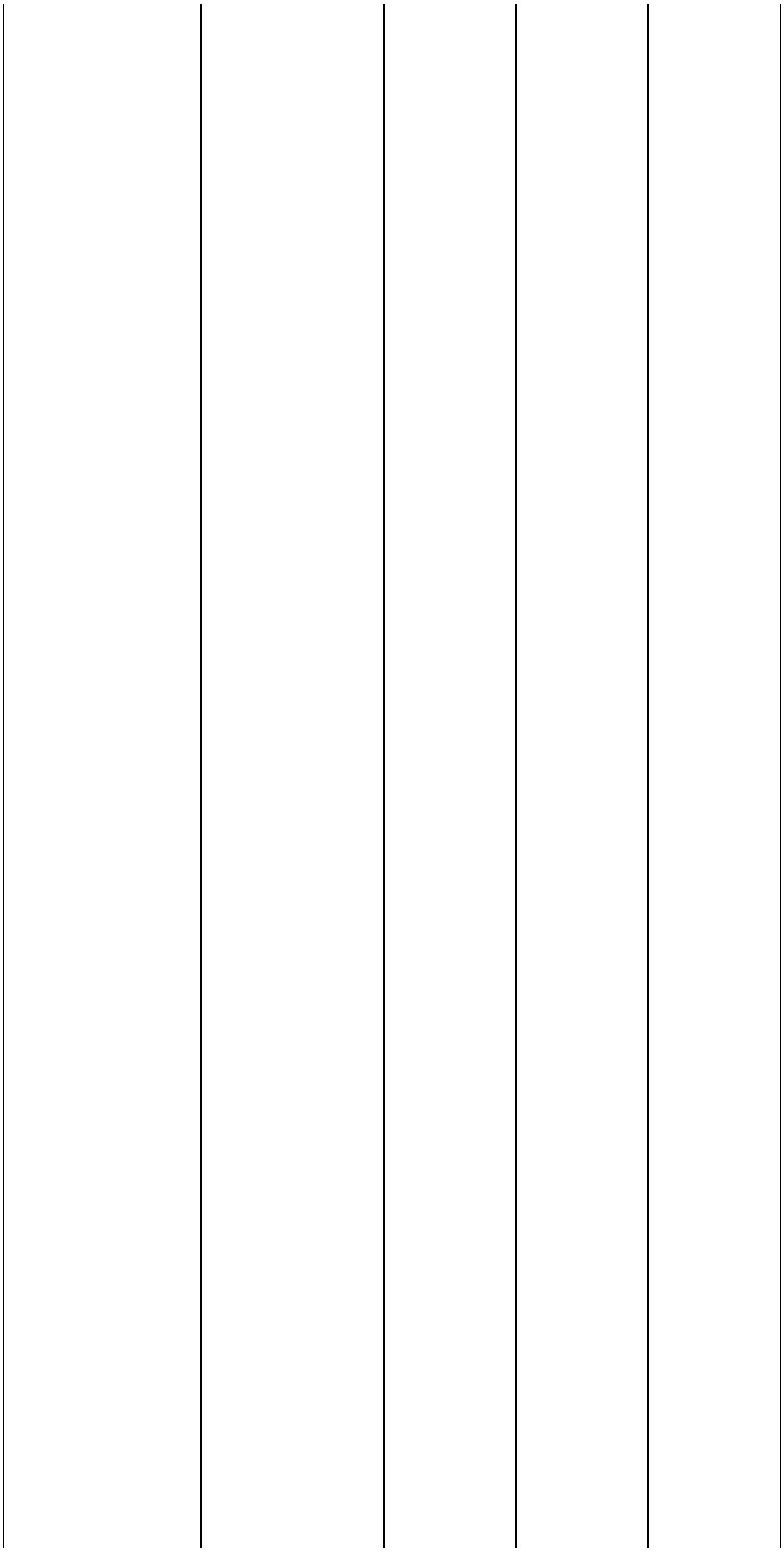
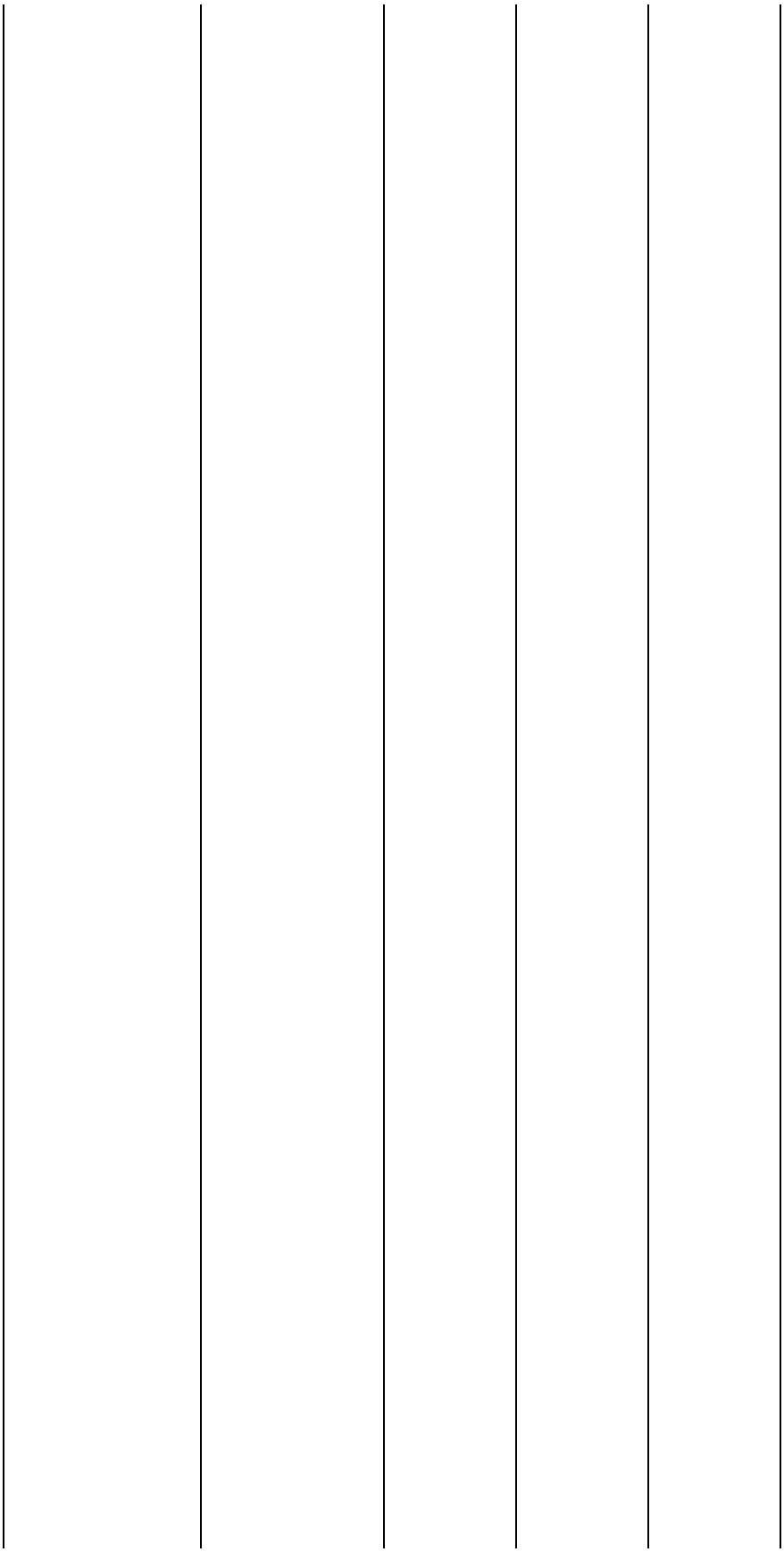
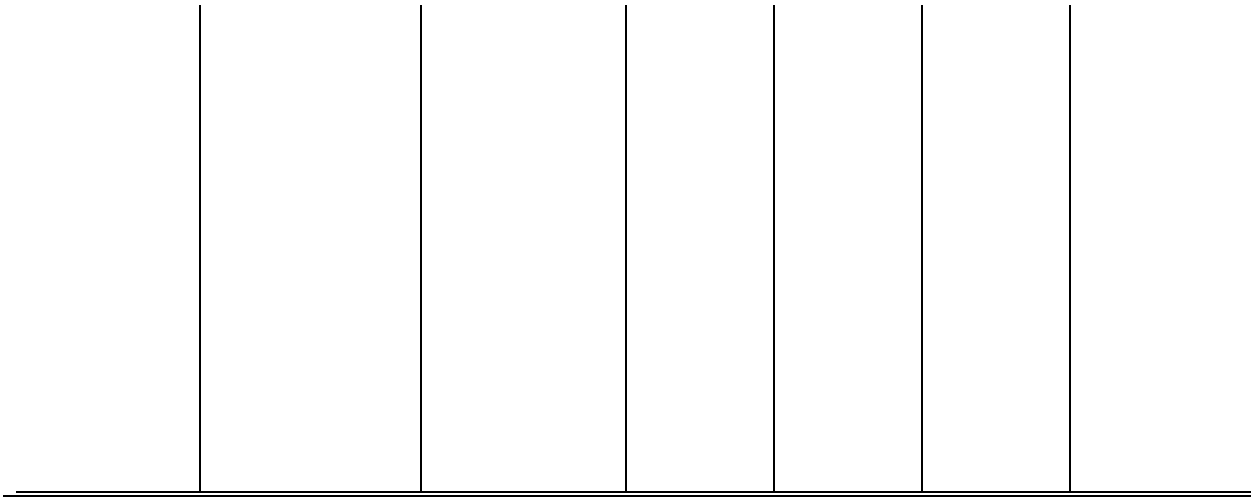
	1 The Septuagint, also abbreviated “LXX.”	2 See also chapters 4–5.	3 See chapter 2.	4 See chapters 2–6.	5 See chapters 8–9.	6 Predicted in Matthew 16:18 and beginning on the Day of Pentecost (when believers were baptized into the body—Acts 1:5; 2:1–3; cf. 1 Cor. 12:13).	7 See “Universa Church/Loc Church(es table in chapter 4



72 Albert H. Boudreau, ***The Born-Again Catholic*** (Locust Valley: Living Flame Press, 1983), 139.	73 Ralph Martin, ***Hungry for God*** (Garden City: Doubleday, 1974), 69–70. Martin (b. 1942) bemoans the effect that "cultural Catholicism" has had on faith (ibid., 137).	74 Eastern Orthodox theologians (for the most part) do not incorporate purgatory in their dogmatics.	75 See Volume 3, chapter 9.	76 See Volume 2, chapter 14.	1 See chapter 10.	2 Stott distinguishe two views, r that accord condition immortal "nobody sur death exc those to w God gives l whereas according [annihilation everyon survives d and will eve resurrected the impen will finally destroyed" 316). For purposes the terms used interchange since both a the eter nonexisten unbelievers judgmen